

TORONTO SUN NEW HOMES & CONDOS

Stop fanning the flames!


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As I sit here writing this, I'm reminded of when I was looking to purchase a new home. There was never a question that I wanted a cozy den with a fireplace in it.

Nothing compares to sitting quietly, reading by a real fire on a cold day. Or so I thought.

Surprisingly, I ended up purchasing a condo in the city. It seemed to have everything I was looking for, but of course owning a condo meant no real fireplace. Even a gas insert wasn't an option so my dream slowly started to fade away.

But then I had another idea. I could improvise. I turned the second bedroom into a den with double French doors that open into the living room and planned out how I would enhance the focal wall, visible from the living room.

Even if I couldn't have the real thing, I was going to make

it work. Thus began the search for a faux fireplace.

It didn't take long to find a great option. The technology and design features of electric fireplaces has improved since the old tin foil and incandescent light bulb days.

I was intrigued by the advantages of an electric option, such as no fumes, no venting, no high operating cost or difficult installation. It's a cost effective supplementary source of heat, it requires no maintenance (no ash to clean out) and it's safe.

I checked out a number of options and purchased an attractive unit that mounts directly to the wall. Mine sits about 20" off the floor.

I then designed a Shaker-panel surround with a nice chunky mantle to hold artwork, candles and seasonal décor.

The added heat source is delightful on colder days and visually it's as comforting as the real thing. It's probably my favourite place in the world, well, in my condo.

The most impressive thing I learned was there are great design choices available. Options like full-sized media consoles with shelves flanking the built in fireplace can be purchased through Canadian companies like Napoleon fireplaces www.napoleonfireplaces.com out of Barrie.

If you prefer modern, there are sleek boxes that can be hung at eye level when seated, a super idea in a dining room or bedroom. Even the electric inserts and stove styles are impressive.

If you have a chimney with a non-functioning fireplace, or you want to build a feature wall with a chimney-like stone or brick façade, consider an electric insert.

Add an optional trim kit to give it a polished, custom look. Or go for the sleek contemporary design of a wall hung fireplace with the horizontal flame.

It can be recessed or hung directly onto the wall. Most are just 5" deep. For that tra-



An electric fireplace can also be a great place to display art, candles and seasonal decor. Here is Jane Lockhart's mantle ready for the holidays.

ditional fireplace feel, look for a 'floor' model fireplace with mantle.

Whether it's modern, transitional or traditional, it is going to make a statement in any room. The cabinetry now being manufactured or custom built for electric fireplaces is as well designed and constructed as it's gas counterparts.

And how about that flame? Technology meets artistry in newer models. The cool thing is that many models can be remote controlled.

Want higher, faster flames? A different colour? Just a touch of a button and you can set the mood and heat level. You can also set it on a timer.

Some models come with LED lights that change colour and offer a nightlight feature, too. When you're ready to turn it off, the embers slowly fade just like the real thing.

Extra features on some models include the sound of a burning fire and some include a product that can create a smoke effect for an amazing virtual fireplace experience.

This technology is available at www.Dimplex.com from Cambridge, Ontario.

If you were sitting beside me now you would be enjoying the wonderful, carefree warmth from my fireplace. It may even inspire you to write ... about fireplaces.

— Award-winning designer, TV personality and spokesperson Jane Lockhart is one of Canada's leading experts in the world of design. Visit www.janelockhart.com.

Fall is the perfect time for a renovation


NATALIE DEANE
DECOR
AND MORE

The weather is starting to get a little chilly, so you have been spending more time indoors.

As you look around you are noticing all the little things you would like to be get done — and then there are the big things, like that kitchen and bathroom renovation you have been putting off all summer.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have all your reno's big and small done before the holiday season when your family and friends will be coming over for parties, dinners and casual drop-ins?

Fall is the perfect time to do your in home renovations

— summer is too hot, winter is too cold and spring is too damp and rainy.

Design decisions

Once you have decided to renovate the real work starts. What do you want to get done? What's your budget? What are your design choices? Where do you actually start?

If you have been thinking about this for a long time, you probably have started a Pinterest page with ideas, or ripped pages out of magazines with styles and looks you love. If you haven't, now is a good time to start.

Go through décor and

design magazines; visit stores, interior and home blogs or sites. Once you have honed in on what you want, it's time to call in a professional.

I would always suggest getting a designer to give you more advice. You may think it's too expensive or fancy, but it's money well-spent when you think about the total investment you are making.

If it's your kitchen you are remodeling, you probably won't do another reno for 10 to 15 years. If your budget is just too tight or you are set and know what you want, your contractor can help too.

Qualified contractor

We have all heard the contractor horror stories. I, myself, have a couple. Many a homeowner has been scammed out of their hard earned cash or gotten shoddy work done.

As Mike Holmes once said: "What percentage of contractors are doing good, honest

work? I call it the good, the bad and the ugly: 20, 70 and ten percent, respectively."

The best thing, it is said, is to get a recommendation from someone who has had work done themselves, although even then it doesn't always work out as planned.

I had a friend tell me a contractor was great and they were horrible to work with. I was left with a renovation less than one-third complete, money stolen and a messy home. I needed a reliable competent contractor to fix everything, and for that, I found a site called Smart Reno! during one of my searches.

I asked Andrei Uglar, the president and founder where he came up with the idea.

"We've all heard the stories. The idea came from personal pain-points trying to look for trusted contractors. It's hard to know what contractors are trusted and qualified besides just looking at their websites



Wouldn't it be wonderful to have all your renovations big and small done before the holiday season and your family and friends come over to visit?

or size of their ads. "

With the cold long winter ahead, now is the perfect time for getting your home ship-shape. After all, you are going to be spending a lot more time indoors over the

next few months.

— Natalie Deane is a lifestyle connoisseur who shares tips for everyday living through decor, entertaining and household trends.