



Design insights: Fireplaces, heating and cooking

📷 Kim Williams and GC Fires/Northern Flame ✍️ Kim Williams





FIREPLACES

Having the right fireplace in your home can bring an elemental warmth that not only heats your home but comforts the soul. Choosing which fireplace will work best for your needs will depend on aesthetics, the ambience you want to create, the fuel that you want to burn, the size of the space you need to heat and in some cases, whether you want to cook on your fire or not.

Kim Williams (www.kimwilliams.co.za) is no stranger to readers of TO BUILD. Here she shares some tips on getting organised with a cosy fire option - and outdoor cooking with it.

Today, the choices of fireplaces big and small mean that there are very few places where you cannot find a heating solution adapted just for you.

Aesthetics and ambience

Fire brings such energy into a space because it represents passion, zeal and motivation and brings literal and physical warmth into the home. With so many options from gas-oil hybrids, to ergonomic pellet fireplaces, and classic stone hearths, there is sure to be one that fits your ideal aesthetic. Considering the style and ambience you want to create will determine which option will work best for you. My personal favorite is cast iron wood burning stoves, not only are they super-efficient but also have a beautiful vintage charm.

Go high quality

The final fireplace you choose should fit with your lifestyle requirements and be realistic for you in terms of fuel and effort. If you want to simply flip a switch after a long day and relax with a glass of wine, a gas option is probably better for you than wood because it eliminates the labour of carrying wood inside. The longevity of your design choice is also paramount for both essential materials such as fire bricks and in terms of style. I always recommend clients go for what they truly love, not just what is on-trend, because fireplaces are expensive to repair or replace.

Follow the sun

The sun is often overlooked when home builders collaborate with architects, and yet light is the most fundamental factor to how a house feels, lives and changes with the day and seasons. Having a sunny space will make an enormous difference to how much energy you are putting into heating your space because of the solar gain that will naturally build up as the sun filters in during the day. If you are buying a home that doesn't get a lot of sun, before installing heating systems, try to open it up with windows or skylights. The sun will always be the most efficient way to heat a home because after all, it is free.

A fireplace creates a warm social hub and the perfect ambience ...

Size up your space

The most successfully heated spaces are where the heating source is proportional to the room to ensure it is kept warm but does not use unnecessary fuel and therefore cost more. There are many experts whose main focus is understanding the science behind space and airflow, and how sunlight and energy interact in a space. When I design a space, I collaborate to ensure that the end result matches both the heating and lifestyle requirements so that my clients end up with a functional and beautiful space.





FIREPLACES

Keep it connected

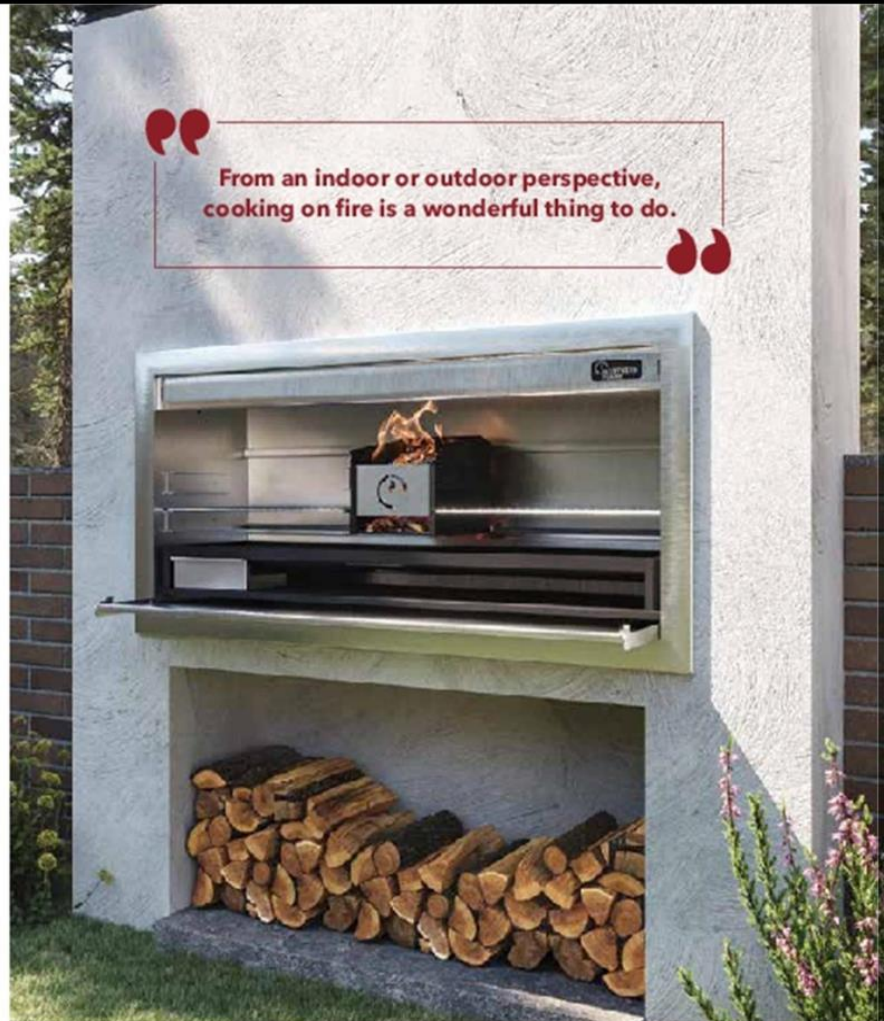
If a home is cold we tend to retreat to the warm embrace of our duvets rather than gathering in a communal area. A fireplace creates a warm social hub and the perfect ambience to bond as a family, relax as a couple or cook and eat together. When building your fireplace, consider how space will be used and use furniture that makes it easy to gather safely around the fire and facilitates being together.

Remember all the elements in the room

Making a space warm is also psychological. By considering elements such as the floors, wall coverings, lighting, colour and textures you can make even the darkest room feel cosy. To find balance among all these elements I often look to nature and incorporate earth, air, water and fire. Vibrant plants in open spaces infuse a home with life and cool ocean blues make the perfect inky backdrop for warm colours and earthy tones. Lush rugs and dim candles as well as rich wallpaper also help to add psychological warmth and insulation.

Make it multifunctional

Fireplaces are amazing spaces to display paintings and hang mirrors, and a mantle has always been a fantastic place to hang Christmas stockings and display family photographs. Nowadays, it is easy to make space for recessed TV's above fireplaces, or make the fireplace central and move the TV to the side. Wood storage can also be magnificent if built floor to ceiling or using large decorative baskets.



From an indoor or outdoor perspective, cooking on fire is a wonderful thing to do.

Take the fun outside

Using your outdoor space with the kind of weather we have in South Africa is also very much an option. We are seeing a huge resurgence of the fire pit. I personally love them and adore how versatile they can be; from a simple cost-effective metal pit to grand sunken landscaped arenas, there really is something for every budget. If a fire is not your preference, or perhaps you have a smaller courtyard garden, outdoor heaters are a lovely alternative.

Spring is here - get cooking!

The whole trend towards cooking outdoors is exploding at the moment with the pandemic. Particularly fire pits and cooking on fire pits; it has ignited a whole new industry of specialist grids and grills as opposed to the standard Weber.

I think, as we try and create a new more diverse range of experiences in our outdoor areas, be it braaing or picnics, there will be more innovation around the elements that we use to create and change these spaces. Companies like Iron Banister are proof of how elegant and innovative metalwork can be.

From an indoor or outdoor perspective, cooking on fire is a wonderful thing to do. In homes that I design, I love the fact that if you consider the fireplace carefully it can be used for both a fireplace and a braai. It is particularly popular in the Western Cape because of our unbelievable wind in summer and storms in winter. It is, however, very important to make sure that your ventilation is good so that you can protect your home from smoke smells in the space.

Building a fireplace is so much more than a heating solution; it is a way to draw us together to find comfort in the bonds we share with family and help us revive our souls after the haste and confusion of a busy day. 🍷

