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A Facelift for your Fireplace

When you're enjoying a hot cup of coffee in your living room on a cold evening, you may notice that your fireplace looks very dated. Perhaps the decorating style of the furniture competes with the design of the fireplace. The furniture may be either more or less formal than the fireplace. Homeowners replace the furniture every ten years, but the fireplace is usually left untouched. Since a fireplace is the primary focal point of a room, improving its appearance and efficiency is a good way to enhance the value of your home. Here are some ways to update that old fireplace:

- The fireplace can be boxed in with dry wall to change its shape and proportion to the rest of the room. This can be very effective when the room has a cathedral ceiling and a small firebox.
- Does the substrate of the current fireplace surround coordinate with the rest of the room setting? An old brick surround can be covered with ceramic or stone tiles (\$3-\$13 per square foot) without the mess of demolition.
- Marble or granite creates the most formal and elegant fireplaces. A granite or marble slab surround with a hearth will cost about \$1700-\$2000. You can match this with the flooring in the entry hall to unify the space.
- Another option is to use cultured stone, which replicates the color, shape and texture of river rock or dry stack sandstone. It has a resin and cement composition, which is shaped and sized for quick installation. There is no need for additional support for the wall or fireplace foundation because of its lightweight composition.

Fireplace mantels can be made from many materials, depending on the design of the room. Cast concrete fireplace mantels and surrounds can mimic expensive limestone or tumbled marble for a fifth of the cost. These surfaces can be smooth or sandblasted. Some of the cast concrete mantels give a posh old world look to ordinary fireplaces. A one and a half inch piece of glass supported by corbels creates a floating, "minimalist" mantel. Hammered metal mantels provide an excellent compliment to slate or stone surrounds. Simple pre-fabricated wood mantels, which can be installed by the homeowner, cost about \$250 and can be stained or painted to match other finishes in the room. A



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factory-produced wood mantel and wood surround will cost about \$1000 when it is installed by a carpenter.

To improve the efficiency of your wood-burning fireplace, consider installing a gas or electric fireplace insert. Today's models cost \$250-\$1500. Glass doors prevent heat loss from the room and increase the radiance of the heat into the room when the fireplace is functioning. Just installing glass doors on your wood burning fireplace (\$200-\$500) will help the fire to draw better and will enable you to extinguish it more quickly when you leave the room.

A crackling fire, a good book and a dog at your feet...Life is good!

Submitted by Jean Cary of Jean Cary Interiors 650-593-9622