



By Sean Supple

Fireplaces

Fuel and the Mantle

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It's not possible for a home to have too many fireplaces. Some Newport, Rhode Island mansions had eight chimneys rising from the ground floor to third floors, meaning homes had up to 24 fireplaces! Unlike those days, when grand homes emitted smoke and soot like a small factory, there are regulations to consider. The City of Atherton website has a Wood-Burning Compliance Advisory from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District or I can explain things to you. The Spare the Air winter season is from November 1 through February 28, prohibiting the burning of wood or pellet stoves on certain days, selected and announced based on the weather – cool weather inhibits smoke and soot dissipation.

Here are things to consider when choosing a new fireplace. First, you need to make a fuel decision: burning wood or pellets, electric, or gas. The latter two evade Spare the Air regulations and can be operated with remote control.

The benefits of wood have been known since the first days of contained fire – crackling sounds and an intoxicating aroma. If the electricity goes out, you're still warm, and there are a variety of woods, like aromatic yew or pine, or crackling cedar. If you're burning wood you'll need a chimney with the accompanying expense and regular safety inspections, and a glass door or some type of enclosure to eliminate the possibility of flying sparks and embers.

Electric fireplaces are relatively easy to install – find a spot and plug it in – and they're more efficient. The downside is that they're not real, and if the electricity goes out, so does your fireplace.

In-wall recessed electric fireplace. Image provided by Sean Supple.



Gas fireplaces can work even when the electricity is out, they're efficient, and if you have several placed throughout your home, can heat an entire house. The cost of installing a gas fireplace may increase if you're also installing a new gas line. Maintenance is minimal, with periodic inspections for wiring and efficiency.

Once you've settled on a location and type, the fun begins, as you explore mantles and fireplace housing, from antique mantles in Europe to hand made



Stone mantle fireplace, shelves, and storage. Image provided by Sean Supple.

mantles customized to meet your tastes and needs. Some site to visit: chateuastone.com has limestone mantels and the Olde Good Things (Pennsylvania) website has rare mantles and fireplace sets, including a 500-year-old marble fireplace for \$8,500; a \$57,000 hand carved 19th Century marble mantle; a \$9,500 pair of hand made antique iron andirons; and a rare \$2,500 bronze wood holder with colored jewels. See more at ogtstore.com.

If you'd like to explore options, I'm happy to talk anytime.

Sean Supple – the exclusive provider of contractor/building editorial for Atherton Living – is the founder and owner of Supple Homes, specializing in additions, remodels, and whole house design/build, adept at any style – traditional, craftsman, Mediterranean, contemporary, and modern farmhouse. See more at supplehomesinc.com, or call Sean at 650-380-9352.

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