

## ASK THE BUILDER

With the cold weather approaching, we are looking into putting a fireplace in our family room. We don't have one there right now. How easy would it be to install? What are the advantages of gas vs. wood? I also have heard about electric. Are they a realistic option?

There is nothing better than sitting around a nice cozy fire. Especially when there is a little Santa Barbara chill in the air. So this is a good time to start making plans.

The first thing you need to decide is what kind of fireplace you want? Believe it or not there are several different options on the three different types you asked about. Let's start with wood.

Wood fireplaces require you buy wood and store it. With wood you also have to build the fire, maintain it and regularly clean out the fireplace and flue. There are the fake logs you can buy but I personally don't like the odor they put out. Some older fireplaces offer a "gas assist" to help you start and maintain wood fires as well. There is nothing better than the smell of burning wood and the sound of a crackling fire. Now new wood stoves require a sealed combustion chamber with a glass enclosure. You can get them without any glass but those are primarily for heat and don't provide the visual ambiance. These newer wood stoves can be free standing or built in to a nice corner or wall unit. The types of surroundings of the fireplace are unlimited and they can become the focal point of your room. The options are endless. Including installation of the TVs mounted above the fireplace. New fireplaces also have flues that are made up of an intake and exhaust chamber for air. That means it is much safer since it does not use any internal air from the home.

The new gas fireplaces are similar to the new wooden ones mentioned above when it comes to the sealed combustion chamber, flue and tremendous options for surrounding the fireplace. The units are pretty much a self contained insert. A frame is built to hold the fireplace insert. These frames can be enhanced with your personal touch. The insert itself can have several different faces from modern to historic classics. Inside the fireplace, there are many options for log sets. Different types of wood, size of flame and even material that looks like embers underneath the logs. You can add things like a blower to provide heat for the room. Even a remote control. These remotes start with and on and off but they can get much more sophisticated including thermostatically controlling the fire level, and blower.

The electric options for a fireplace have made great improvements. They are a cheaper alternative to buying an insert and they are much cheaper than having a whole fireplace installed. Electric fireplaces are known for looking a little "fake" compared to a real flame. There aren't any actual flames, just digitalized versions that mimic fires.

Hope this helps to simplify a few of the elements when considering a fireplace. But they are a great asset to you room and add value to your home as well. Stay warm.