

Interior-design COURSE

PART 21: CHOOSING THE IDEAL HEATING SYSTEM



'The right heating is an essential component in every home. Inefficient systems lead to chilly corners and hot spots, which make life uncomfortable and are a waste of precious energy. Whether you want a conventional boiler, radiator and fireplace combination or invisible underfloor heating, it makes sense to research the market and plan for each room to find the ideal solution for your home.'

Deborah Drew

Deborah Drew (above), presenter of BBC TV's *DIY SOS*



A wood-burning stove makes a great focal point for a cosy seating area.

Two-seater sofa, £800, leather armchair, £1,150, oak coffee table, £550, pink rug, £275, Laura Ashley



The clean lines of a simple fireplace suit both traditional and modern homes.

Mantelpiece, hearth and fire, £1,479, Elgin & Hall



Consider your options

If you're installing a new heating system from scratch, take time to familiarise yourself with the different options currently available.

Wet systems The most common form of heating, this uses a boiler to heat water, which is then fed through pipes to radiators into your rooms. Boilers are generally fired by mains gas, but can also be run off LPG (liquid petroleum gas), oil, coal, wood, or electricity. A cost-effective option to run, although it can cost a lot to install initially.

Underfloor heating The boiler heats water that is pumped through a network of pipes fitted into the floor. It is ideal in open-plan layouts where wall space for radiators is limited. Although it operates on lower water temperatures, which makes it relatively inexpensive to run, the high installation costs make it impractical, and will cause a real upheaval unless you're building a house or extension from scratch.

Under-tile heating An insulated wire containing an electrical element is threaded underneath natural stone or ceramic floor tiles. It's most commonly used as an extra form of heat to take the edge off smaller areas like cold floors in kitchens and bathrooms, rather than as the sole heating option, as running costs tend to be high.

Warm air system This uses a simple gas-fired device to warm air and fan it through ducts that lead into rooms via ceiling or floor grilles. This is a system

WHICH BOILER?

There are two main types of boiler: the condenser and the combination or 'combi' boiler. Condensing boilers are the most efficient and cost-effective choice in a large home where there is a high demand for hot water. Combination boilers provide hot water for radiators and taps, eliminating the need for a separate hot-water storage tank, which makes them better suited to smaller homes. However, because they can only feed one hot water tap at a time, they are unsuitable for busy households where more than one bathroom tends to be used at the same time.

Gas fires are a low-maintenance option as you don't have to clear them away like a real fire.

Arts gas fire, from £525, Gazco, available in black (shown), brass, or chrome



most commonly found in larger period properties and although it delivers heat quickly and fairly cheaply, the underfloor ducts need to be so big that installing them can be costly.

Electric storage heaters These work by storing high-density bricks that absorb heat generated by electricity during off-peak periods, then release the heat into the room as required. Regulating the temperatures in some models can be tricky, as they produce heat even when switched off, and electricity is more expensive than gas or oil wet systems.

Installing a fireplace

Assess the practicalities Before you decide on the type of fire you want, you need to check to see if your home has a flue. All solid-fuel, oil and gas fires need a channel for smoke to escape through. If you live in an older property, you will probably have a traditional brick chimney. Get a chimney sweep to check it fulfils modern safety requirements, and clear it of blockages. If you live in a modern property, you're more likely to have a pre-cast flue with a raised roof tile or aluminium cowl for smoke to escape through. Because dimensions vary, not all fire types suit every flue, but your fireplace retailer should be able to advise you. Some properties – particularly flats – don't have a flue at all, but this doesn't mean you can't have a fire. A balanced or fan flue fire can be installed without a chimney, but will need venting through an outside wall. If this isn't practical, there are plenty of flueless fires on the market nowadays that have a catalytic converter to remove harmful gas.

Choosing a design You will also need to decide whether you want a classic hearth-mounted grate, freestanding basket or stove with a surround, a modern, wall-mounted fire, or one built into a hole-in-the-wall. All options come in a range of designs. Remember that the fuel you choose will also have an impact on the overall look. Solid-fuel fires offer all



▲ This brightly enamelled stove is available in seven colours.

Montfort multi-fuel stove in red, £595, Franco Belge

▲ Create impact with a traditional wood-burning stove.

Aitana solid fuel stove, £2,995, Rocal

Use an electric fire when there is no flue or chimney.

Capri electric fire, £249, Valor



WHICH FUEL?

Before you start shopping for your fire, think about which fuel you want to use. Cost effectiveness, environmental friendliness and flexibility are major factors to consider before making a decision.

Natural gas is cheap to run and provides realistic, odourless flames at the touch of a button. All gas-fired appliances must be installed by a fitter who is registered with CORGI (Council of Registered Gas installers; 01256 372 300; www.calor-gas.com). Most local suppliers will be able to recommend someone.

Solid fuel can be wood, coal, anthracite or manufactured smokeless variety. Any one of these fuels tend to be relatively cheap, but they are high maintenance and require regular cleaning. If you happen to live in a smoke control area, you will have to use smokeless fuel.

Electricity is one of the cleanest options as all the energy that goes into the appliance is used to heat the room, with no wastage being lost up the chimney or flue. However, the flames tend to be less realistic than gas and even when used at the off-peak rate, it is more expensive than other fuels. **Gel** comes in a can nestled inside a fire bowl which is then hidden by ceramic coals, logs or pebbles. Gel fires can be set inside a standard fireplace or a hole-in-the-wall design and don't need a flue, chimney or power supply. The downside is that the gel is costly to replace, one can (approx £4) only lasts for three to four hours.



Use decorative tiles to provide extra detail around your fire. Waterford cast iron effect mantel, feature tiles, black granite hearth and electric fire, £799, Go Goa

the atmosphere of real flames and smoke, while gas-fuelled fires and stoves provide good low-maintenance imitations.

Hearth-mounted fires can be powered by solid fuel, gas, electricity or even liquid gel, and most of the designs fit into a standard fireplace opening. They are normally teamed with a fire surround, which can be made from a wide variety of materials. They are easy to fit, and provide plenty of heat, as well as creating an attractive focal point. Hole-in-the-wall fires have become increasingly popular in recent years as their streamlined designer look particularly suits modern homes. Solid-fuel, gas, electric and gel fires are all available and adaptable to almost all flue requirements.

Freestanding stoves come in traditional cast-iron or enamel designs and ultra-modern stainless steel, and can be used with solid fuel, gas or electricity. They work well positioned inside a large fireplace opening or inglenook with the flue pipe rising vertically from the stove into the chimney, but can also be placed in front of a smaller opening with the flue pipe leading horizontally into the flue.

Antique versus reproduction An original fireplace will bring a touch of authentic style to your home and is likely to be unique if created in the early 19th century or before, when mass production techniques hadn't been established. Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian surrounds are especially sought after, and the best place to find them is in a salvage yard. Before buying an original, check it carefully for structural damage or missing sections that may need either repairing or replacing. If this sounds too costly and high maintenance, there are some excellent reproduction fireplaces around on the high street that are cheaper and often more durable.

Fitting a fireplace You don't need planning permission to fit a new fireplace onto an existing flue, but you will need approval from your local planning office if you want to add a new flue and chimney. If you live in a listed property, all exterior or interior



'If you want to replace a chimney breast that has been removed or blocked up, get in touch with a specialist. A builder or structural engineer will be able to assess the requirements of the job as well as how much it is going to cost.'

▼ **Choose a decorative fire basket for a traditional look.** Reproduction Adam fire basket, £423, Chesneys



A freestanding stove will create a stunning centrepiece in a large room Moulded steel stove, £6,364, Donbar, available as a gas or wood burner

WHICH TYPE OF SURROUND?

Stone can be real, reconstituted or faux. Carved natural limestone or sandstone is expensive, but either will add a real touch of luxury to your room scheme. Reconstituted stone made from a mixture of crushed real stone and cement often looks like the real thing but is much cheaper.

Wood surrounds are frequently made out of veneered MDF or solid timber and are teamed with marble back panels and hearths. Although traditionally they come

with carved detailing, they are also available in simple designs suited to modern homes.

Faux marble fireplaces are cast in moulds, using a combination of resins and filling material, or reinforced plaster. They are an ideal, lower cost solution for large rooms in older properties that require an impressive surround.

Brick is also a traditional choice, and is most often found in country homes as an inglenook, where it looks good with cast iron stoves.





A chrome radiator can double as a towel rail. Chrome radiator, from £229, Bathstore.com



◀ Embossed column radiators add a traditional feature to Victorian houses. Radiator, from £265, Old Radiator Co



‘Choose a radiator with a thermostatic valve, which means each one can be controlled individually, so you don’t waste energy.’

Feature Rachel Voip • Photographs Ashley Morrison



◀ A bold, unusual radiator will add interest to any modern scheme. Radiator, from £1,488.68, The Radiator Company

ENERGY-SAVING TIPS

- ◀ An energy-efficient home is not only better for the environment but it will reduce your heating bills, too.
- ★ Boilers over 10 years old can lose their efficiency, so think about updating to a new model. Have your boiler serviced every year so you can be aware of any problems before it breaks down.
- ★ Setting the hot water temperature to 60°C or lower and adjusting the room thermostat by just 1°C could reduce your bills by 10%.

changes should be approved and this includes removing any fireplaces. The National Fireplace Association can provide an extensive list of fireplace specialists who will be able to recommend a qualified installer in your area.

Fireside accessories You can breathe new life into an existing fire by replacing the surround or hearth. Similarly, if you’re already happy with your fire surround but don’t like the inset, this can be replaced without having to rip everything out. Choose a decorative fire basket or stove and invest in new fireside tools such as a fire blower to turn over the embers, as well as pokers and a brush and shovel. Wicker baskets are practical for storing ready-cut wood, and help create a country feel.

Choosing a radiator

Radiators are no longer purely functional panels, but come in a wide array of shapes, sizes and colours. Some are even design features in their own right. **Which design?** Panel radiators are still the most common option. They come in many different sizes and colours and are generally made from steel, but if your rooms are particularly cold, go for an aluminium version as they produce more heat.

Column radiators, usually found in older properties, are traditionally cast-iron radiators with double rows of pipes. They also come in a wide range of modern steel and aluminium designs, which warm up more quickly than cast iron.

Towel warmers are ladder-shaped radiators that bring heat into a bathroom as well as providing space for towels to hang and dry. They may not be big enough to heat the room as well, so are best used with a conventional radiator.

What size? Buying the right size is essential – to do this, you need to work out the heat loss from your room. Visit the Central Heating Information Council’s website (www.centralheating.co.uk) and order its calculator online for £15.

Positioning The best place to put a radiator is in the coldest part of a room, which is generally on an outside wall or under a window. If you don’t have enough wall space, opt for two or three smaller radiators and install them on different walls.

ESSENTIAL CONTACTS

The National Fireplace Association (0121 200 1310; www.nfa.org.uk) publishes a handy list of approved manufacturers or showrooms on its website. It also offers lots of advice on products and installation.

Solid Fuel Association (0845 601 4406; www.solidfuel.co.uk) provides information on how to use solid-fuel products and which fuels are legal to burn in your area.

Central Heating Information Council (0845 600 2200; www.centralheating.co.uk) for ideas on making your home energy efficient.

Elgin & Hall (01677 450 712; www.elgin.co.uk) specialises in a range of well-priced reproduction fires and accessories.

Gazco (01392 261999; www.gazco.com) has an extensive range of modern and traditional

gas fires with realistic effects and all the latest hi-tech specifications.

Chesney’s (020 7627 1410; www.chesneys.co.uk) stocks a huge variety of antique, restored and bespoke fire surrounds, grates, baskets and accessories, plus designs by Jasper Conran.

For stockist details, see page 16

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CREATING PERFECT
BEDROOM STYLE**