Hearth and Home

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A hearth of early Gothic period.

**FEBRUARY** is the month that brings with it dreams of "Hearth and Home." The home may be a shack on a North Dakota homestead, a large house on an Iowa farm, or the city mansion of the multi-millionaire. The fireside may be the traditional homestead laundry stove, a hard coal heater, or the most elaborate marble or carved wood fireplace and mantle. In each home we find the same love, the same dreams, and the same hopes.

When evening brings a lull in the day's activities, the mother will sit down near the fireside and the children will soon cluster around her. They will ask for a story, always.

It was at the fireside you first heard the story of the baby that was born in Bethlehem, of his Mary Mother, and of the three Wise Men who came with gifts of gold. You loved the shepherd boy David and his wonderful harp. You wondered, without a doubt, about the kind of coat Joseph really wore. You loved to hear the story of the beautiful princess and the wonderful prince. The stories of fairies, ghosts and goblins.

As you sit near the hearth and watch the blazing logs you may wonder about the origin of the fireplace. Not even the chimney was known or used by the Greeks and Romans until a late date. We do not find any record of a chimney or a fireplace even as late as the first century of our era. A few crude fireplaces have, however, been found at Pompeii.

Scholars, archeologists, and artists have looked in vain for signs of the fireplace of that period, in old ruins or illustrated on pottery decoration and wall frescoes. We find no ode sung by poets to the mance and comfort of the fireplace. They will ask for activities, the mother will sit down near mantel. In each home we find the elaborate marble or carved wood fireplace construction was popular in the New England until a later date. There was only one chimney in the New England house and that was centrally located. Fisk Kimball says, "We may surmise that the reason lay in the use of wooden chimneys, and that the practice continued in the New England until the latter part of the seventeenth century. It is also possible that they persisted until after the Revolution in other parts of the colonies. As early as the middle of the seventeenth century chimneys of masonry were used in frame houses."

The decoration of the fireplace and the mantle was not neglected. In early Gothic work the human figure was used as capitals of pilaster as columns. Later appear heraldic and mythical creatures, flowers, shells, the small fruits, and a curious combination of unrelated motives.

With the advance of the seventeenth century in England, Inigo Jones' work began to influence public taste. He brought in classic design which stresses simplicity, good proportion, and fine line quality.

In France during this period in the reign of Louis XIV, the fireplace remained large and it was usually elaborately decorated, it expressed the pomp, the love of formality and dignity of that period. When Louis XV came to the throne, people had become weary of formality and pomp and large rooms. The small room became popular and as a consequence the fireplace and the mantle became smaller. It became almost a decorative ornament. The French designer never lost sight of the relation of good proportion to structural and architectural laws. The mirror which has come in

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during the last years of the reign of Louis XIV became a dominant feature of decoration above the fireplace. The graceful curved lines were now used in the mantle construction and in the ornament. The period of Louis XVI and the Emperor brought back again the straight lines.

Panelling of rooms in wood became popular the first half of the eighteenth century. The fireplace and mantle, therefore, became part of the architectural construction. The colonists of this period adopted the best styles of fireplaces and mantles which were in vogue in the mother country. After the Revolution the French styles became popular. America was fortunate because she received inspiration from the French models of possibly the period of greatest refinement.

Architects lost interest in the designing of fireplaces during the nineteenth century because they were being made on a commercial basis. Individuality in design and workmanship was almost lost. Steel grates became the vogue because people were using coal instead of wood.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century brought about a reaction. There was a breaking away from the heavy Victorian traditions and a revival of the Louis XV-Louis XVI and Georgian models. This classical note in fireplace design is still very popular. The tendency has been to flatten the chimney piece and confine the fireplace within the thickness of the walls. The modern grate has done much to bring about the decrease in the size of the fireplace. This change in size and proportion is also due to the popularity of the small house and the modern apartments.

The bungalow and cottage interiors lend themselves beautifully to the use of brick and stone for fireplaces. These materials with a combination of wood or without are also used in the formal home. Brick and tile bring color into an interior which might otherwise be dull and uninteresting.

The fireplace plays an important part in the structural unity of the interior. It might therefore, be advisable to place it in a central position in relation to the wall space and not near a corner, in other words, on an axis of the room.

Built-in bookcases or furniture on each side of the fireplace is very useful. It saves space, and adds to the decorative treatment of the interior. A mirror or a fine picture may be built in above the fireplace mantle.

The fireplace with its glowing logs is always a joy to children. They wait for the hour of twilight when mother waves her wand and they are transported into the world of magic. You climb the golden stairs straight up to heaven, you wear your best shoes and glorious red ribbons in your hair. You sing with the angels, and you talk to a prince. You penetrate the innermost parts of the earth and see the elves at work.

Before a blazing fire, you see ghosts and goblins, you come out in time to see Thor throw his mighty hammer. You are dazed by the lightning and frightened by the crashes of thunder. Finally the child comes back from the land of magic to the world of reality. He will, however, have with him always as a priceless jewel, the dreams, the love, and the hopes that were kindled by the glow of the fireside.

As the years come and go, the fireplace will remain the center of interest because around it will cluster the youth of the home and the hope of the nation. February is the month that will always bring with it dreams of "Hearth and Home."

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