

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Don't get cold feet this Christmas, let our experts guide you in all your heating needs

Q I'm planning to install a multi-fuel or woodburning stove as I've heard they are very green options. How efficient are the latest models?

A Some of the best multi-fuel and woodburning stoves on the market will work at up to 80% efficiency which is exceptionally good. With regards to energy consumption you can find units that can easily burn for ten hours or more on a single filling of natural anthracite, or other suitable fuel, which means you need to burn less to get more heat than many other stoves that are currently on the market. This makes them extremely economical to run because wood and anthracite are still the cheapest fuel types available today. Look for designs that have received DEFRA's recommendation for exemption from the Clean Air Act 1993. This is given to the most efficient and clean-burning stoves and means that they can even be used in Smoke Control Areas when burning wood.

Kate Eaton, BFM Europe/Portway
(01782 339 000, bfm-europe.com)

Q I would love to get restored Victorian radiators installed in my home. What is the renovation process and do they work effectively?

A Firstly all of the old fittings are taken off and the radiator is flushed through to ensure any sediment is removed. After this, the fittings are replaced with new 15mm standard bushes at the bottom, unless otherwise specified by the customer. It is then pressure tested (to 6 bar), an important part of the quality control procedure, as it detects any pinhole leaks and hairline cracks which are not visible to the human eye. Any pressure drop indicates a leak, which is located and repaired if possible, or the section is replaced if not. Finally the radiator is shot blasted before either being painted or given a polished finish.

Diana, The Old Radiator Company (01233 850 082, theoldradiatorcompany.co.uk)



Q I'm keen to add a heated towel rail in my bathroom, will it heat the room as well as warming the towels? Similarly, can I use it in the summer without having my central heating on?

A Whether the rail heats the room depends on the Btu/hr rating of the model that you choose. This is the measurement of the heat output, so the higher the Btu/hr the more heat will be given off. If the rail is covered with wet towels, though, some of this energy will of course be absorbed to dry them. A model which combines both a radiator and a towel rail will give you the full benefits of both. If you wish to have a design that can be used independently of the central heating, choose a model that is either electric only or dual energy. The latter will be powered by your central heating system when this is turned on, and by your electricity when it is off. This will allow you to enjoy the comfort of warm, dry towels all year round, using the most appropriate and efficient energy source available at any given time.

Steve Birch, Vogue UK (01902 387 000, vogueuk.co.uk)



Q We're considering underfloor heating for both our new extension and conservatory. Are there any fundamental things we should know before committing to designs?

A The beauty of underfloor heating is that very few design considerations are required when preparing to install in a new build. It will also provide a luxuriously comfortable radiant heat regardless of floor covering too. Ceramic tiles or stone should have no problems, most carpets will also be fine but they should be taken into consideration during the planning phase. Thick carpets and underlays – greater than 1.5 tog combined – should be avoided. If in doubt check with the floor covering manufacturer. Advances in underfloor heating mean that additional rooms, whether new build or pre-existing, can be added to your system at a later date.

Karly Taylor, Wavin (01392 444 122, osmaufh.co.uk)

Q We've recently moved into a property with a woodburning stove but we haven't had one before. How often should we have it serviced and what can we do ourselves?

A Your stove should be serviced at least once a year, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. It's best to use a HETAS qualified installer as you may invalidate the stove's warranty and put yourself at risk if you don't know what you're doing. You should also have your chimney swept at least once a year, depending on the fuel you use and how dry it is, how frequently your woodburning stove or fireplace is used, the type of chimney or flue and whether or not it is lined, as fewer deposits will build up in a lined chimney. You should regularly clean the stove glass as per the manufacturer's instructions, and you can also touch up the stove's exterior using aerosol paint or colloidal black cleaner for most painted finishes. Clean enamelled surfaces with a soft, damp cloth.

Zoe Sheridan-Wasey, Stovax (01392 474 000, stovax.com)



Q Our original Tudor fireplace needs restoring. A friend suggested that we should get a fireback. Are these purely decorative or do they serve a practical purpose too?

A Cast iron firebacks protect the rear of the fireplace from excessive heat, as well as radiating warmth into your room. Firebacks were first made in the early-16th century, and came into general use when it became the norm to place the fire against a wall instead of in the middle of the room. It was necessary to protect the wall from the heat and it was discovered that an iron fireback didn't absorb heat like brick and stone do. You can get a range of traditional cast iron designs,

including copies of authentic originals. To install a fireback, simply lean it safely against the rear of the fireplace to allow the air gap to protect the brickwork – it should not be secured flat against the rear.

Andrew Pearson, Kingsworthy Foundry (01962 883 776, kingsworthyfoundry.co.uk)

Q We're trying to get authentic-looking fireplaces for our Victorian home. What features or traits should we look out for?

A Victorian fireplaces were often made into the centrepiece of a room. This was especially so in the main reception rooms where they would be slightly bigger than those found in the bedrooms. If you're looking for that extra touch of historical accuracy make sure to replicate this size difference. Marble was a commonly-used material during this period, and this would often feature ornate hand-carved details. Where these 19th-century models often differed from previous designs was in the semi-circular grate, which would have three or four horizontal bars to hold in the burning coal. This style became as popular as the rectangular look that was typical of the Georgian period.

Eve Iravani, Montpellier (01452 714 800, montpellier.co.uk)



Q Our friends have a large and impressive-looking firebox, but it often makes the heat uncomfortable when we visit. How important is getting the size correct?

A Open convector fireboxes deliver all the looks and atmosphere of a real open fire, with the added benefit that they do it with considerably improved efficiency - usually at least twice that of a conventional open hearth.

It is very important to size the firebox correctly as they can generate a significant heat output - installing one which is too large is, unfortunately, a common mistake. You can end up having to open windows to lose some of the excess heat or find yourself getting into the habit of building tiny, mean-looking fires in an attempt to keep the heat output down to acceptable levels.

It is always much better to have the correctly-sized fire burning brightly than too large a fire just ticking over. It will reduce the potential build-up of condensates in the chimney but most importantly it will give you a lovely-looking blaze without the risk of being roasted alive!

Gordon Allen, Flamewave Fires (0845 257 5028, flamewavefires.co.uk)



Q I'd like to find a wooden Georgian fireplace for my 18th-century home. I've been told that marble is more historically accurate, but I'm sure isn't true.

A The idea that only marble designs were used in the principal rooms of Georgian houses is a misconception. Perhaps the most detailed inventory that identifies fireplaces by materials - which dates from the late-18th century - is the one made by the Adam brothers for the Adelphi project. Almost fifty sketches survive of which ten are marble, over thirty are ornamented timber and the rest are unidentified. Timber was almost certainly the

predominant material in use by the 1790s, when marble supplies from Europe were interrupted by wartime blockades. It was also perfectly appropriate for such high status interiors as David Garrick's house, which was one of the most fashionable addresses in London. The splendid example from his library is now displayed in the British gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

David J Black, Thistle & Rose (01450 376 928, thistleandrose.co.uk)