

INSTALL A FIREPLACE

SKILL LEVEL



The way that modern surrounds are constructed makes installing one a very simple job that anyone can undertake successfully.

SAFETY FIRST

If you are installing a gas fire in a fireplace, it must be installed by a member of CORGI (Confederation of Registered Gas Installers). For further information contact: Gas Service Agents - Tel 0906 8517651.

INTRODUCTION

A fireplace is the focal point of a room and there are now so many wonderful surrounds available that you can't fail to create an eye-catching feature.

Even if you don't like an existing fireplace surround, someone else may do; so remove it carefully and put any money you get for it towards the cost of your new surround.

Your brand-new surround can be further enhanced by having a companion set comprising brush, tongs and shovel, plus a coal hod and a firescreen.

2 - Removing an old fireplace

Before removing an old fireplace, or if you are going to open up a chimney to have a new fire (solid fuel, gas or electric ornamental), have the chimney swept and tested. Contact a professional chimney sweep through your Yellow Pages.

Unless the room has been emptied for complete redecoration, roll back the carpet and cover any furniture that has to remain with dust sheets - there can be a lot of dust created.

If there is an old fireplace surround and hearth to remove, be very careful, since a cast-iron, brick or stone type is very heavy, and you will need help lowering it to the floor.

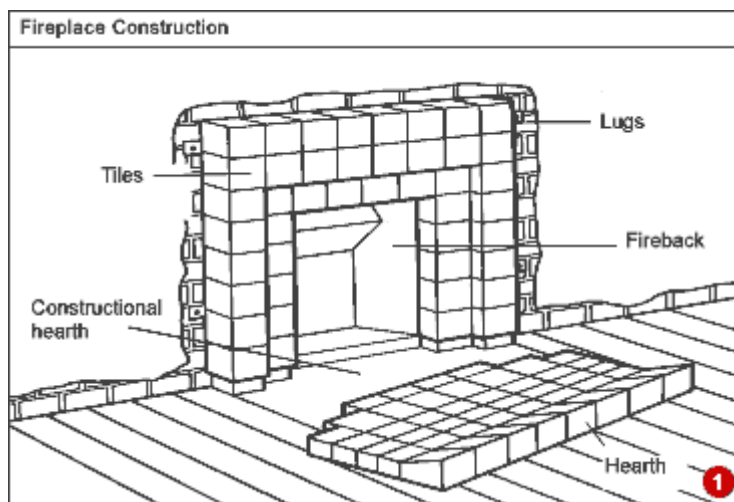
Due to its weight, you might have to allow a surround to fall. To help prevent any damage, pile some cushions and pillows on the floor in front of the hearth and cover them with dust sheets. Take care to stand clear.

You will probably need to use a bolster chisel and club hammer when removing a surround. Be sure to wear a face mask, safety spectacles and gloves.

Usually the hearth will have been laid after the surround was

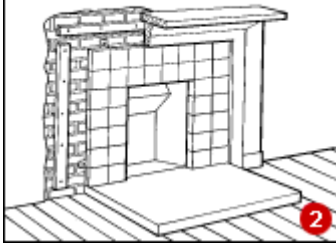
fitted. It is laid on a bed of mortar, so chisel away around the underside until you are able to get a crowbar or garden spade underneath, then lever upwards to free the hearth from the mortar bed. Remember, it will be heavy so have help on hand.

Below the hearth will be a layer of concrete which is level with the floorboards. This is the constructional hearth and can remain in place and be covered by a new hearth or floorcovering (1). If it needs to be smoothed, use a self-levelling compound; this is simply poured on to the floor, smoothed out with a trowel and left to dry to a level finish. Sometimes the hearth will comprise a layer of tiles level with the floorboards. These can remain in place or be lifted with the bolster chisel and club hammer.



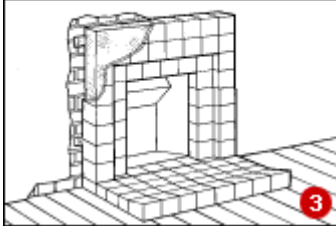
A fireplace surround will be held to the wall with screws driven through metal lugs. The lugs - there may be one or two on each side - will be buried in the wall plaster (1). To locate them, chip away an inch or so of plaster all around the edge, using the cold chisel and club hammer. This will reveal the screws which can be removed. They may, however, be rusted in and need to have the heads drilled off to free the lugs. The surround can now be lowered to the floor - remember it will be heavy.

An old timber surround may be fixed to wall battens



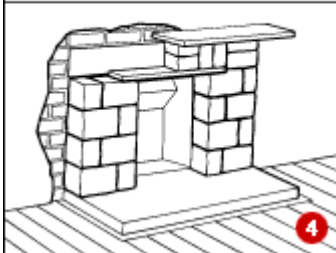
A wooden surround may be screwed to wood battens (2). Again, it's a matter of locating the screws which will be hidden behind wood plugs or filler. You may have to strip off any paint or varnish to locate the filler used to conceal the screw heads.

Tiled fireplaces often have a concrete backing



A tiled surround will have a concrete backing which will be fixed to the wall through lugs (3).

Stone and brick surrounds are built from individual components



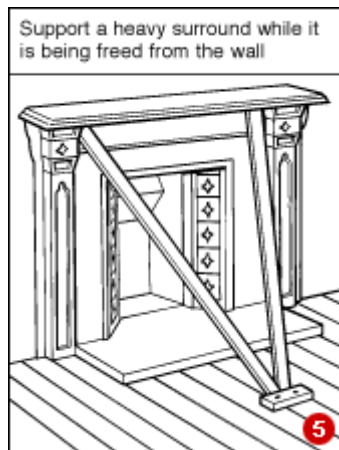
A stone or brick surround will have been built with individual components held together with mortar (4). Chip away the mortar bit by bit, starting with the top course. Sometimes there may be metal wall ties linking some mortar courses to the wall behind. These can be chipped out of the wall.

With the fireplace surround removed, you may be faced with a fireback. This will be in two sections and can be removed, top half first, followed by the lower portion using the bolster and club hammer.

Remaining in the hearth will be some rubble used as a backing for the fireback; remove all the rubble to leave a rectangular brick opening ready for your new gas or electric fire, fireplace surround and hearth. Depending on the condition of the brickwork in the opening, you may want to keep it or cover it over with a new facing of brick or stone as a feature, or fit a new fireback.

If you are not going to resell the fireplace, then break it up 'in situ' to make its removal easier. Cover it with old blankets before dismantling it with a club hammer. This prevents pieces of hardcore flying around dangerously - again, wear appropriate

safety equipment.



It is worth supporting a heavy surround while it is being freed from the wall (5).

3 - A new surround for a modern decorative fire

There is a vast array of fireplace surrounds, back panels (eg tiled inserts) and hearths which are interchangeable so you can mix and match to get the precise effect you want. Surrounds come in such materials as marble, pine and mahogany effects.

An electric fire does not need a flue. A gas fire requires a brick chimney, pre-cast flue or a pre-fabricated flue. Where there is no flue and the fire is to be installed on an outside wall, you can install a balanced-flue gas fire contained behind glass, or a rear-fan-flued gas fire which is open-fronted.

If you simply want a surround but no fire, then you could use something such as a dried-flower arrangement to form an eye-catching focal point in the room.

Your local B&Q now have the new flueless gas fires that can be installed on any wall, but they do require a vent constantly open to provide combustion air.

4 - Installing a surround

The new surround will be fixed to the wall using keyhole angle plates and screws.

A surround must not be installed against damp plaster - and plastering must be fully dried out. No lime or cement must come into contact with timber that will be visible on the completion of the installation.

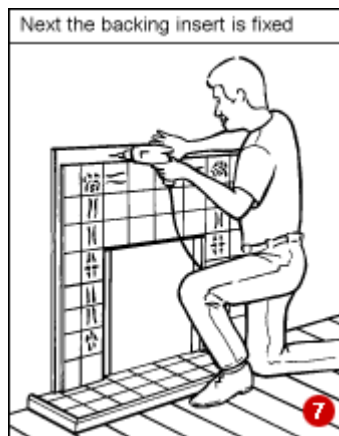
The surround must be fitted centrally around the fireplace

opening, so draw guide lines on the wall to ensure that it is correctly positioned and is aligned both horizontally and vertically.

The fireback needs to be removed and the fireplace opening reduced using bricks. Alternatively, simply remove the fireback and keep the wider opening.

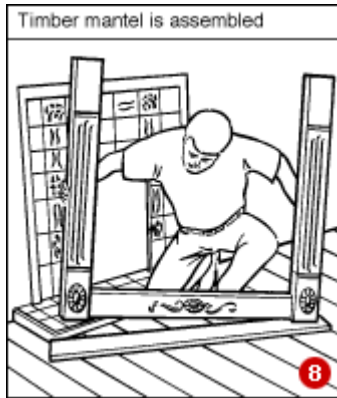


First the hearth should be laid centrally in front of the opening (6). Ensure that it is flat on the floor and check with a spirit level that it is horizontal. If necessary, use packing pieces of wood to bring it level.



The back panel is usually supplied screwed to a chip-board frame to protect it in transit. The panel is removed from the frame, placed centrally on the hearth and screwed to the wall (7).

Natural and conglomerate marble back panels cannot be fixed to the wall on a permanent basis. Instead they should be stood vertically against the wall and held in place by the appropriate timber mantel. If you have any difficulty doing this (due to the wall not being square), use a small amount of Unibond No More Nails to fix the panel to the wall until you have the surround in place.



If a timber mantel is being used, this will come in sections and have to be assembled (8).



The assembled mantel is temporarily lifted into place so that the locations of the screw-fixing positions can be marked off (9). The mantel is then removed, and the wall drilled and plugged for the screws. The mantel is then permanently fixed with screws slotted through the keyhole plates.



Where applicable, a brass frame is located around the opening of the back panel to complete the job (10).

5 - Cleaning existing fireplaces

Brick: Use a stiff brush to remove general dust and dirt. If there is heavy soiling, use a brick, stone and concrete cleaner - be careful when using such cleaners as they are caustic. Wear protective clothing and rubber gloves, and ensure the room is well ventilated.

Cast iron: Most grime can be removed with a general household cleaner diluted with hot water, according to manufacturer's instructions. Stubborn patches of soot or tar can

be removed with methylated spirit and fine wire wool. Any rust spots can be removed with an emery cloth. To restore the finish, use a coat of heat-proof matt black paint, or black-lead graphite polish.

Ceramic tiles: Wash with sugar soap or household cleaner diluted with hot water - the cleaner must be non-abrasive. A loose tile can be refixed with heat-resistant ceramic tile cement.

Marble: Polished stone surfaces can be washed with soapy water, dried with a chamois leather and shined with a good-quality wax polish. Be careful with the surfaces as they are easily damaged.

Slate and granite: Use a stiff-bristle brush (not a wire brush) to remove deposits from unpolished surfaces, then wash with a liquid detergent in hot water. Only use a caustic cleaner if all else fails.

