



Fireplaces ... not just for Detached Homes

By Evelyn Eshun

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High-rise living is the norm in Toronto, and why apologize for that? The convenience of living in the city close to restaurants, transportation and shopping is a choice many are making. As a designer, I have to guide my clients in making their condo homes as comfortable as the old perception of what the traditional home stands for. Some clients hire me to help them give their home in the sky the personal, cozy feeling of a detached home. The goal is to make that box in the sky feel like your own cocoon that expresses your lifestyle and provides all the comforts a home should bring.

Built-ins are one of the best ways to make good use of a small space. Storage is one of the biggest challenges condo owners face and bought furniture does not always fit the bill. In this condo, my client missed the warmth of the fireplace she had in her previous home. My motto is Why compromise? Take on the challenge and figure out how to make it happen!

This client approached me with the challenge of creating the feeling of a cozy family room with a crackling fire and warm colours. But how do you do that in a condominium, where you cannot run a gas line and you certainly cannot burn logs? Well, where there is a will, and a bit of cash, there is a way.

In this space, I designed a built-in to replace a dated, tired china cabinet – you know exactly the one I mean; all our parents have one. My client was thrilled when I told her she could have an electric fireplace, this one from Dimplex, which would give her the heat, ambiance and glow of a traditional gas or log fireplace.

I created curves in the design and a feature area for a piece of art that held sentimental value for my client. To add further depth to the space, the back of the open shelf area was painted a warm,

inviting caramel colour. It's a nice way to add a simple, yet surprising element to any built-in or wardrobe.

Don't discount the value of an electric fireplace; you'd be surprised how they have changed since their inception. A wide variety of options are available for heat control, log appearance and even crackling sound. All you need is a plug and you're set. I advise my clients to get a model with a built-in fan and various bulb settings. These options will provide heat as well as a realistic flame.

Tips

- Choose a light colour for your built-in, ideally the same colour as the trim.
- Ask your electrician to install a dedicated plug for the fireplace so you do not blow a fuse.
- Get the best electric fireplace you can afford; it really does give you more options and a better quality flame.
- Add an accent paint colour or wallpaper to the back of the built-in for added detail.
- Have the structure built to the ceiling if you have a standard 8'- to 9'-ceiling. It will create the illusion of more space, as well as eliminating an area for dust to accumulate.

