

THE FIREPLACE

Its Origin, Its Development and Its Possibilities

By G. M. WEST

LIFE in the early centuries of the middle ages was lived among much more primitive conditions, and was of a much more simple nature than that of these later times. In those early days the house of man was more a shelter from the onslaught of the rain and snow, and a protection from the icy blasts of winter. It consisted then of one great room, around, or immediately in connection with which, were stabled the four-footed animals of the establishment, and provided the sleeping accommodation for the men and women of the household. At one end of the great room was the open hearth, which, shedding smoke throughout the room to combat the odours incidental to the mixed population, formed the centre of the family life and work, and was the prototype of our modern fireplace.

It is interesting indeed to trace the development of this primitive style of living, beginning with the building of the master's chamber above and behind the hearth on to the complex requirements of the modern home.

With the fireplace itself, however, the first step was the addition of a hood above the fire, with a flue to carry off the smoke direct. Previously, a simple hole in the roof had more or less fulfilled this purpose.

Next came the enclosing of the sides or jambs to prevent side draughts, and it is this form which remains essentially the same to the present day.

Relative Importance. In the early days the fireplace was large and grandiose, in keeping with its importance in the life of

the family and the scale of the room of which it was the chief feature. Following naturally with changing conditions, the hearth of the great hall, with its manifold uses for heating, cooking and sociability, was replaced in the old New England farm house by the kitchen fireplace and oven for

sixteen by fourteen feet, it is out of place to build a great fireplace, which dwarfs the room. Where we have large halls or rooms, large and even monumental fireplaces are permissible, but let us lift our voices against those designers of railway stations and town halls, et al, who give us great cavernous hearths wherein no fire is ever built, but where



Bedroom fireplace with the modern colonial spirit.

repose on the cold stones, cigar stubs and waste paper. Let us consign this misguided use of the fireplace to the same place as that of the white glazed tile whose purity the landlord will not permit to be sullied by smoke and ashes.

Colonial Mantels

In delicacy of scale and beauty of proportion, the colonial mantels are the most successful. We illustrate two examples, one of more modern feeling than the other, but both expressive of the colonial spirit. In the old designs the motive is almost invariably the Doric or Ionic order, with columns much attenuated, friezes widened, and mouldings reduced to slender lines of shadow. The cornice often becomes a mere shelf, adorned with reed mouldings, small strings of pearl-like balls, etc. A pleasant combination sometimes used with the low Colonial mantel is a gilded mirror above, standing on the shelf. This classic type is not capable of wide variation. It is usually finished in white, with a narrow tile or marble facing. Brick is not generally suitable for this purpose, though some of the thin Roman shapes, being smaller in scale, are successful.

The Brick Mantel.

In contrast to the delicate scale and beauty of the Colonial mantel we often turn to designs in other materials, and of these, brick is perhaps the most widely used, and there are many designs in this rougher material of much artistic interest and merit. Unfortunately, the average builder who hears the words "brick mantel" at once conjures up before his mind's eye a horrible erection of dull red pressed and moulded brick, some of which seem to be still on sale. There is considerable scope for design in brickwork, and its possibilities are often overlooked. We reprint an interesting and original design for a brick mantel. In itself a good example, its rough scale, exaggerated still more by the coarse, wide joints, is not in harmony with the delicate proportion of the details of the room. An accompaniment of massive ceiling beams, rough plaster walls, and coarse heavy panelling would be more fitting. The color of the brickwork and the mortar is a most important point. There are many varying shades of brick if you will only go and find them—plain buff and red bricks are not the only ones obtainable. It is often effective to rake out the joints to a depth of three-fourths of an inch, and sometimes if the detail of a room is very robust, to make the joints three-quarters of an inch in width.

Other Types.

There remains the rough stone mantel whose vigour of design is suitable for the living room of the summer camp or cottage, and appeals strongly to the lover of cliffs, woods and out-of-doors. We must be careful not to make the mistake pointed out in regard to brick, and place these in too refined situations, nor yet to have them look, as some do, more like a rockery in a park, than a fireplace.

Heavy plank shelves, supported on corbels of stone, are suitable. Mantels constructed mostly or wholly of tile are sometimes pleasing, and give a chance at times to work in some ornamental metal work. Metal hoods can sometimes be used successfully with this, and with brick or stone work.

Practical Points.

Several considerations must be taken into account when placing the mantel. The best place, if the room is not too narrow, is usually the centre of the long side. The heat will diffuse quicker from this position, and, having in mind the social value of the fire, note that fewer people can gather round the hearth when at the narrow end of a room. Breadth of treatment is easier to obtain if on the long side. Unless a niche for shelves or seats (which, by the way, are seldom very comfortable), is required on each side of the breast, it is better to keep it flush with the wall, especially in a small house where space is valuable. It is often a good idea to build a fireplace on the verandah, if it is to be enclosed in winter, as is now so often done, and in building this, or indeed any fireplace, the mason when leaving the rough opening must allow for the finished lining which will be put in afterward. The depth of the finished fireplace should be at least half its width, and the flue area should be from a twelfth to a fifteenth that of the finished opening. When a tile facing is used, care should be taken to work to the tile sizes, so the tile will not have to be cut and the face thus made patchy. The woodwork of the mantel should be rabbitted over the tiles about three-eighths of an inch.

The majority of small house owners have a predilection for buying stock mantels. These practically never suit their surroundings. It is obviously out of place to put an oak mantel in a room trimmed with pine, and your architect can nearly always design you a cheaper and more effective built-in

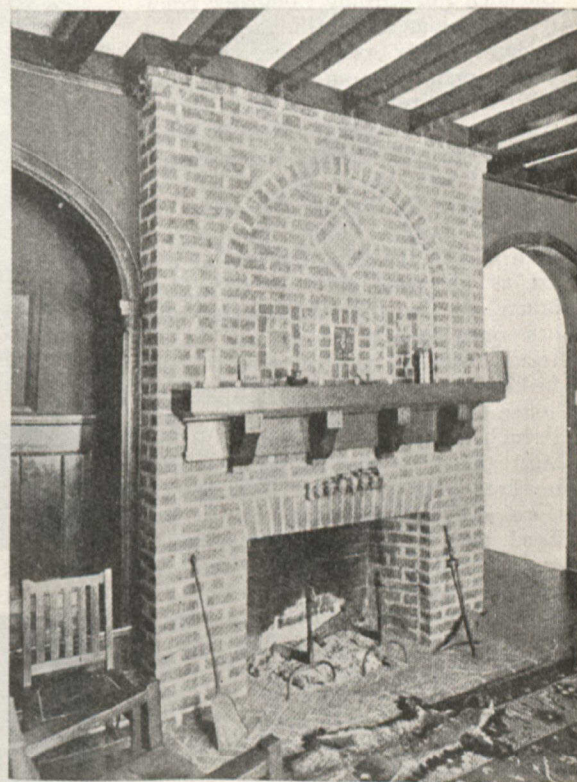


Colonial fireplace in a home at Salem, Mass.

cooking and utility purposes, and the smaller and more ornamental hearths to supply warmth and good cheer in the parlor, dining room and bedrooms.

The fireplace of to-day being now no longer a necessity, even for heating, has become, to a large extent, simply a source of social pleasure, and in accordance with its lessening importance we find that it is often designed merely as an accented continuation of the treatment of the room. More particularly is this true of the bedroom and, perhaps, dining room mantels, the living room being an exception for the keynote of this room is, or should be, sociability, and the fireplace thus assumes, relatively, more importance, and in the country house where the cheerful blaze of the open fire seems so much more in place we notice this particularly.

Then again, since good design should be logical, we should bear in mind the fact that in most small houses where the principal rooms average perhaps



A well-conceived brick design.

fireplace, if you will allow him to do so for you. The mantel should always be of the same wood as the trim of the room.

ONE of the great experimental fruit farms in England is that belonging to the Duke of Bedford at Woburn, in Bedfordshire, and the thirteenth report has been recently issued. It has been shown that the general result of grassing the ground, either by sowing seed or replacing the turf after the trees have been planted, is the arresting of all stunting of the branches. A light and unhealthy character imparted to the leaves is one of the first noticeable results of the action of grass upon trees. In the case of those that are feeling the full effect of grass the fruits are found to be small and ill developed. No matter what the tree may be, whether grown for its fruit or otherwise, the effect of grass is most pernicious.