

Home is Where the Hearth Is

Give your home the ultimate
"housewarming" gift...

Bringing comfort and heat into the home, the fireplace was as integral in the 18th century American home as the television is today. Deriving from European ancestry, the hearth was the center of family life providing food and warmth, along with the comfort of social interaction. Whereas early fireplaces were constructed of fieldstone, eventually these coal chambers evolved into brick edifices culminating in towering chimneys that any chimney sweep would find daunting.

Initially, the mantel was just a beam from which to hang your wet cloak, but as center fireplaces became more elaborate, the low-end cabinetmaker met the high-end carpenter and early American homes were transformed by a simple mantel that adorned the warm fireplace it framed.

The earliest American fireplaces, including the corner fireplace was found in Pennsylvania and traced back from Germanic roots. In the mid-18th century, Dutch hearths began to appear in the homes of prominent tradesman ornamented with Delft tiles that often displayed biblical themes, perhaps to remind family members to remain on the "straight and narrow."

Eventually these large cooking facilities evolved into smaller more heat-efficient hearths with "fireplace walls," con-



Bucks County, PA Mantel 1790-1800

Connecticut Neoclassic Mantel 1800-1810

New Jersey Farm House Mantel 1800-1810

Virginia Mantel 1790-1810

sisting of raised paneling and the addition of the "mantel shelf," which ultimately metamorphosed into the familiar "mantel" - that paneled fireplace surround that adds character to all our homes.

As the Georgian style swept the country, so did our taste for aesthetically appealing details in architecture. The impressive features of the Georgian home with its arched fanlights, and pedimented windows and doorways, would not be complete without an ornate fireplace mantel. Setting the stage for social gatherings in the Victorian period, the parlor displayed this newly acquired taste for grandeur and elegance and the fireplace mantel became the focal point accenting this new sense of harmony in design.

However, as a result of the changing tastes and the expanding population of the twentieth century, many of these beautifully appointed homes were lost

to demolition. In the 1960s as Route 95 expanded southward, and after watching historic homes and sea captain enclaves disappear before his eyes, Francis J. Purcell of Philadelphia was drawn to the preservation of fireplace mantels. On his daily commute to and from New York City, he peered out the window to watch historic homes set afire for local firemen to hone their skills and the demolition of structures from Front Street to Water Street in Philadelphia, as underground tunnels paved their way to progress. In an effort to preserve a part of the past, Mr. Purcell began to acquire his stock of antique fireplace mantels from these demolished homes and, as a result of his efforts, he had become the leading expert, having the most extensive collection of period mantels on the East Coast.

His son, Francis Purcell, Jr., grew up to appreciate these relics of the past,

and it is only fitting that he now oversees operations at the company. Today their stock represents mantels extending from Maine to Georgia and west to Ohio, all made within the period of 1770 to 1820. Usually constructed of yellow or white pine and almost always milk-painted, this wood was plentiful and a close to perfect substrate for embellishment. The designs range from Pennsylvania Dutch-style relief carved fans and four-pointed stars to pineapple and acorn motifs in the southern states. Conservative New England preferred staying simple with linear and geometric folk art themes.

If you should decide to give your home the ultimate 'housewarming gift,' the best recommendation for choosing the right mantel is to find your architectural theme first and design your interior around this concept. Whether you're after a minimalist modern design or a primitive folk art theme, the fireplace mantel is the focal point of your room and it should integrate the furnishings with the architecture. If you have trouble visualizing a new fireplace mantel, you can always call 'Uncle Frank's Mantel Mobile' and Mr. Purcell will deliver a selection of these heavy creatures to your door. Rest assured, your investment will not go up in smoke!

Martine White, of Bernards Appraisal Associates, LLC, in Gladstone, NJ, is a Senior Certified Appraiser of Antiques & Decorative Arts with the American Society of Appraisers and the Appraisers Association of America. Ms. White has been appraising property in the metropolitan area since 1988. To contact Martine, call (908) 234-1153.

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Pristine Tewksbury Home



This lovely 5 bedroom colonial located in the Fairmount section boasts a large, open floor plan with wonderful natural light. Some of the many features include a two story foyer with 2.58 acres of open land, hard wood flooring, a lovely family room with fireplace opening to a country, eat-in kitchen. A formal step down living room and dining room open to the foyer. A bedroom and laundry complete the first floor. A beautiful master suite including walk-in closets and designer bath along with 3 additional bedrooms, guest bath and an unfinished area over the garage complete the second floor. Located within 45 minutes of Newark International and close to shopping and area schools.



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