

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED AN...

OPEN FIRE

A fireplace makes a luxurious addition to any home but there are a few things to consider before installing one

Historically, fire has been key to the success of human survival – warning off predators and providing warmth, light and heat to cook food. While we no longer

require such protections, we are no less drawn to an open flame. “A fireplace anchors a home and gives us a central place to gather, reconnect and share stories with loved ones,” says Alex Hodge, lead designer at Escea Fireplaces. “It gives today’s homes a sense of cosiness, something a heat pump or heater can’t do. The allure of flames is mesmerising, adding ambience to any space.”

Technology

The humble fireplace has advanced in leaps and bounds from a fire pit in the ground. Some gas fireplaces can operate on ambient mode, so you enjoy the flicker of flames with a lower heat output, and can even be operated from your smartphone. “Most beneficial, however, is the ability to turn a fire on at the touch of a button, with no maintenance required, wood needed to burn or mess to be made,” says Alex. “You can be quite restricted as to where you can install a wood fire within a home, or what you surround a wood fire with. You won’t have the same restrictions with some gas or electric fires. For example, Escea’s Zero Clearance rating means you can surround our gas fires in most materials – and even build the fire straight into cabinetry or hang a TV right above it.”

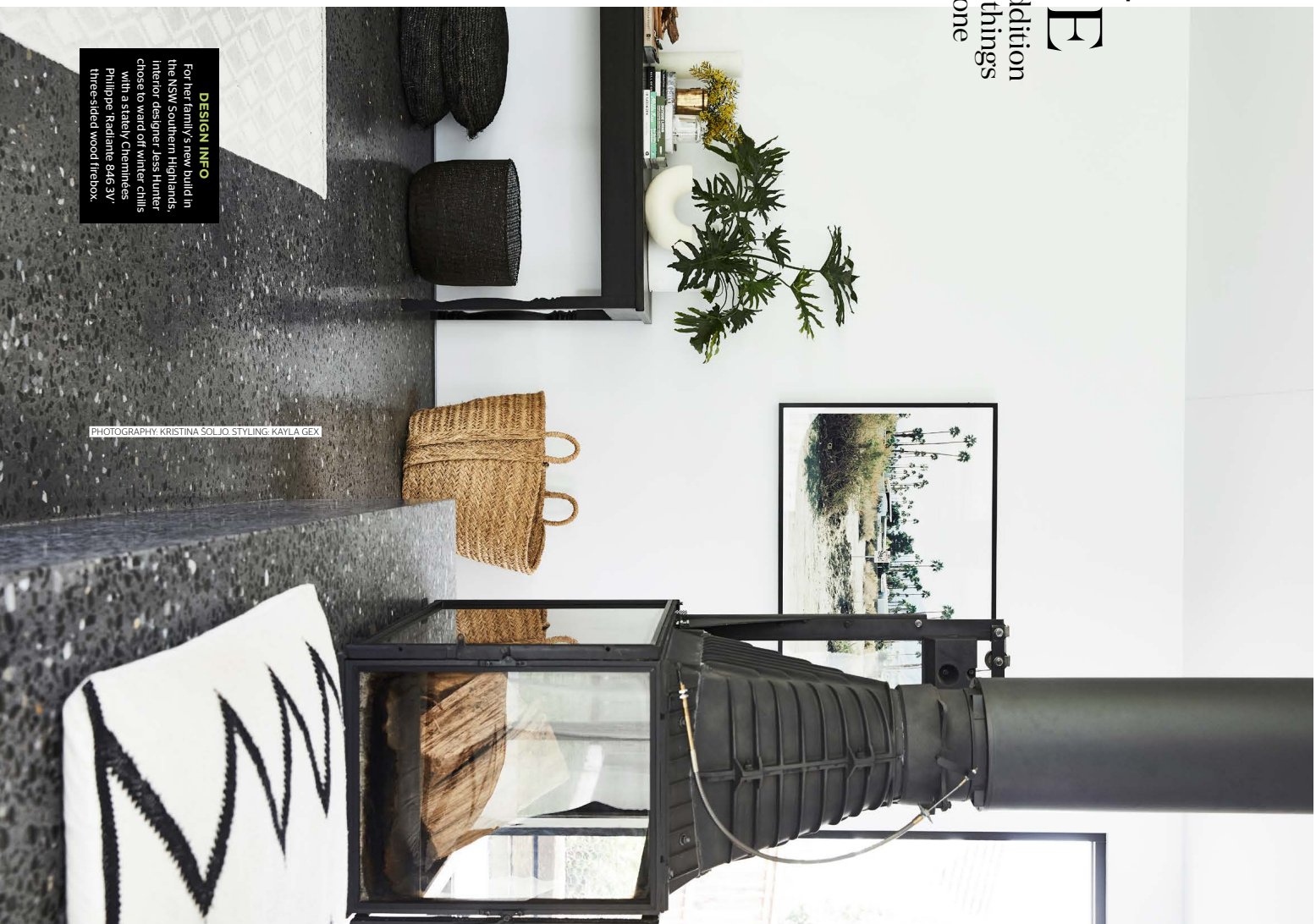
Safety

While the safety rules and installation guidelines of your heater will depend on the style and manufacturer, it’s worth noting that wood fires can pump out spectacular heat and need to be surrounded by non-combustible materials – restricting the types of electronic and design options that can be near the fire. You’ll also need to accommodate a hearth and vertical flue.

Gas fires have more seamless integration into the home and can give you greater design freedom. “Electric fires are similar to gas fires in terms of installation freedom and surround design,” says Alex. “However, electric fires don’t have the same heat output, nor is the flame picture as realistic – so it all depends on what’s most important to you!”

3 location

You can choose to have a wood, gas or electric fireplace in any room of the home, but Alex advises that some locations are better than others for particular fuel types. For example, wood heaters for outdoors, gas for living and open-plan areas, and electric models for bedrooms or secondary living spaces.



DESIGN INFO
For her family’s new build in the NSW Southern Highlands, interior designer Jess Hunter chose to ward off winter chills with a stately Cheminea Philippe Radiante 846 3V three-sided wood firebox.

PHOTOGRAPHY: KRISTINA SOLJO | STYLING: KAYLA GEX

“A lot of outdoor wood fires these days have cooking abilities so you can combine your barbecue and outdoor fire in one,” says Alex. “A gas fire is well suited to main living areas where warmth, comfort and convenience are a priority – it can be switched on at the touch of a button, plus there’s no mess or maintenance. The technology has also come such a long way that gas fires look like real wood-burning fires and can be installed in most places, so you don’t need to worry about chimneys or flues.”

4 trends

In Australia, the most common fireplace styles are wood, gas and electric, in built, retrofit, freestanding, single-, double- or three-sided models. “Double-sided fires are particularly good for visually connecting adjoining living and dining areas,” points out Alex. “You’ll often see a fire installed in a wall or nook between a kitchen/dining area and a living room. Ultra-wide and frameless are also in demand, as are freestanding fires devoted atop a ledge. In addition, we’re seeing a resurgence of traditional square fireplaces.”

5 benefits

Each type of fireplace has its pros and cons. The best one for you is a model that most suits your home, lifestyle and budget. “Environmentally and financially, electric is the best – but you’re not going to get the most authentic experience, nor will the heat output match that of a wood or gas fire,” says Alex. “Wood and gas fires might be comparative in purchase cost (anywhere from \$20,000 to \$20,000), but you’ll need to consider the running costs of wood versus gas, and this will obviously depend a lot on how often and in which way you use the fire.”

The price of installation will vary greatly, depending on the style of fireplace, its fuel type and your home. Alex says it’s best to chat through your requirements with a local fireplace retailer or expert, and to request an accurate quote. [10](#)

Our picks for turning up the heat

- CLOCKWISE** (from below) DX1000 built-in gas fireplace: \$12,499; Escea Era Solo Trebox Garden wood-burner fire pit: \$1995; Urnil DF990 gas heater: \$8499; and DF5730 freestanding gas heater: \$4899; both Escea; Scandia Warmthrite 200 indoor wood fire heater: \$1299; Burnings.

