

The heat of the moment

Interiors Room-heating options are broader and bolder than ever. By Kate Watson-Smyth

Nowadays heating says as much about your design credentials as your choice of wallpaper: from fireplaces made with metal coils to radiators shaped like animals, the latest creations look more like works of art than practical solutions to warming a home.

A traditional hearth may seem an anachronism in the age of underfloor heating, hi-tech insulation and climate-controlled homes, but the appeal of huddling round a flickering flame on a winter's evening remains as strong as ever.

Such is the human desire to while away the hours by a fire that even in the sun-baked Middle East, where average temperatures are around 30C, some of the most exclusive hotels have installed working fireplaces, in spite of the considerable environmental costs. David Bloch, of Bloch Design, created a fireplace for the restaurant of the Sheraton Hotel in Oman.

"We had to construct an extra large vent, so it's not actually very effective

at heating the room. And obviously the air conditioning has to be on full power when the fire is lit," he says. "But there is something so intimate and convivial about a real fire."

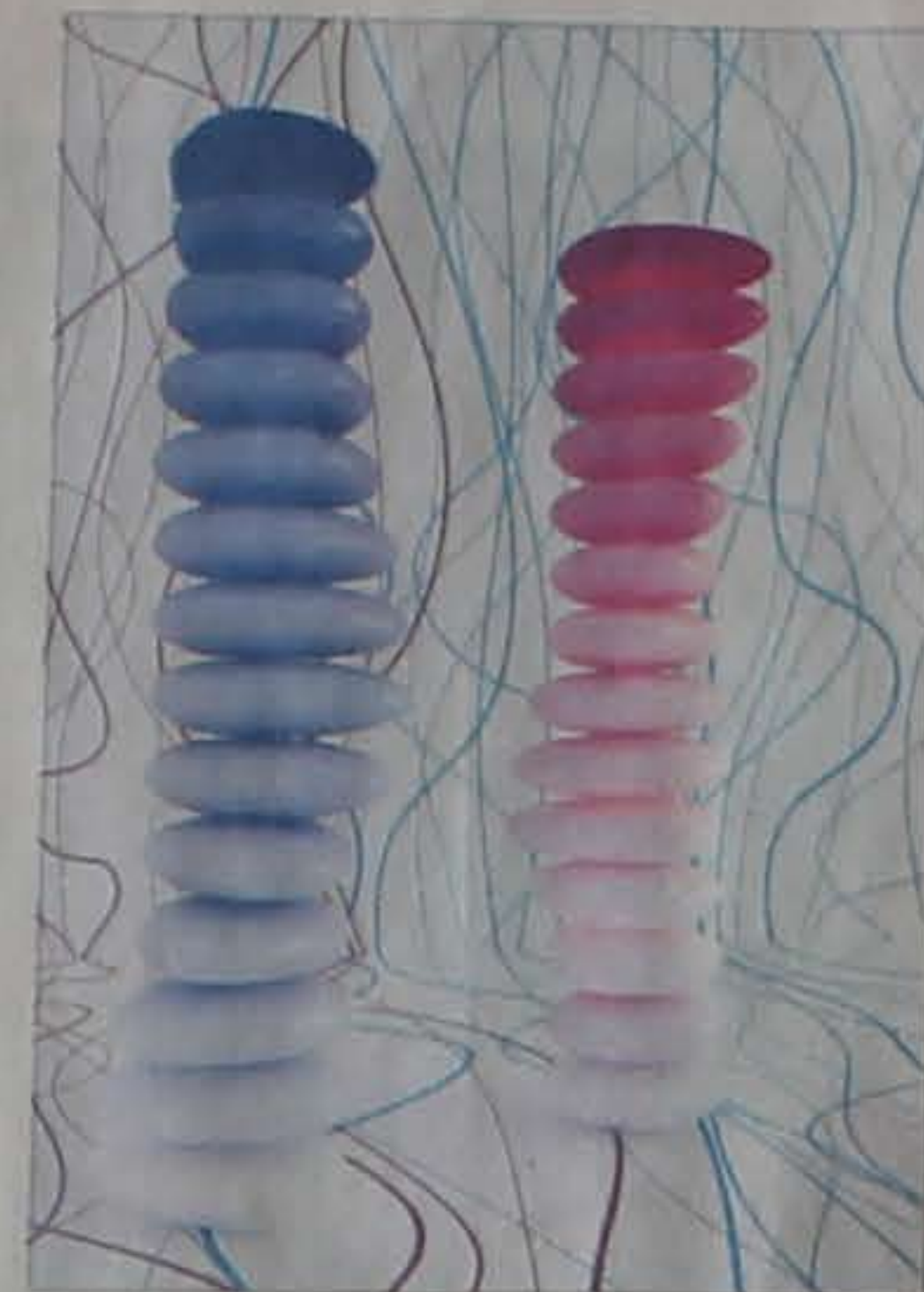
One of London's newest top-end developments, Henry Moore Court, in Chelsea, has commissioned bespoke marble fireplaces, despite the building being climate-controlled. Charles Symons Jones, sales manager for Alpark, the development adviser, says the surrounds will be made from stone quarried at Pietrasanta, a Tuscan town not far from the quarries where Michelangelo sourced the white marble for his statue of David.

It was in the 17th century that fireplace design started to become ornamental as well as practical. In England, the size of the hearthstone was an indication of baronial status, and huge mantelpieces were built to impress visiting royalty.

For many of today's homebuyers the fireplace remains the focal point of a room. Artist Marion Adie, from Edinburgh, was so distressed that her house didn't have one that she com-



Graffe by Scirocco, from €739, www.scirocch.it



Rock and roll radiator by Karim Rashid, www.karimrashid.com



Eclipsya mobile fireplace, €9,188, www.arkiane.fr



Vauni Globe freestanding fuelless bioethanol fireplace, from £1,959, vauni.co.uk

missioned builders to construct a chimney, at a cost of about £6,000.

"I grew up in a Glasgow tenement with no central heating and, as children, we were always huddled round the gas fire in the living room, or the real kitchen fire, so I decided to have a chimney built. The builders thought I was crazy but I love it."

While the classic solid-fuel fireplace is still popular, manufacturers are increasingly looking for new and more sustainable ways to heat our homes. One alternative is bioethanol, which burns with real flames but

has no need for a chimney. Bioethanol is renewable, green, and emits very little carbon dioxide. In the UK it is mainly produced from the fermentation of sugar, and crops including cereals and sugar beet are grown for this purpose.

The lack of need for a chimney also means that fires can be positioned in the centre of the room, which in turn allows for a more sculptural design. Tunisian-born designer Cathy Azria has embraced the notion of fireplaces as works of art, with designs made from loops and coils of metal that



Oreste & Emma bathroom radiators by Andrea Crosetta, from €740, www.antrax.it

Dado radiator, €1,800, www.id-ee.eu, www.designer-radiators.com



glow with heat.

It's not only fireplaces that have become works of art. A radiator can also be a statement in its own right, with shapes that range from giant multi-coloured paperclips to life-size deer.

Gary Walmsley of Radiating Interiors has been fitting radiators since he was 14 years old. Things have come a long way since British homes started installing central heating in the 1960s, he says. "Choosing a radiator is now an integral part of the design of a house. They come in any colour you

like. You can even attach pictures to flat-panelled ones so they look like pieces of art hanging on the wall."

Leading the field in radiator design are the Italians. Brands such as Cordivari, Brem, Scirocco and Antrax are all making unusual products, many of which don't look like radiators at all.

"It's about making a statement," says Walmsley, who holds the exclusive UK licence for many of these designs. "You spend money on the right furniture and rugs, why not think about your radiators too?"

He advises buyers to consider function as well as form. "Chrome, used in so many heated towel rails, is about 30 per cent less efficient than carbon steel. If you touch a heated towel rail you can burn your finger and yet the room doesn't feel warm."

So given the choice of steel, both stainless and carbon, cast iron, stone, glass and marble, which is the best material?

Katie Findlay, co-owner of Feature Radiators, says aluminium is becoming the designers' material of choice, as it is lightweight, eco-friendly and

extremely efficient.

"There is now a huge choice of aluminium radiators, from minimalist to attention-grabbing styles that double up as works of art. The current trend is to install contemporary radiators in more traditionally decorated homes."

However, Findlay predicts that the radiator of the future will be electric. "Central heating has traditionally run off gas and as that runs out, manufacturers are looking to electric. There are some excellent systems, such as iRads, which need no boiler or

pipes and are linked wirelessly."

If you want to pair electric heating with contemporary design, how about glass? Edd Payton from The Glass Radiator Company says: "It looks like a window that heats up. They are electric but with their own thermostats and no visible pipes or wires."

Currently popular in France, where electricity is cheap, a glass radiator will cost around £1,000 and 2p an hour to run. Or, you can opt for a copper or brass-patinated version. One thing is for sure: those corrugated white metal boxes belong firmly in the past.



Cervus Elaphus (the deer) radiator by Gewoon Guus, from €8,800, www.gewoon-guus.nl

BB bioethanol fireplace by Andrea Crosetta, from €1,925, www.antrax.it



Loop fireplace by Cathy Azria, from £2,400, www.bd-designs.co.uk

Jane Fitzgibbon