


the fireplace
plan



Burning Love...

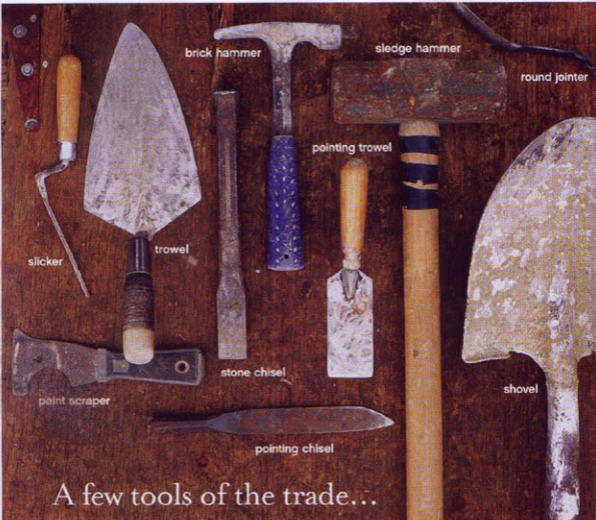
From the first flicker to the last glowing ember, *Century Home* provides a primer on fireplace styles in Canada.

BY KATHLEEN DORE PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNA GRIFFITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALANNA CAVANAGH

the fireplace
build



BY KATHLEEN DORE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DONNA GRIFFITH



A few tools of the trade...



Previous pages: Built in Maple, Ontario, before 1820, the Puseybaugh School House was donated to The Pickering Museum Village in 1996. Peter Devine was responsible for the reconstruction of the stone fireplace. **This page, top:** A selection of Devine's tools of the trade.

Above: Devine has received permission from a local landowner to salvage stones from a crumbling barn foundation for use in stone fireplace constructions – a sort of 'recycling,' so to speak. **Opposite:** The complete fireplace. No one would ever guess it was brand new.



Building a Legacy in Stone

Mason Peter Devine's age-old techniques build a better fireplace.

"SO THAT WAS IT," SAYS PETER DEVINE IN A SOFTLY LILTING GLASWEGIAN ACCENT.

He's talking of his decision to leave a career in banking for one in bricks and stone. It was 1975, he was 21 years old and he'd just arrived in Medicine Hat, Alberta, from his native Scotland. He was working in a bank but wanted a change. "There were carpentry and brick-laying jobs, so I asked my dad, 'What do you think I should do?' He said, 'Go for the masonry.' That was it: Decision made."

Since then, Devine, who specializes in historical restoration, has worked on the crème de la crème of Canadian historical sites. From almost every major church in downtown Toronto to the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, Devine has patiently repointed bricks, replaced stone and restored Canada's architecture with meticulous attention to detail. "Say I have to tear down a wall," he

explains. "I'll put plastic against it and draw out what it looks like, lay the plastic down and take the stones off one at a time, number them and set the wall back up using the plastic as a guide, putting the stones back exactly where they were before."

Historical accuracy is a matter of pride for Devine, but one senses that to him it's only half the job. In his story about his father's advice, Devine's affection and respect for Peter Sr., retired now but who also worked in construction, is apparent. And he beams when he speaks of his brothers, Frank, "the draftsman," in Vancouver, and James, "the highly skilled mason," in Medicine Hat. Like a vein of quartz uncovered with the splitting of hard rock, there's more to Peter Devine than the surface suggests.

You don't have to dig deep to learn that though Devine says "his head and his hands" are his most important masonry tools,

“The craft of building a good fireplace is dying out.”




it's his heart, too, that informs his work. "The neatest thing for me is if I open up an old house or an old fireplace and find something, even an old pop can, that's been there since 1920. That's cool, I enjoy that."

This respect for the past is equalled by Devine's regard for the future. He even buries a time capsule in the historic jobs he does. "I use those little plastic film containers. Usually I'll put in a business card, a picture of the family, a few coins, things like that," he says. "If it's a bigger job, I'll wrap a newspaper in plastic and put it in behind the stones."

The optimism behind such a simple, thoughtful act astounds when compared to the speed with which bricks are laid on a newly built cookie-cutter 'Victorian' row house. It's hard to imagine a level of craft comparable to Devine's existing on most other construction sites. It's a trend that worries him. "It's not going to get passed on," he says. "The craft of building a good fireplace is dying out."

Ironically, it's in the building of fireplaces, especially Rumford fireplaces, where Devine's skills shine particularly brightly. "If I was to say what my favourite job was I'd choose stone fireplaces in log cabins," he says. "The whole look of it, I love it." A recent job

stands out for him. "If I can build a stone fireplace like I did in The Pickering Museum [in Pickering, Ontario] and make it look like it's been there for 200 years but it's new, that's satisfying," says Devine. "I can look at it and say, 'It's mine.'"

Leaving his mark, in a quiet understated way, is perhaps the real work Devine is doing. It's implied in his choice of masonry over carpentry and in the pictures of his wife, Marie, and children, Theresa and Peter ("the IV," jokes Devine), that get tucked behind bricks and mortar in the walls and chimneys he works on. And it's precisely this sentiment that defines Devine as a true artisan. After all, isn't that what the creative impulse is about? To create something that future generations will see, something that says, I was here? He recounts another story: "I had the opportunity to go up in the bell tower when I was working at [Toronto's] St. James' Cathedral. You walk along the I-beam and on the opposite wall chiselled into the brick are the names of all the contractors and journeymen that have worked there. It dates back to 1914. Now my initials are up there: P.D. III, 1991. When you add your name to something like that, it's neat." Very neat. 

PETER DEVINE MASONRY, (906) 821-7513. www.peterdevinemasonry.com