Burley's Empingham fire shown in the Kennet surround.

For style and warmth - it's electric!

Electric fires have come a long way since the ugly and uneconomic bar heaters of the past. Today's designs offer an easy-fit, safe and very stylish way to transform the whole appearance of your home – as well as offering instant warmth when required.

Burley explains how electric fires compare with conventional log fires or gas fires.

Burley, who have been manufacturing electric fires for 30 years, have seen their family business develop from a humble beginning in a garage workshop to a worldwide operation.

Models that appeal to American or Southern European home-owners are often very different to popular models in the UK so Burley, along with other electric fire manufacturers, has developed a wide range to suit most tastes.

The open fire
After a long day at work it can be great to come home to an open fire. In theory there is nothing better than a real fire roaring in the grate. In practice, however, the fire needs to be lit and it takes time to develop. Perhaps you will need to go out into the cold to fetch logs and then, just when the fire has reached its best, it is time to go to bed! The following morning you are greeted with a grate of ash and a chilly room that has lost its heat up the chimney.

At other times you may feel that you cannot be bothered to light the fire, or the weather is not cold enough. On days like this, the room can look dull and uninviting.

Of course, your home may not have a chimney or maybe it smokes or doesn't draw. Repair to a chimney can be costly. Consider too the effect that an open fire can have on your recently decorated room.

The gas fire
In order to look impressive, gas fires need to be working. Unlike electric fires they do not offer the option of a flame picture without heat. These fires must be professionally installed and annually maintained. Like open fires, they require a chimney or flue unless they are specifically designed flueless gas fires.

The electric fire
As you walk in the door, a flick of a switch or a mere touch brings instant and controlled warmth and comfort. Even if you don't need heat, by selecting "flame effect only" you can enjoy a cosy, welcoming glow.

No chimney or flue is needed and no complicated or expensive installation is required. All you need is a 13 amp power point. There is no need for a maintenance contract as there are few moving parts to go wrong.

It is safe for children, the elderly and pets, with no need for unsightly fireguards, and it is good value for money. It could even go with you if you move house.

The Burley Stamford fire which is cast in solid aluminium. Shown here with the Windermere surround.

Are electric fires expensive to run?
With gas prices constantly rising, electricity is no longer regarded as more expensive. The Government Energy Review of last summer renewed commitment to nuclear power and this will mean carbon-free and low-cost electricity generation in the coming years.

Electric fires are 100% efficient at the point of use as there is no waste of fuel up the chimney. They are also cost effective as they provide instant heat purely when required. Better quality fires also incorporate a thermostat so the heater will not be running constantly, only when the temperature drops. Most homes have background central heating. Why not turn this down very slightly, and then switch on your electric fire in the room you are using? There is no need to maximise heat to the whole house when you can efficiently heat rooms individually.

What is the "no heat" option?
During the summer months or during spells of warm weather you may not want heat from the fire but you do want a cosy feel to the room. Many electric fires allow you to "light" the flame effects without selecting heat. Their realistic flame effects give the impression of real flickering flames over a bed of coals, log effects, pebbles, marbles or shells. They provide a comforting glow, costing just the same as a light bulb or two to run. The Burley premier range also includes a circulatory fan which can offer a gentle breeze when the room is warm and stuffy.

Is an electric fire the right choice for me?
Different types of fire satisfy different needs. If your main requirement is for heat then you may prefer an open fire or gas fire. Research has shown, however, that over 50% of electric fires are fitted in homes with central heating, so the choice is due to the design and aesthetic appeal of the electric fire, rather than its use as a main heat source. So if you want a stylish centrepiece to your room that will provide warmth at the flick of a switch, then consider the wide range that is on the market.

What other features should I look for?
Many fires now come with remote control. Some can even be operated merely by touch. If you intend to use manual switches, ensure that they are high level and unobtrusive.

A style to suit all tastes
Traditional electric fires are normally inset into a surround or are freestanding against a plain wall. Stoves have grown in popularity in recent years, notably for use in conservatories or following the renovation of period homes. Consider too the basket fires. These models fit into a standard fireplace in place of an open fire.

More recently there has been a shift towards wall hanging or hole-in-the wall fires. Whilst these are predominantly contemporary, some models look equally impressive in a traditional setting.

Burley's traditionally styled Chilton stove with touch control

The choice in the market is vast – from "super contemporary" to classically elegant. Do not be tempted to go for the cheapest in a DIY store. Visit your nearest fireplace retailer and find out for yourself what is on offer. In that way you will hopefully find a fire design that will complement and enhance the look of your home whilst offering you comfort and relaxation.

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