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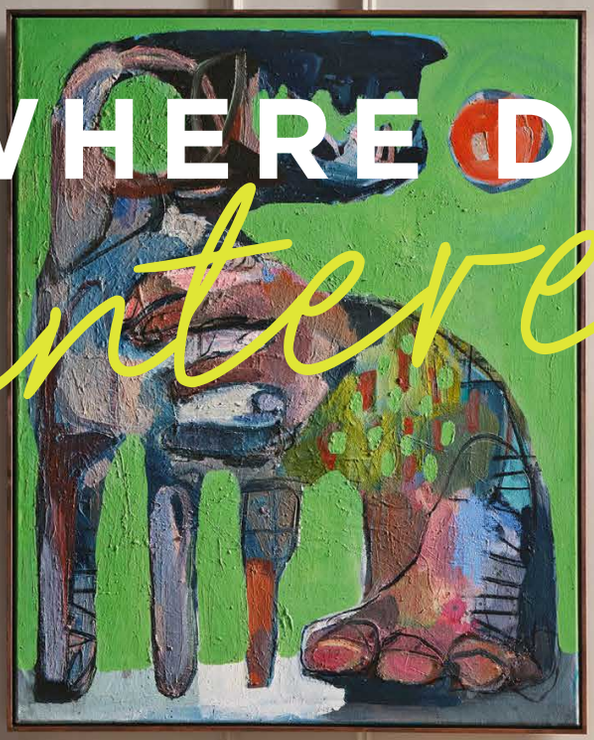
WHERE DESIGN GETS *interesting*



Tour six brilliantly creative homes

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BRINGING LIFE TO DESIGN

SLOW BURN

THE CERAMIC STOVE IS OUR LATEST DESIGN OBSESSION, OFFERING AN ORNAMENTAL AESTHETIC ALONGSIDE HEATING EFFICIENCY

FEATURE Juliet Benning

As the nights draw in and the temperature drops, what could be more alluring than a roaring fire in the grate? Except these days, it's not so simple. Following strict clean air guidelines, traditional hearths are attracting the wrong kind of attention; post a photo of a fireside moment on Instagram today and you may well get a telling off from an eco-conscious follower.

Enter the ceramic stove, or 'kachelofen' in German and 'kakelugn' in Swedish. Once a background artiste (you can spot them in *The Sound of Music* or Sky's *Amadeus*), these monumental towers of warmth are quietly claiming their moment in the spotlight. 'They are beautiful objects and make a focal point in any room,' says the interior designer Henri Fitzwilliam-Lay, who used one in the kitchen of a project in Surrey. 'As far as their heating output goes, they're extremely efficient.'

Though a centuries-old staple in northern Europe, this traditional thermal engineering is a fresh frontier for British design, with interior design studios only now beginning to adopt it. 'There's always been a lack of knowledge here because we're used to open fires, which are much more inefficient,' says Alan Hills, director of The Ceramic Stove Company. Ceramic stoves work by generating heat for 12 to 24 hours from one hot burn, using far fewer logs than a conventional wood burner. 'The fire itself is hotter and brighter, which means the particulates are combusted within the firebox and it produces fewer emissions.'

Beyond their eco-credentials, in our fast-paced digital landscape the kachelofen stands as a symbol of slow, enduring luxury. 'They are sort of an art object – a jewel if you like,' says Henri. 'They add a certain sense of history to a room, and speak to craftsmanship because they are made of ceramic tiles, often elaborately decorated.' Adam Bray, Beata Heuman and Veere Grenney are just a few of the designers who have installed ceramic ovens for their clients.

But kachelofen need not be the preserve of grand properties. The interior designer Olivia Outred installed a gas-fitted ceramic stove for her clients living in a modest east London terrace. 'It arrived in lots of boxes, all these beautifully curved tiles,' she says. 'We built a monolithic-looking brick tower first and then the tiles were applied to the surface. It was literally built in the room.' As it's a little more hands-on, you need to time the installation right. 'The best time to install is when wet trades like the plasterer have finished,' says Alan. 'You might need to consider a reinforced base. Many of them are modular and can be put together in a couple of days.'

With prices starting at several thousand pounds, installing a ceramic stove isn't for the faint-hearted – yet it's an investment that will last decades. Emitting hours of deep, radiant heat after burning only a single basket of logs, it's also a sustainable choice that protects the household from rising winter fuel bills. In introducing such an enduring heirloom of 'gemütlichkeit' to your space, the emotional and visual pay-off will be huge.

PHOTOGRAPH KATRI KAPANEN



URBAN GLOW-UP

Olivia Outred opted for a Karl-Johan stove from The Ceramic Stove Company for her East London project. 'We needed a source of heat and wanted something sculptural for the corner of the room that wouldn't block the windows,' she says. 'The ceramic tiles respond beautifully to all the tiles used elsewhere in the house.' The stove was fitted with gas to ensure it met with London's strict air quality control regulations.

SERENE GREEN

A ceramic-tiled stove forms a focal point in this bedroom within an apartment designed by AIYA Bureau, a design studio based in London, Milan and Dubai. One of the more historical features in the apartment, which is set within an early-20th-century building, the angular stove is suitably decorative thanks to its intricately patterned tiles – but their subtle, cool-green hue and the pared-back, minimalist surroundings give the scheme a much more contemporary edge.

ARTISANAL TOUCH

For her Heart Lake project in Ontario, the Canadian interior designer Colette van den Thillart opted for a Roslyn stove created by ceramicist Jessica Steinhäuser of Stone House Kachelöfen. 'The backing is unlacquered brass, which will of course tarnish over time,' says Colette. 'I loved the idea of the patina anchoring the rich terracotta of the stove. I find it so primitive in a way.'



