PJ Bremier's Fine Living: Mantels can be a home's focal point, too

Suzanne Tucker's custom Bellagio mantel, shown here in statuary marble, is available in a variety of marble or stones. PHOTO BY ANNIE SCHLECHTER

With the wonderful downpours, wild windstorms and chilly weather we're enjoying right now, there's no better time to sink into a cushion near a crackling fireplace and simply absorb the inviting ambience.

While you're gazing into the flames, do your eyes occasionally drift to the mantel? Mine do. And, unless there's a dazzling view outside or outrageous furnishings inside, a room's fireplace and mantel is almost always the first place my eyes search out.

Suzanne Tucker, principal of the interior design and decorating company Tucker & Marks headquartered in San Francisco's tony Maiden Lane, thinks that's justified.

The Randolph, one of four mantels in a new collection designed by Suzanne Tucker for Chesney's. COURTESY OF PJ BREMIER

"I build a fire almost every night and love the cozy warmth, the delicious aroma and the visual interest," the Sausalito resident says. "Nothing says 'home' to me more than having a burning fire within a beautiful fireplace, or is more welcoming to our family and friends."

She wants homeowners to think of the mantel as an important focal point in the room and give it as much consideration as one does the floor, walls and furnishings.

Tucker, who creates sumptuous, high-end interiors, has also penned two design books, fabricated a line of sophisticated textiles for Suzanne Tucker Home, fashioned a line of outdoor textiles and furniture for Michael Taylor Designs, and designed dinnerware for Royal Limoges.

Now, she's introduced her latest collection, a series of four stone or marble fireplace mantels in a partnership with Chesney's, a leading UK-based supplier of luxury fireplaces and stoves. A fifth mantel will follow later this year.

"We are both passionate about fine craftsmanship, exquisite materials and sophisticated European design influences," she says.

Her exposure to these qualities through travel has informed the designs of her four mantels which she's named the "Bellagio," "Voltaire," "Antibes" and "Randolph."

"My inspiration invariably comes from the decorative arts and ornamental vernacular which every country offers up, in this case Italy, France and England," she says. "Those influences and classic architectural details inspired these designs and come directly from antique mantels I have bought over the years."

The classic designs lend themselves to wide a variety of design vocabularies, contemporary or traditional.

"In a contemporary space, these designs can be a bold stroke, a statement. And, in a more traditional interior, they can be a lovely architectural complement, a good marriage," she says. "Their appeal will be to anyone who understands and appreciates how a beautiful mantel can be a brilliant focal point in any room, adding strength and architectural interest."

The mantels are carved from real stone and can be customized for scale and proportion.

For homeowners without a well-designed mantle, there are ways to make a mantel more appealing with creative mantelscaping, hearth adornments and art or mirrors on the wall above the surround.

But, often mantels that aren't appealing or are badly proportioned. When you're ready to replace your mantel, she says, "always consider the room's proportions as scale and proportion are everything in interior design."

Be flexible when it comes to material and design, she suggests. "It is not necessary to 'match' the mantel style to the architectural house as an elaborately carved Italianate design can look stunning among the clean lines of a contemporary space, while a simpler design might work better among highly detailed classical architecture."

Mantels from Suzanne Tucker for Chesney's work with any fireplace and are available for clients through their architects and designers. Because each piece is custom, the price depends upon the dimensions and the choice of materials. For information, go to www.chesneys.com.