

OTTAWA FIREPLACES

Fireplace Renovation & Refacing

Surround upgrades, stone and tile refacing, mantel installation, and fireplace makeovers

23 Expert Answers from Fireplace IQ

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Q1

How much does it cost to remove an old brick fireplace surround and replace it with drywall in Ottawa?

Removing an old brick fireplace surround and replacing it with drywall typically costs \$1,500 to \$4,000 in Ottawa, depending on the size of the surround, the condition of the wall behind it, and whether structural modifications are needed. This price includes demolition, disposal, framing adjustments, drywall installation, mudding, taping, priming, and basic paint.

The complexity of this project in Ottawa homes varies significantly based on the age and construction of your house. Many older Ottawa homes built in the 1960s and 1970s have substantial brick surrounds that were built as integral parts of the wall structure, not just decorative veneers. These require more careful demolition to avoid damaging adjacent walls or structural elements. Newer homes often have thinner brick veneer surrounds that are easier to remove but may reveal unfinished framing that needs additional work to prepare for drywall.

The demolition phase typically costs \$500 to \$1,200 and involves carefully removing brick, mortar, and any metal ties or anchors. Expect significant dust and debris — brick removal is messy work that requires proper containment and disposal. Most contractors charge \$150 to \$300 for debris removal and disposal fees in Ottawa. After demolition, the wall cavity may need insulation, vapour barrier repair, or framing adjustments to create a smooth surface for drywall, adding \$200 to \$800 to the project cost.

Drywall installation, finishing, and painting typically runs \$800 to \$2,000 depending on the square footage and ceiling height. If the fireplace surround extended to a cathedral ceiling or covered a large wall area, costs increase accordingly. Premium finishes like textured drywall or high-quality paint can add \$300 to \$600 to the total.

Important considerations: Verify that removing the brick surround won't affect the structural integrity of the chimney or fireplace. Some brick surrounds provide essential support or fire protection that cannot be eliminated. If the fireplace remains functional, ensure adequate clearances to combustibles are maintained with the new drywall installation. Never remove brick that's part of the actual firebox or chimney structure without professional assessment.

When you're ready to move forward with this renovation, you can browse contractors experienced in fireplace modifications through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare options and get detailed quotes for your specific situation.

Q2

How long does a full fireplace surround renovation take in Ottawa and what permits add to the cost?

A full fireplace surround renovation in Ottawa typically takes 3 to 7 days for the actual work, but the complete timeline from planning to completion usually spans 2 to 4 weeks when you factor in material ordering, permit processing, and scheduling around Ottawa's construction season. The work itself involves demolishing the existing surround, preparing the wall surface, installing new materials like stone or tile, and finishing with trim and mantel work.

Ottawa's short construction season from May through October means scheduling is tighter than in milder climates, especially for projects involving masonry work that requires consistent temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius. Smart homeowners book surround renovations in spring or early fall to avoid the rush of last-minute projects before winter. Material delivery can add 1 to 2 weeks to the timeline, particularly for custom stone work or specialty tiles that aren't stocked locally.

Permit requirements depend on the scope of your renovation. A cosmetic surround update using tile, stone veneer, or paint over existing drywall typically requires no permits from the City of Ottawa. However, if you're removing load-bearing elements, modifying the firebox opening, changing the hearth dimensions, or running new electrical for accent lighting or a hardwired mantel, you'll need a building permit. Building permits in Ottawa cost \$150 to \$400 for typical fireplace surround work, plus plan review fees of \$100 to \$200. The permit process adds 2 to 3 weeks to your timeline, so apply early.

Electrical permits through ESA are required if you're adding hardwired lighting, outlets, or switches as part of the surround renovation. This adds \$75 to \$150 to your permit costs and requires an ESA-licensed electrician to perform and inspect the work. Gas work permits through TSSA apply if you're relocating gas lines or modifying the fireplace itself, though this is less common in pure surround renovations.

The renovation cost in Ottawa runs \$2,000 to \$8,000 depending on materials and complexity — natural stone and custom millwork push toward the higher end, while ceramic tile and painted drywall stay closer to \$2,000 to \$4,000. Factor permit costs and potential electrical work into your budget from the start rather than discovering them mid-project.

When you're ready to move forward, you can browse fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare professionals who handle surround renovations and understand local permit requirements.

Q3

How much does it cost to add a raised hearth with storage underneath during a fireplace renovation in Ottawa?

A raised hearth with built-in storage underneath typically costs \$3,500 to \$8,500 in Ottawa, depending on the materials, size, and complexity of the storage design. This price range includes the structural framing, hearth materials (stone, tile, or brick), storage construction with doors or drawers, and professional installation, but does not include any fireplace modifications or gas/electrical work that might be required.

The cost varies significantly based on your material choices and storage configuration. A basic raised hearth using cultured stone veneer with simple storage compartments runs \$3,500 to \$5,000, while a premium installation featuring natural stone like limestone or granite with custom cabinetry-style storage can reach \$6,500 to \$8,500 or more. The storage component adds \$1,500 to \$3,000 to the base cost of a standard raised hearth, with soft-close hinges, interior lighting, and custom millwork pushing costs toward the higher end.

In Ottawa's climate, a raised hearth serves both aesthetic and practical purposes. The elevated design improves heat distribution from wood-burning fireplaces and creates valuable storage for firewood, kindling, fireplace tools, or seasonal items. However, the raised hearth must meet Ontario Building Code requirements for hearth extension dimensions — typically 18 inches in front of the fireplace opening and 8 inches on each side for wood-burning units, with specific requirements varying based on your fireplace type and size.

Storage design requires careful planning around clearance-to-combustible requirements. The storage compartments must maintain proper clearances from the firebox and any gas lines or electrical components. Ventilation may be required to prevent heat buildup in enclosed storage areas, especially with wood-burning fireplaces that generate significant radiant heat. Additionally, if your renovation involves modifying gas lines or adding electrical components for storage lighting, you'll need TSSA-licensed gas fitters and ESA-licensed electricians, which adds \$500 to \$1,500 to the total project cost.

The best time for this type of renovation in Ottawa is late spring through early fall when contractors can work efficiently without heating concerns. Get detailed quotes that specify materials, storage configuration, permit responsibilities, and whether the work includes any necessary fireplace modifications. When you're ready to move forward with your hearth renovation, you can browse experienced fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare options and find professionals familiar with both the aesthetic and code requirements for raised hearth installations.

Can I convert my single-sided Ottawa fireplace into a double-sided one without major renovations?

Converting a single-sided masonry fireplace into a true double-sided fireplace without major structural work is unfortunately not realistic in most Ottawa homes. You would essentially need to rebuild the chimney core, firebox, and internal partition — which is itself a major renovation and can cost \$8,000 to \$20,000 or more depending on the chimney height and location.

Here's why conversion is so difficult: A single-sided fireplace has its firebox, damper, and smoke chamber built to draw air from one room only. Converting it to serve two rooms requires rebuilding the internal structure so both sides can independently access combustion air and exhaust into a shared chimney — or creating entirely separate flue passages. The masonry work must be done precisely to ensure proper draft, prevent smoke blowback, maintain structural integrity, and meet Ontario Building Code requirements. You cannot simply knock a hole through an existing fireplace and expect it to draw properly or safely on both sides.

What you can actually do instead:

The far more practical solution is adding a **gas insert fireplace** to the adjacent room on the other side of the fireplace wall. If your existing single-sided fireplace is on an interior wall shared with another room, you can often install a direct-vent gas fireplace on the opposite side without significant structural work — just a gas line run and venting. This gives you the appearance of a double-sided fireplace (or double-fireplaced space) with far less cost and disruption. A gas fireplace insert on the opposite side would run \$2,500 to \$5,500 installed, compared to \$8,000 to \$20,000+ for rebuilding your existing chimney. You'd have two independent, controlled heating appliances rather than one shared system.

Another option is installing a **gas insert into your existing single-sided fireplace** if you don't currently have one. Modern gas inserts can heat both rooms reasonably well depending on room size and layout, especially if the fireplace is centrally located. A quality gas insert runs \$2,500 to \$5,500 and provides 25,000 to 40,000 BTU of heat output — often enough to warm an adjacent room through an open doorway during Ottawa's shoulder seasons.

If your fireplace is on an exterior wall and a second fireplace on the other side would require creating an exterior chimney or penetrating the roof with a new vent, costs and complexity rise dramatically.

The critical question: Is the wall you want to open to interior or exterior? Is a second fireplace on that side structurally feasible, or would you need a new chimney? Once you answer those, you'll have a clearer picture of what's actually possible and affordable.

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Q5

What structural considerations are there when removing a load-bearing chimney from an older Ottawa home?

Removing a load-bearing chimney from an older Ottawa home is one of the most serious structural interventions you can make — it is not a fireplace or hearth project, it is a major renovation that requires engineering and building permits, and it will cost significantly more than almost any fireplace installation or repair.

Most masonry chimneys in older Ottawa homes — particularly those built between 1920 and 1970 — are indeed load-bearing. The chimney mass, often 3 to 4 feet wide and built directly on the foundation, was designed to support the weight of floors and roof structure above it. In Victorian and early 20th-century Ottawa homes, chimneys were sometimes integral to the structural frame, bearing loads that a modern engineer would never allow a fireplace to carry. When you remove a load-bearing chimney, you must transfer those loads to new structural members — typically a steel beam or posts running perpendicular to where the chimney stood.

The structural analysis step is non-negotiable. You must hire a Professional Engineer (P.Eng.) licensed in Ontario to assess the chimney's actual load-bearing role in your specific home. The engineer will examine the framing above the chimney, determine what loads are acting on it (floor joists, roof trusses, wall loads), and design a replacement beam or post system that can safely carry those loads. This engineering cost runs \$800 to \$2,500 depending on complexity. Once you have engineering drawings, you will need a building permit from the City of Ottawa — the building department will require those P.Eng. drawings before issuing a permit. The permit process typically takes 2 to 4 weeks.

The actual structural work — installing the beam, removing the chimney, and properly supporting the loads during the transition — should only be performed by a structural contractor or experienced framing crew, not a general

carpenter or chimney contractor. The contractor must carefully shore up the structure above the chimney before demolition (usually with temporary posts and beams), remove the chimney section by section, install the new permanent beam, and remove temporary supports only after everything is confirmed load-bearing and the mortar (if masonry) has set properly. In an older home, this work often reveals additional surprises — the chimney may be partially embedded in walls, may have undermined its own foundation due to decades of freeze-thaw damage, or may be supporting loads that span further than initially expected. The structural contractor will need access to the basement and full visibility of what is above and below the chimney line.

The cost for structural removal of a load-bearing chimney in Ottawa typically runs \$8,000 to \$18,000 or more, comprising the engineering assessment (\$800–\$2,500), the building permit and associated inspections (\$500–\$1,500), the structural work and beam installation (\$4,000–\$10,000), and the demolition and disposal of several tons of masonry (\$2,000–\$5,000). This is distinctly different from removing a non-load-bearing chimney (stack that sits on the roof and does not carry structural weight), which might run \$3,000 to \$8,000 total.

There are also hidden structural implications. Removing a chimney eliminates a natural thermal mass that helped regulate temperature swings in older homes during Ottawa's extreme seasonal changes. You are also removing what was often an important lateral bracing element — chimneys help stiffen older wood-frame houses against wind loads and racking. In some cases, engineers will recommend installing additional wall bracing or foundation reinforcement after chimney removal to compensate for this lost stiffness. This adds cost and complexity.

Before committing to chimney removal, ask yourself whether the goal is truly necessary. Many older Ottawa homeowners remove chimneys because they assume them unsafe or unsightly, when in reality a structurally sound chimney with a repaired crown, new cap, waterproofing, and modern flashing is a charming and functional feature of historic Ottawa homes. A masonry chimney that has been properly maintained for a century is often more durable than modern alternatives. If you genuinely want to preserve the aesthetic character of an older home while eliminating an old chimney, that is a different conversation — but that aesthetic choice still carries the full structural cost above.

If you proceed with removal, start with the engineering assessment first. Do not hire a structural contractor, arrange demolition, or apply for permits until you have clear, stamped engineering drawings that show what loads the chimney carries and how they will be supported afterward. This ensures everyone — the engineer, the contractor, the building inspector, and you — is working from the same factual foundation. The structural work itself is specialized enough that you should hire a contractor experienced in historic home renovations who understands the quirks of Ottawa's older housing stock and the complications that often arise when opening up 80-year-old masonry structures.

This work sits at the edge of what falls under "fireplace and hearth" guidance — it is truly structural engineering territory. If you are seriously considering chimney removal from an older Ottawa home, connecting with a P.Eng.

who specializes in residential structural work and renovation is your first step. Your home inspector or architect may have recommendations for engineers they trust in the Ottawa market.

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- Custom By Arie
- Ottawa Caulking
- Valcor Construction

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Q6

How much does building an outdoor stone fireplace with a seating area cost in the Ottawa region?

Building an outdoor stone fireplace with a seating area in the Ottawa region is a major project that typically costs between **\$8,000 and \$25,000 or more**, depending on the complexity of the design, the quality of the materials, the size of the seating area, and whether the work requires a chimney liner, foundation work, or permitting.

What drives the cost in Ottawa

An outdoor fireplace is fundamentally different from an indoor installation because it must withstand Ottawa's extreme climate without shelter. The freeze-thaw cycle that slowly destroys chimneys is even more aggressive on an outdoor fireplace because there is no roof or walls to provide any protection. Water infiltration is the primary enemy — moisture enters the masonry, freezes at -25 to -30 degrees Celsius, expands about 9 percent, and cracks the stone and mortar from inside out. A properly built outdoor fireplace in Ottawa must use high-quality materials, superior drainage design, and proper waterproofing to survive more than a few winters without significant deterioration.

The cost breakdown typically includes: the fireplace structure itself (firebox, chimney, stone veneer, or full stone construction at \$4,000 to \$12,000 depending on materials and size), a functional chimney with proper height and draft characteristics (\$2,000 to \$4,000), a non-combustible base and foundation meeting Ontario Building Code

clearance requirements (\$1,500 to \$3,000), seating walls or benches in stone or masonry (\$2,000 to \$6,000 depending on size and finish), hardscaping including a fire pit surround or hearth pad (\$1,500 to \$4,000), and labour, which represents 40 to 50 percent of the total cost for quality masonry work.

A simple outdoor fireplace — essentially a firebox and chimney with minimal seating — might cost \$8,000 to \$12,000 installed. A mid-range project with attractive stone finishes, built-in seating for four to six people, and a small patio surround runs \$12,000 to \$18,000. A substantial outdoor entertaining space with a large fireplace, extensive seating for eight or more people, multiple levels, built-in grills or cooking features, decorative stonework, and professional landscaping integration can easily exceed \$20,000 to \$30,000 or more.

Critical Ottawa-specific considerations

Your outdoor fireplace must have a functional chimney that properly vents smoke and draws air through the firebox. An undersized or poorly designed chimney will smoke you out of your seating area, especially on calm, cold evenings when air inversions trap smoke near ground level in the Ottawa Valley. The chimney must extend at least 3 feet above the point where it exits the roof line of any attached structure, and at least 2 feet higher than any structure or tree within 10 feet — this is the 3-2-10 rule mandated by the Ontario Building Code. A chimney that is too short will downdraft, and an outdoor fireplace with chronic downdraft is simply a smoke producer, not an entertaining feature.

Drainage and waterproofing are non-negotiable in Ottawa. The fireplace foundation must sit on solid ground below the frost line (1.2 to 1.5 metres deep in the Ottawa area) or on a frost-protected shallow foundation designed for your specific location. Water must drain away from the structure, not pool against it. The chimney crown — the cap at the top — must be properly sloped so water runs off, not into the structure. Many outdoor fireplaces fail within five to ten years because builders underestimate Ottawa's water infiltration risks and do not invest in adequate drainage and waterproofing. A properly built outdoor fireplace in Ottawa has intentional weeping holes or gaps in the mortar joints to allow any water that does enter the structure to drain out rather than becoming trapped inside.

The choice of stone or materials matters enormously for durability. Soft or porous stones like sandstone absorb water and deteriorate quickly in Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles. Harder, denser stones like granite, limestone, or slate-type materials perform much better. Natural stone veneer over a concrete block or brick structural base is a practical middle ground that balances cost and durability. Full stone construction is more durable but more expensive.

Permits and professional requirements

A permanent outdoor fireplace with a chimney requires a City of Ottawa building permit. The permit ensures the structure meets Ontario Building Code requirements for clearances to combustibles, foundation depth, chimney

height, and structural safety. Permit costs run \$150 to \$400 depending on project complexity. The chimney must be inspected during construction and again after completion before you can obtain final approval. This is not a project where you can quietly build something and hope nobody notices — unpermitted outdoor structures can affect your property insurance, create liability issues, and must be disclosed during a home sale.

This is a specialized project that requires masonry expertise, understanding of Ontario Building Code requirements, and knowledge of Ottawa's specific climate challenges. Most homeowners should not attempt this as a DIY project. You will need an experienced mason or masonry contractor who has built outdoor fireplaces in Ottawa's climate, understands proper drainage design, and can navigate permit requirements. You can browse fireplace and masonry contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory to find professionals who specialize in outdoor fireplace work.

Plan for a timeline of 4 to 8 weeks during the May-through-October construction season. Masonry work requires temperatures consistently above 5 degrees Celsius for mortar to cure properly, which limits outdoor fireplace construction to roughly late spring through early fall. A project started in November will sit dormant until spring, then resume — this extends timelines and increases costs due to weather exposure during the winter months.

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- The Egress Group Inc
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- Home Front Services
- Best Hand2Hand moving company

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What's the cost to replace a traditional fireplace with a modern linear gas unit in Ottawa?

Replacing a traditional fireplace with a modern linear gas unit in Ottawa typically costs **\$5,000 to \$12,000 installed**, depending on whether you're converting an existing masonry fireplace or building a new surround from scratch. This price includes the linear gas fireplace unit itself (\$2,500 to \$6,000), professional installation with all necessary connections, venting materials, and finishing work to integrate the unit into your existing space. If structural modifications to the firebox or surround are needed, costs can climb toward the higher end of that range.

Why Linear Gas Fireplaces Make Sense in Ottawa

Linear gas fireplaces — also called ribbon or see-through gas units — have become hugely popular in Ottawa because they solve a real problem: traditional masonry fireplaces are essentially space heaters that lose most of their heat up the chimney. A traditional open fireplace operates at 30 to 40 percent efficiency, meaning 60 to 70 percent of the heat you pay for goes straight outside. A modern direct-vent linear gas fireplace, by contrast, delivers 80 to 95 percent of its heat into the room. In Ottawa's climate, where you're running your heating system hard from October through April, that efficiency difference translates to real money — a gas fireplace supplement can noticeably reduce your furnace load on the coldest nights.

Linear units also give you that coveted long, dramatic flame view that today's homeowners want. The modern designs look nothing like the boxed-in traditional fireplace — they feature sleek glass fronts, realistic burning logs or stones, and flames that stretch across the entire viewing area. This combines the ambiance that drew you to a fireplace in the first place with the heating efficiency that makes financial sense in Ottawa's extreme winters.

Breaking Down the Costs

If you're converting an existing masonry fireplace to gas (the most common retrofit in Ottawa), the fireplace unit itself runs \$2,500 to \$6,000 depending on the brand, size, and heat output. Premium brands like Valor, Kozy Heat, and Montigo run toward the higher end. The installation labour — which includes removing the old firebox components, installing the new gas unit into the existing masonry opening, connecting the gas line, installing the vent pipe (typically a direct-vent dual-pipe system that exits horizontally through the side of the chimney or wall), and setting up the ignition system and controls — adds another \$2,000 to \$4,000. You'll also need a TSSA-licensed gas fitter to connect the gas line and tag the appliance for compliance, which is typically bundled into the installation cost but may be itemized separately at \$300 to \$500.

If you're building a new fireplace surround from scratch — for example, in a basement recreation room or a new renovation — you'll also pay for the fireplace enclosure, hearth extension, and finishing materials. A simple

surround with drywall and paint might add \$1,500 to \$3,000, while a premium stone or tile surround can add \$3,000 to \$8,000 or more.

Important Considerations for Ottawa

Direct-vent linear gas fireplaces are the right choice for Ottawa because they draw fresh combustion air from outside and exhaust combustion gases outdoors through a sealed system — they don't consume household oxygen or create indoor air quality concerns. This matters in Ottawa's tightly sealed modern homes, which are built to conserve heat during our brutal winters. A sealed direct-vent system also means you're not losing conditioned air up an open chimney.

The good news is that if you already have a masonry chimney in place, you may not need a full chimney relining or replacement. Many linear gas conversions use a direct-vent system that exits horizontally through the side of the existing chimney structure or through an exterior wall, bypassing the old clay tile flue entirely. However, if your chimney is in poor condition — spalling brick, cracked mortar, a deteriorated crown, or settling — your contractor may recommend repairs or waterproofing work before the conversion. Get a WETT-certified chimney inspection before committing to a contractor's bid; inspection costs \$250 to \$450 and will clarify exactly what the chimney can support.

One other consideration: linear gas units require electricity for the ignition system, blower fan, and remote control. Most installations use a dedicated 120-volt outlet located near the fireplace. If your fireplace location doesn't have convenient access to an outlet, an ESA-licensed electrician will need to run a line, which typically costs \$300 to \$800 depending on distance and routing.

Seasonally, spring and early fall are ideal times to schedule this work — contractors are less busy, and you avoid the October-November crush when everyone is rushing to prepare for winter. That said, a quality installation matters far more than perfect timing.

When you're ready to move forward, you can browse fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory, where you'll find experienced installers who specialize in gas fireplace conversions. Get at least three written quotes that specify the exact gas unit model, venting method, labour scope, permit responsibility (the contractor should handle any necessary City of Ottawa building permits), and warranty terms before signing a contract.

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Q8

Is it feasible to install a fireplace in my Ottawa basement and what are the venting challenges?

Installing a fireplace in an Ottawa basement is feasible, but it requires careful planning around venting challenges that are more complex than above-grade installations—especially in our climate where basements are cold, damp, and often below the water table.

Why Basement Fireplaces Matter in Ottawa

Basements are a natural choice for supplemental heating in Ottawa's extreme winters. A well-designed basement fireplace or wood stove can warm a finished recreation room, add comfort to a home gym or workshop, and provide emergency heat during ice storms when the power goes down. However, basement venting introduces several challenges that don't affect main-floor installations: negative pressure issues (basements often have combustion air competition from furnaces, water heaters, and clothes dryers), moisture concerns (basements are inherently damp, especially during Ottawa's wet spring and fall), chimney condensation (cold basement exterior walls can cause flue gases to cool rapidly, creating liquid water in the chimney), and water infiltration risks (any exterior penetration is a potential source of ice damming and basement moisture in our freeze-thaw climate).

Venting Options for Basement Fireplaces

Gas fireplaces are the most practical basement choice. A **direct-vent gas fireplace** (\$3,500 to \$7,500 installed) is ideal because it draws combustion air from outside through a sealed intake pipe and exhausts through a sealed exhaust pipe—the system is completely isolated from the basement atmosphere. This eliminates negative pressure problems and avoids consuming conditioned air from your home. The double-wall vent pipe can exit through the basement wall horizontally or rise vertically up the exterior of the house. Horizontal runs through basement walls are shorter and cheaper but require careful flashing and slope to prevent water penetration and condensation pooling. Vertical runs up the exterior wall are longer (requiring higher material costs, typically \$2,000 to \$4,500 for relining and installation) but create better draft and cleaner exhaust.

A **B-vent (natural draft) gas fireplace** (\$2,500 to \$4,500 installed) draws combustion air from inside the basement and exhausts through a single-wall metal pipe that must rise vertically and exit above the roofline. B-vent is not recommended for basements because it consumes basement air (potentially creating negative pressure that draws radon and moisture into the home) and because the flue gas cools as it rises through a cold basement wall, causing condensation inside the chimney that can freeze and block the vent in Ottawa winters. The condensation problem is severe enough that most Ottawa HVAC professionals advise against B-vent in basements.

Wood stoves and wood inserts are technically possible in basements but present serious practical challenges. A wood stove requires a chimney that runs vertically from the basement, through each floor above, and exits above the roofline—this is an expensive (\$4,500 to \$9,500 installed) and structurally disruptive retrofit in most homes. More critically, a long interior chimney passing through multiple heated rooms loses draft efficiency on warm days, and the cold basement starting point means flue gases take longer to warm and rise. In Ottawa's shoulder seasons (April, October, November) when basements are cold, draft problems are common. A wood stove in a basement also complicates emergency egress—basements are already the most dangerous place in a house to be during a fire, and a wood-burning appliance that produces radiant heat and consumes oxygen adds real risk. Insurance companies scrutinize wood stoves in basements very carefully, and WETT inspectors will require excellent clearances and chimney design.

Critical Installation Considerations

Water and moisture is the dominant concern. Any venting penetration through a basement wall (whether for a direct-vent gas line or chimney) must include proper flashing, slope, and sealant to prevent water entry during Ottawa's heavy rains, spring snowmelt, and freeze-thaw cycles. Condensation inside vent pipes—especially with B-vent or older chimneys—can drip back into the fireplace or create ice blockages in winter. Horizontal vent runs must slope slightly downward (typically 1/4 inch per foot) toward the exterior exit to prevent water pooling. Many basement fireplace failures in Ottawa result from contractors underestimating the severity of water infiltration through venting penetrations. Have any contractor who quotes your project specify in writing how they will flash and waterproof exterior penetrations, and what warranty they offer against water damage.

Negative pressure and combustion air is the second major concern. If your basement has a furnace, water heater, clothes dryer, or range hood that exhausts air, installing a gas fireplace that also consumes air can create negative pressure in the basement—in extreme cases, this can backdraft the furnace vent or water heater flue, pushing carbon monoxide into the home. A direct-vent gas fireplace eliminates this problem because it draws outside air. If you are considering a B-vent appliance, you may need to install a dedicated combustion air duct bringing outside air directly to the fireplace—this adds \$500 to \$1,500 to the installation cost. Always discuss negative pressure with your gas fitter before installation.

Ceiling height and space requirements matter in basements. Most finished basements in Ottawa have 7.5 to 8-foot ceilings—gas fireplaces typically require 12 to 18 inches of clearance above the unit to the ceiling (check the manufacturer's specifications), and wood stoves require up to 36 inches depending on the model. Measure your basement ceiling height and available wall space before shopping for units.

Building permits and inspections are required for basement fireplace installations. The City of Ottawa considers this a structural and safety modification, so you will need a building permit. TSSA licensing is required for any gas work, and WETT certification is mandatory for any wood-burning installation—insurance companies will not cover an uninsured wood stove, even in a basement.

Realistic Costs for a Basement Installation

A **direct-vent gas fireplace in a basement** typically costs \$4,500 to \$8,500 installed (slightly higher than main-floor units due to flashing complexity and exterior venting runs). A **wood stove in a basement** costs \$5,500 to \$10,500+ because of the complex interior chimney run, structural supports, and flashing costs. An **electric fireplace** (\$700 to \$3,800 installed) avoids all venting and water penetration issues—it requires only an electrical outlet and produces modest heat; it is worth seriously considering if your primary goal is ambiance and supplemental warm

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Q9

How much should I budget to convert my old wood-burning fireplace to gas in Ottawa?

Converting an old wood-burning fireplace to gas in Ottawa typically costs **\$3,000 to \$7,000**, with most straightforward conversions landing in the **\$4,500 to \$6,000 range**. The final price depends on whether you're installing a simple gas log set, a more realistic gas insert, or a complete rebuild of the firebox to accommodate a modern gas unit.

Why the Cost Range Varies in Ottawa

The biggest cost driver is the condition of your existing chimney and firebox. If your chimney is sound, has a proper liner, good draft, and is already at the correct height for gas venting, you're looking at the lower end — roughly \$3,000 to \$4,500 for a basic gas log set or \$4,000 to \$5,500 for a gas insert. However, many older Ottawa fireplaces have issues that surface during inspection: deteriorated mortar joints from decades of freeze-thaw cycling, a cracked or missing chimney crown, damaged clay tile liner, improper clearances, or flashing leaks where the chimney meets the roofline. Any of these problems must be fixed before a gas appliance can be safely installed, and repairs add \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more to the total project cost.

A **WETT Level 2 inspection** (\$350 to \$600) before you commit to conversion is essential — it will reveal exactly what repairs your chimney needs and give you a realistic budget. Ottawa's brutal freeze-thaw cycles mean masonry chimneys deteriorate faster here than in milder climates, and skipping this inspection is a recipe for discovering a \$5,000 problem midway through your project.

The type of gas appliance also matters significantly. A **gas log set** (\$1,500 to \$2,500 installed) is the most affordable option — it sits on the floor of your existing firebox and produces a convincing flame effect with modest heat output (5,000 to 25,000 BTU depending on the model). A **gas fireplace insert** (\$2,500 to \$5,500 installed) is a sealed metal box that fits inside your firebox and delivers much more heat — typically 25,000 to 40,000 BTU — making it a genuine supplemental heating appliance rather than just ambiance. A **complete firebox rebuild** with a new gas fireplace unit built into the opening (\$4,000 to \$7,000) is necessary if your firebox structure is severely damaged or if you want a completely modern look.

Critical Regulatory Considerations

All gas fireplace work in Ottawa must be performed by a **TSSA-licensed gas fitter** (G2 or G3 certificate) — this is Ontario law, not optional. After installation, the technician tags the appliance with a compliance label, and you'll receive documentation confirming the work was done properly. Unlicensed gas work voids your home insurance and creates serious carbon monoxide and explosion risks. Gas work is never appropriate for DIY, and any contractor who suggests otherwise should be immediately rejected.

You'll also need to ensure your existing chimney is suitable for gas venting. Older wood-burning chimneys are sometimes too large for gas appliances, which can create draft and efficiency problems. A gas fitter can downsize

the flue with a stainless steel liner if needed — this typically costs \$2,000 to \$4,000 depending on chimney height and adds it to your overall conversion budget. Some older chimneys may need the clay tile liner replaced with modern stainless steel before any gas appliance can be safely vented through them.

Timeline and Seasonal Planning

Schedule your conversion in spring or early fall to avoid the rush of last-minute calls in October or November when everyone suddenly realizes their old fireplace is about to become their backup heat source. If you're doing any exterior chimney repairs or crown work, get this done between May and October when masonry work can cure properly — trying to repair mortar in winter rarely ends well. Plan for the project to take 2 to 4 weeks from initial inspection to final completion, depending on whether chimney repairs are needed.

What's Included in the Estimate

When you get quotes, ensure they specify: the cost of the gas appliance itself, the cost of installation labour, any required chimney inspection or relining, gas line installation or extension (if needed), the TSSA compliance tag and final inspection, removal and disposal of the old firebox damper or grates, testing for proper operation and safety, and a warranty on both the appliance and the installation work. Written quotes should also clarify who is responsible for obtaining any required building permits — typically the contractor handles this, but confirm it upfront.

Converting to gas is a smart move for Ottawa homeowners who want the ambiance and supplemental heating of a fireplace without the annual chimney cleaning demands and creosote risks of wood burning. If your old fireplace is currently non-functional or you're heating with inefficient open wood fires, a gas insert or log set will give you reliable, convenient heat and a much safer, lower-maintenance appliance.

If you'd like help finding a TSSA-licensed gas fitter and WETT-certified chimney professional to assess your fireplace and provide a formal conversion estimate, you can browse experienced fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- 613Bins
- JC Carpentry
- Steven Labelle - Your Complete Home Renovator
- M.O.T. CONSTRUCTION INC.
- Beauty of gardens

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Do I need an Ontario building permit to build an outdoor fireplace in my Ottawa backyard?

Yes, you will almost certainly need a City of Ottawa building permit for an outdoor fireplace in your backyard, though the exact requirements depend on whether your structure is a permanent masonry fireplace or a portable/prefabricated unit. Permanent outdoor fireplaces — those built with brick, stone, or concrete and intended as fixed installations — fall under the Ontario Building Code and require a building permit before construction begins. Even prefabricated outdoor fireplace units that are installed permanently (bolted or cemented into place) typically require a permit, though some portable units that remain freestanding without foundation work may fall outside permit requirements. The safest approach is to contact the City of Ottawa Building Code Services at 3-1-1 or visit ottawa.ca before you start planning or purchasing materials.

Why this matters in Ottawa specifically. Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycle is far more demanding on outdoor structures than in milder climates. Outdoor fireplaces must be engineered to survive being buried under 200+ centimetres of snow, exposed to ice loading, and cycling through -30 degree winters and +30 degree summers repeatedly over decades. The Ontario Building Code has minimum standards for foundation depth (frost must not penetrate beneath the foundation, which in Ottawa means digging roughly 1.5 metres down), chimney height (the 3-2-10 rule applies to outdoor fireplaces just as much as indoor ones), clearances to nearby structures, and hearth protection. A permit process ensures that your fireplace is designed and built to withstand Ottawa's climate rather than crumbling apart after three or four winters.

Building permits for outdoor fireplaces in Ottawa typically cost \$200 to \$500 depending on the size and complexity of the structure, plus any engineering or design documentation required. The permit process usually involves submitting plans (either detailed architectural drawings for a custom masonry fireplace or the manufacturer's specifications for a prefabricated unit), identifying the location on your property, confirming setback distances from property lines and nearby structures, and confirming that any electrical or gas work is included. Approval timelines usually run 2 to 4 weeks, though this can extend if the City identifies code compliance issues or if your property is in a heritage district or subject to additional planning restrictions.

The Ontario Building Code also specifies minimum clearance distances from your fireplace to combustible materials like wooden fences, garden sheds, trees, and your house itself. For masonry fireplaces, these clearances depend on whether the chimney is insulated, but generally the exterior surface of the chimney must be at least 1 metre away from any combustible structure. Gas-fired outdoor fireplaces have their own clearance requirements. If your backyard is small or densely planted with trees, you may discover that a fireplace cannot be safely installed where you initially envisioned it — the permit review catches this before you spend money on materials and labour.

One critical consideration for Ottawa: outdoor fireplaces are not heated indoor spaces, so they must be built with materials that will survive freeze-thaw cycling without deteriorating. This means using high-quality firebrick, Type N mortar (not Type S or M), and a properly designed and maintained chimney cap to shed water. Cheaper outdoor fireplace kits using inferior materials will spall and crack within a few years in Ottawa's climate. A properly permitted and built outdoor fireplace will last decades; a hastily built one without attention to Ottawa's climate will become a safety hazard and eyesore within a handful of winters.

Also confirm whether your property deed or homeowners' association has any restrictions on exterior structures or outdoor installations — some neighbourhoods in Ottawa have covenants limiting permanent outdoor structures, and the permit process may flag these issues before you commit to the project.

For a custom masonry outdoor fireplace designed and built to Ottawa code, expect total costs of \$4,000 to \$12,000 depending on size, materials, and site conditions. Prefabricated outdoor fireplace units (gas or wood-burning) typically cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 for the unit itself plus \$1,500 to \$4,000 for professional installation including foundation work and permitting. If you are ready to move forward, you can contact the City of Ottawa to confirm permit requirements for your specific project, and when you are ready to hire a contractor, you can browse experienced fireplace builders in the Ottawa area through the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- The Egress Group Inc
- Dreamwood Construction & Renovations
- Steven Labelle - Your Complete Home Renovator
- Titley Construction

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Q11

What does a two-sided see-through fireplace installation cost in Ottawa including structural work?

A two-sided see-through fireplace (also called a double-sided or see-through fireplace) typically costs **\$5,500 to \$14,000 installed in Ottawa**, depending on the appliance type, whether structural modifications are required, and

the complexity of venting and framing work. Gas models dominate this category, with a quality direct-vent linear unit running \$5,000 to \$12,000 for the appliance alone, plus \$1,500 to \$3,000 for installation labour and venting — total of **\$6,500 to \$15,000**. Wood-burning see-through inserts and stoves are less common but possible, running \$4,000 to \$8,000 for the unit plus \$2,000 to \$4,000 for chimney work and installation.

Why this matters in Ottawa specifically: A two-sided fireplace is architecturally ambitious and comes with unique structural demands in Ottawa's climate. These units typically sit in an opening that penetrates from one room into another, which means you're essentially creating a new flue opening in your home's thermal envelope. Ottawa's extreme temperature swings put enormous stress on new structural penetrations — poor installation can lead to air leakage, heat loss, condensation problems, and accelerated deterioration of framing and masonry around the opening. The structural work to accommodate a see-through fireplace is where costs can escalate dramatically, and this is where most problems arise if corners are cut.

The structural work required depends on where you want the fireplace to sit. If you're installing it in an existing masonry chimney or fireplace opening that already penetrates the roof, costs stay on the lower end — you're essentially replacing or upgrading an existing system, which might run \$4,000 to \$7,000 total. If you're creating a new opening between two rooms (perhaps removing a section of wall or a chimney breast that currently exists), you need to build a proper structural frame, install a steel lintel or beam to support the load above, potentially reroute utilities, and create a new chimney or vent opening through the roofline — this structural work alone can cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 before the fireplace is even installed. If you're adding a see-through fireplace to a location where no chimney currently exists, you need to frame a new chase (the structure that houses the vent pipe and chimney), insulate it properly, run either a new gas line or chimney pipe through it, and exit through the roof — this can run \$3,000 to \$6,000 in structural and framing work alone.

The appliance itself and venting configuration add significant cost layers. A quality direct-vent linear gas fireplace (the most popular choice for two-sided installations because they draw combustion air from outside and vent through a sealed double-wall pipe) runs \$4,500 to \$10,000 for the unit. Premium brands and larger sizes push toward the higher end. The venting itself — which must be properly sized, supported, and sealed to prevent air leakage in Ottawa's climate — typically costs \$800 to \$1,500 in materials and labour. Gas line installation to reach the fireplace location can add another \$500 to \$1,500 if you don't already have a gas outlet nearby. TSSA compliance and the final gas tag from a licensed gas fitter are built into professional installation costs, usually around \$300 to \$500 of the total.

Labour costs for the actual fireplace installation — setting the unit, connecting gas, installing the vent, sealing clearances, and finishing the installation — typically run \$1,500 to \$2,500 for a straightforward setup. If structural framing, lintel installation, or significant cutting and modification of the home's exterior is required, installation labour can reach \$3,000 to \$4,000.

A realistic Ottawa pricing example: A homeowner wants to install a two-sided direct-vent linear gas fireplace between a living room and master bedroom, where no chimney currently exists. They need a new structural frame built around the opening, proper insulation and draftstopping, a gas line extended to the location, and a vent opening cut through the roofline. Breakdown: structural framing and lintel (\$2,500), fireplace unit (\$6,500), venting materials and installation (\$1,200), gas line extension (\$800), labour for assembly, connection, and finishing (\$2,500), TSSA licensing and compliance (\$400), chimney cap and flashing installation (\$500). Total: approximately **\$14,900**. This is not an exceptional cost in Ottawa for this type of work — it reflects the real complexity of creating a new thermal penetration in a climate where every breach in the building envelope has consequences.

A critical consideration unique to Ottawa: Two-sided fireplaces create exposed venting that exits through the roofline, and that means a new chimney flashing that must withstand Ottawa's brutal freeze-thaw cycling. Flashing failures are one of the most common water infiltration points in Ottawa homes, and they are especially problematic with newer penetrations that haven't had time to settle. The flashing must be installed by someone who understands ice dam formation, snow load behaviour, and the specific challenges of Ottawa Valley weather. A poorly installed flashing on a two-sided fireplace can result in water leaks into the attic or walls within the first winter — a costly mistake that should make you very cautious about who does the structural and roofline work.

Also note that two-sided fireplaces have specific clearance-to-combustible requirements on both sides of the unit. The Ontario Building Code specifies minimum distances from the fireplace to walls, furniture, and other combustible materials on each side. These clearances are NOT flexible, and if you're working in a tight space, you may discover during the design phase that a two-sided unit won't fit safely. A professional installer will lay out these clearances in advance so you know exactly what the footprint will be.

Building permits are typically required for structural modifications and new venting penetrations, and they add 4 to 8 weeks to your timeline if you haven't already factored that in. Plan ahead — the outdoor construction season in Ottawa (May through October, and really May through September for reliable weather) is short, and structural work combined with roofline venting penetrations should not be rushed in marginal weather conditions.

If you're seriously considering a two-sided fireplace, connecting with an experienced local fireplace contractor through the Ottawa Construction Network directory will help you understand the exact structural requirements for your specific space and get accurate quotes. This is complex work where poor planning or installation can have ripple effects throughout the home, so the expertise matters more than the cost.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- 613Bins

- The Egress Group Inc
- MAK Construction and Development Inc
- Beauty of gardens
- Vanguard Environmental

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Q12

Can I add a fireplace to my Ottawa home that doesn't currently have one, and what's involved?

Yes, absolutely — adding a fireplace to an Ottawa home without one is entirely feasible, and you have several solid options depending on your budget, space, and heating goals. The complexity and cost vary dramatically based on which type you choose, whether you need a new chimney, and where in your home you want it located.

Your Main Options

Gas fireplaces are by far the most popular choice for new installations in Ottawa, and for good reason. A direct-vent gas fireplace draws outside air for combustion and exhausts through a sealed double-wall vent pipe, meaning it doesn't consume household oxygen and is highly efficient (85 to 95 percent). Installation cost runs **\$3,500 to \$7,500** for a standard unit, or **\$5,000 to \$12,000** for a premium linear model. The big advantage: no new masonry chimney required. You run a vent pipe through an exterior wall or roof, which is far simpler and cheaper than building a chimney. You'll need a nearby gas line or a new gas line run to the fireplace location (add **\$500 to \$1,500** for that), and all work must be done by a TSSA-licensed gas fitter — this is Ontario law and non-negotiable.

Wood stoves offer authentic wood-burning warmth and can be a genuine supplemental heat source in Ottawa's brutal winters — a modern EPA-certified stove operates at 70 to 80 percent efficiency and can heat 1,000 to 2,000 square feet depending on the model. A complete wood stove installation including the stove itself, chimney pipe, hearth pad, and labour runs **\$4,500 to \$9,500**. The catch: you'll need a chimney. If one doesn't exist, you're building new — either a prefabricated metal chimney (cheaper, faster) or masonry (more expensive, permanent, and traditional). A WETT-certified installer must handle the installation, and your insurance company will require a WETT inspection before they'll cover a wood stove.

Electric fireplaces are the most affordable entry point at **\$700 to \$3,800** installed, require zero venting or gas work, and need only a standard electrical outlet (or a dedicated circuit for hardwired units). Modern units produce surprisingly realistic flame effects using LED technology. The trade-off: modest heat output (typically 5,000 BTU,

enough for a single room) and higher operating costs than gas in Ottawa's climate. They are ideal for condos, apartments, or rooms where gas or wood isn't practical.

Fireplace inserts are another route if you have an existing but non-functional fireplace or are considering converting an old wood-burning fireplace. A gas insert converts the existing opening into an efficient sealed appliance, running **\$2,500 to \$5,500** installed. You use the existing chimney (though it may need relining and inspection). This is typically less disruptive and cheaper than starting from scratch.

The Site and Structural Considerations

Location matters enormously in Ottawa. You need clear access to the exterior for venting — a direct-vent gas fireplace or wood stove chimney requires a path through the roof or an exterior wall. If you're adding to a basement, first-floor, or second-floor room, confirm that your roof structure can accommodate penetration without compromising structural integrity or hitting obstructions like attic framing or roof trusses. An exterior wall vent is simpler than a roof penetration and avoids the freeze-thaw damage that roof flashing in Ottawa's climate can sustain.

Clearances to combustibles are mandated by the Ontario Building Code and vary by appliance type. A wood stove typically requires 3 feet of clearance on the sides and back, and 12 to 18 inches of clearance in front (depending on the model and whether there's a protective hearth extension). Gas fireplaces have lower clearance requirements — usually 0 to 3 inches for some direct-vent units — but exact specifications depend on the model. Your installer will verify these during planning.

Hearth protection is required under the Ontario Building Code. A wood stove needs a hearth extension (typically 16 to 18 inches in front and 8 inches on the sides) of non-combustible material — slate, tile, or stone. Gas fireplaces have less stringent requirements, but a proper hearth pad protects your flooring and looks intentional.

The Permitting and Inspection Reality

The City of Ottawa requires a building permit for new fireplace or chimney construction. You can apply through the City of Ottawa Building Code Services (call 3-1-1 or visit ottawa.ca). The permit process typically takes 2 to 4 weeks, costs \$100 to \$300 depending on scope, and ensures your installation meets the Ontario Building Code. Some contractors handle permits as part of their service; always confirm this upfront.

Once installed, your fireplace will require inspections depending on type. Gas work must be tagged by a TSSA-licensed gas fitter with a compliance label. A wood stove or wood-burning insert requires a WETT inspection (Level 1, which costs \$250 to \$450) — while technically voluntary, your insurance company will almost certainly demand it before they'll insure the appliance.

Seasonal Timing and Planning

This matters in Ottawa. Masonry chimney work requires temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius for mortar to cure properly, which limits new chimney construction to roughly April through November. If you're planning a new wood stove with a masonry chimney, schedule the work for spring or early fall to avoid the rush of last-minute calls when the first cold snap hits in October. Gas fireplace installation is weather-independent if you're running the vent through an interior wall, but roof penetrations are best done in dry conditions.

Budget 6 to 12 weeks from consultation to completion for a straightforward gas fireplace, slightly longer for a wood stove with a new metal chimney, and 12+ weeks for a masonry chimney build.

Cost and Decision Framework

Here's the rough investment hierarchy: electric fireplace (\$700–\$3,800) < gas fireplace direct-vent, no existing chimney (\$3,500–\$7,500) < wood stove, metal chimney (\$4,500–\$9,500) < gas fireplace insert into existing chimney (\$2,500–\$5,500 if chimney is sound, potentially more if relining is needed) < wood stove with masonry chimney or premium gas fireplace (\$8,000–\$12,000+).

For most Ottawa homeowners without an existing chim

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- 613Bins
- JC Carpentry
- The Fixer
- Jaiko Cleaning Services
- Edenza Landscaping

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How much does it cost to completely remove a fireplace and chimney from an Ottawa home?

Removing a fireplace and chimney from an Ottawa home typically costs between \$3,000 and \$8,000 for a full removal, though complex cases involving structural work or heritage considerations can exceed \$12,000. The final price depends heavily on the chimney height, whether it's interior or exterior, the fireplace construction type, and what needs to happen with the roof opening once the chimney is gone.

What's Actually Involved in a Removal

A complete fireplace and chimney removal isn't just about knocking things down — it requires careful planning and multiple trades. The project involves disconnecting and safely removing the fireplace appliance, demolishing the chimney structure (which can be interior masonry extending through multiple floors or an exterior brick stack), properly capping and waterproofing the roof opening where the chimney penetrated, and dealing with the firebox and hearth structure inside the home. If the chimney was the primary flue for a furnace, water heater, or other appliance, those utilities need to be vented through an alternative route before removal begins. The demolition itself generates substantial debris that must be hauled away, and masonry debris is heavy — a full chimney can produce 2 to 4 tonnes of material.

Ottawa Cost Breakdown

In Ottawa's market, expect to pay roughly **\$1,500 to \$3,500 for chimney demolition and removal labour** (depending on height and whether it's interior or exterior), **\$800 to \$2,000 for roof work and waterproofing** the opening, **\$400 to \$1,200 for hauling and debris disposal**, and **\$300 to \$1,500 if structural repairs or beam work are needed** after the chimney comes out. An interior chimney that runs through multiple floors costs more to remove than an exterior stack because the work is more involved and the roof opening is larger. A simple single-storey exterior chimney might come in at the lower end of the range (\$3,000 to \$4,500), while a three-storey interior masonry chimney with complex roof work could easily reach \$8,000 to \$12,000.

This is exactly the kind of project where getting three detailed written quotes is essential. Each contractor will assess the situation differently — some may discover hidden structural issues (like deteriorated framing around the chimney opening or inadequate support) that add cost, while others may find the removal straightforward. Make sure quotes specify what's included: demolition, debris removal, roof patching and waterproofing, any structural repairs, and whether a building permit is the homeowner's or the contractor's responsibility.

Why People Remove Fireplaces

Ottawa homeowners remove fireplaces for several practical reasons. An old, deteriorating masonry chimney that would cost \$4,000 to \$8,000 to reline becomes a candidate for removal if the homeowner doesn't plan to use it. A chimney damaged by severe freeze-thaw spalling — where the brick and mortar have cracked apart from repeated ice expansion — might be beyond economical repair. A homeowner converting to an all-electric heating system may no longer need any flue. And sometimes an interior chimney takes up valuable floor space that the homeowner wants to reclaim, especially in smaller Ottawa homes or after a major renovation.

Important Considerations Before Removal

Before committing to removal, verify that no other appliances are venting through the chimney. A furnace, water heater, or kitchen range hood connected to that flue cannot be removed until those appliances are safely re-vented through an alternative route — this could add \$1,000 to \$3,000 to the project if new venting is needed. Check whether the chimney is part of the home's structural system or merely sits against the exterior — some older Ottawa homes have chimneys that are integral to wall bracing, and removing them without proper reinforcement can cause structural problems.

If your home is in a heritage district (like the Glebe, Sandy Hill, or New Edinburgh), you may need heritage approval before removing an exterior chimney, even if no one is using the fireplace. This can delay the project by several weeks and occasionally result in requirements to preserve or recreate the chimney's appearance.

Building permits are required for chimney removal in Ottawa. You can apply through the City of Ottawa Building Code Services (3-1-1 or ottawa.ca), and the permitting process typically takes 1 to 2 weeks. Permit costs run roughly \$100 to \$250 depending on the project scope.

Timing and Season

Spring and early fall are the best times to remove a chimney. Roof work requires dry conditions and temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius for proper sealant and waterproofing installation. The construction season in Ottawa runs effectively May through October, and summer scheduling ensures the work is completed before cold weather arrives — you don't want an open roof hole heading into November.

If chimney removal is the right decision for your home, connecting with experienced demolition and masonry contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory can help you compare local pricing and understand exactly what's involved before committing to the work.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Homeupgraders
- RenoMotion Inc.
- Regimbal
- M.O.T. CONSTRUCTION INC.
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Q14

What design options work best for refacing a dated 1970s fireplace in an Ottawa split-level home?

A 1970s fireplace in a split-level home is an opportunity to anchor the entire living space with a modern focal point while working within the structural constraints of the original chimney and hearth. The good news is that fireplace refacing is one of the most transformative renovations you can do without replacing the entire fireplace, and Ottawa contractors have plenty of experience updating homes from that era.

Before you choose finishes, you need to understand what you're working with. Most 1970s Ottawa split-levels have fireplaces with a steel firebox surrounded by decorative facing material — often orange or tan brick, occasionally stone, sometimes ceramic tile in unfortunate harvest gold or avocado tones. The actual functional components (the firebox, damper, and chimney) almost never need replacement, which means refacing costs run \$2,000 to \$8,000 depending on materials and scope, rather than the \$15,000 to \$30,000 you'd spend on a full rebuild or removal. That's a realistic budget for a high-impact transformation.

Material and style directions that work well in Ottawa split-level homes:

A full-height stacked stone or brick facing in warm grays, charcoals, or natural stone tones creates a contemporary look that feels both grounded and modern. This works beautifully in open-concept split-levels where the fireplace sits as a room divider or focal wall. Gray stacked stone especially suits homes with modern furnishings and feels current without trendy. Expect \$3,500 to \$6,500 for full-wall stone refacing with proper structural support and sealing.

Large-format porcelain tile (24 by 48 inches or larger) in matte finishes — whites, creams, soft grays, or subtle patterns — creates a clean, almost minimalist aesthetic that feels less "fireplace project" and more "integrated design element." This approach works particularly well in split-levels with higher ceilings, and oversized tile makes the fireplace feel contemporary rather than dated. Tiling costs run \$2,500 to \$4,500 depending on complexity and

whether you extend tile up the chimney breast or just the lower surround.

A mixed-material approach combining natural wood shiplap or horizontal wood paneling with a contrasting masonry or tile surround plays to the casual, family-friendly nature of a split-level home and feels very current. Shiplap in white, soft gray, or warm walnut tones paired with gray brick or light stone creates visual interest without feeling busy. Wood requires proper fire-rating certification and careful installation with appropriate clearances to the firebox, so this is not a DIY project — budget \$3,500 to \$6,000 including materials and labour.

Concrete or cast-in-place finishes in smooth or textured profiles have gained popularity in Ottawa in recent years and create a distinctly modern, almost industrial aesthetic. Polished concrete, colored concrete, or textured finishes can be sealed and maintained easily, and they age beautifully. This is a specialty work — not every contractor offers it — but expect \$2,500 to \$5,000 depending on finish complexity.

A bold accent wall approach using darker tones — deep charcoal, black, or rich burgundy brick — creates drama and grounds the fireplace as a design statement rather than trying to blend it into the room. This works especially well in split-levels with good separation between living areas, where the fireplace can command visual attention. Darker materials also hide soot staining over time better than lighter finishes.

Practical considerations for Ottawa split-level homes:

Split-level layouts often mean your fireplace sits at a key sightline — the junction between the upper and lower living areas, or the transition from entry to living space. This makes the refacing choice visible and impactful, so material selection matters more than in a home where the fireplace is tucked into a corner. Choose finishes that complement your home's existing flooring, cabinetry, and trim rather than creating a jarring contrast.

The original 1970s hearth pad is likely too small by modern standards (Ontario Building Code specifies 16 inches in front and 8 inches on each side minimum for masonry fireplaces, more for wood inserts). Budget \$1,500 to \$3,000 to extend the hearth with matching or complementary materials — this also gives you a visual ground line that can make the whole refacing feel intentional rather than patched.

Updating the surrounding mantel and trim is often where a refacing project gets its biggest visual lift. A modern floating mantel in wood or stone sits above clean, contemporary surround treatment and costs \$1,500 to \$3,000. Removing a dated wood mantel and trim entirely, then creating a seamless wall where the refacing rises to the ceiling, gives a minimalist effect that reads as intentional contemporary design.

Lighting makes an enormous difference in how a refaced fireplace reads in the room. Recessed lighting above the fireplace, wall sconces flanking the hearth, or uplighting at the base of the fireplace highlight texture and create ambiance without looking dated. These are electrical upgrades that require an ESA-licensed electrician, typically costing \$800 to \$1,500, but they transform how the refaced fireplace functions as a focal point.

Sequencing and timing:

Spring (April through June) is ideal for major fireplace refacing work, especially if any exterior masonry work is needed. Interior refacing can happen year-round, but coordinating with the rest of your home renovation schedule makes sense. Most refacing projects take 2 to 4 weeks from first conversation to completion, including material selection, approvals, and installation.

If your fireplace is functional and you want to keep it that way during the refacing work, discuss this explicitly with your contractor — some materials can be installed without disrupting the fireplace, while others require temporary closure during installation. If you're refacing a non-working fireplace or planning to convert it to a gas insert or wood stove during the renovation, that integration costs \$3,000 to \$7,000 additional but can be done cleanly in a single project.

Fireplace refacing is one of the few home upgrades that adds measurable resale value while immediately improving daily living — you spend roughly \$4,000 to \$6,000 and gain a modern focal point that gets used and appreciated every time you gather in that room, especially during Ottawa's long, cold winter season. When you're ready to connect with experienced contractors who specialize in hearth renovations and understand split-level home layouts, you can browse fireplace professionals through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Apple HVAC and mechanical
- JC Carpentry
- Leeds Property Maintenance
- Canadian Diamond Products
- Custom By Arie

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Q15

Can I add a linear modern fireplace to my Ottawa home's existing chimney during a remodel?

Yes, you can add a modern linear gas fireplace to an existing chimney during a remodel, but the feasibility depends on your chimney's current condition, structural capacity, and whether it has been properly inspected — and the answer is not as straightforward as simply inserting a unit into the opening.

Why This Matters in Ottawa

Your existing chimney has likely been sitting unused or underutilized for years, and Ottawa's extreme freeze-thaw cycles mean the interior is probably not in ideal condition for a new high-performance appliance. Masonry chimneys deteriorate silently — mortar joints crack, clay tile liners fracture, and water infiltration damage the interior structure. A chimney that was acceptable for an old, inefficient fireplace may not safely or efficiently vent a modern linear gas fireplace. Additionally, linear fireplaces have different venting requirements than traditional fireplaces, wider openings than standard units, and specific clearance-to-combustible demands that your existing chimney opening may not accommodate.

The key distinction is whether you want to use the existing chimney for venting or if you're open to a **direct-vent linear fireplace** that exhausts through the exterior wall instead. This choice fundamentally changes your project scope and cost.

Using Your Existing Chimney

If you want to vent through the existing chimney, here's what must happen first: Have a **WETT-certified chimney inspector** perform a Level 2 inspection (detailed, ideal for remodel scenarios). This inspection costs \$350 to \$600 in Ottawa and examines the chimney's interior condition using a camera probe, checks for cracks in the liner, assesses mortar joint integrity, and determines whether the flue is properly sized for a linear gas fireplace. If the chimney is structurally sound and has a functioning flue, the next step is installing a **stainless steel chimney liner** that matches the gas fireplace's vent pipe diameter — typically 4 inches or 5 inches for linear units. Relining costs \$2,000 to \$5,000 depending on chimney height and condition.

Once the chimney is lined and certified, a **TSSA-licensed gas fitter** installs the linear fireplace, runs the gas line, ensures proper clearances (typically 12 to 24 inches from the fireplace opening to combustible materials like mantels or wooden surround trim), and installs a proper chimney cap. Total project cost through the existing chimney route runs \$5,500 to \$10,000 or more when you factor in inspection, potential repairs, relining, and installation.

Direct-Vent Linear Fireplace (Recommended for Most Ottawa Remodels)

A **direct-vent linear fireplace** is more practical for remodels and offers significant advantages. This unit draws combustion air from outside through a sealed double-wall vent pipe that exits through your exterior wall, and exhaust vents directly outside — no existing chimney required. The fireplace is sealed from the room, meaning it

does not consume household oxygen or allow combustion gases to enter your living space. This is especially important in Ottawa's tightly sealed modern homes, where an open-chimney setup can create negative pressure and backdrafting issues during winter.

Direct-vent linear units cost \$5,000 to \$12,000 installed in Ottawa, depending on the model's length (24 to 72 inches is typical), flame realism, and whether you choose basic or premium features. Installation is faster — typically 1 to 2 days versus 3 to 7 days for chimney relining — and you can often proceed with your remodel finishes immediately. You still get the stunning modern aesthetic of a linear fireplace, wall-mounted television above, and integrated media console, without depending on the condition of an aging chimney.

Practical Remodel Considerations

Linear fireplaces are typically installed in a new or heavily modified fireplace opening with finished surrounds of tile, stone, or custom millwork. Your remodel timeline should account for the fireplace installation appointment — TSSA-licensed gas fitters in Ottawa book 2 to 4 weeks ahead during spring and fall, and they are overwhelmed by October as homeowners rush to prepare before winter. Schedule your fireplace installation early in the remodel process, ideally before final wall finishes, so that rough-in for the gas line, venting, and electrical (for the blower fan and ignition system) can be completed before drywall and trim go in.

If you choose to use your existing chimney, factor in 1 to 2 weeks for the inspection and chimney assessment before you finalize your remodel design. If relining is needed, add another 2 to 3 weeks for the liner installation — weather dependent in Ottawa, as the work is often done from the roof. If you go the direct-vent route, you have more flexibility because the exterior wall opening can be cut and sealed during the final stages of your remodel.

Important Warnings

Never hire an unlicensed contractor for the gas fireplace installation — Ontario law requires a TSSA-licensed gas fitter (G2 or G3 certificate) for any gas work, and your homeowner's insurance will not cover unlicensed gas installations. Carbon monoxide from an improperly installed gas fireplace is a silent killer. After installation, the fireplace must be tagged with a TSSA compliance label.

If you use the existing chimney, a **Level 1 annual chimney inspection and cleaning** by a WETT-certified sweep becomes non-negotiable — Ottawa's long burning season and the linear fireplace's higher heat output mean creosote deposits accumulate faster than with older fireplaces. Budget \$250 to \$450 per year for this maintenance.

Next Steps

Get a WETT Level 2 chimney inspection (\$350 to \$600) to determine whether your chimney can be safely and cost-effectively relined, or whether a direct-vent approach makes more sense. Once you have that information, you can

make an informed decision about design and budgeting. If you need a referral to a WETT-certified chimney inspector or TSSA-licensed gas fitter in the Ottawa area, you can browse fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory — they can guide you on the best venting approach for your specific remodel layout and help you plan the timeline and budget for your project.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- 613Bins
- The Egress Group Inc
- Core Climate Ltd.
- Canadian Diamond Products
- Ottawa Masonry Contractor

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Do I need a WETT inspection before refacing or modifying my wood-burning fireplace in Ontario?

A WETT inspection is not legally required before cosmetic refacing or modification to a wood-burning fireplace in Ontario, but whether you actually need one depends entirely on what work you're doing, whether you plan to continue using the fireplace, and what your insurance company requires.

When WETT Inspection Is Critical

If you're planning to *use* your wood-burning fireplace after any modification, or if you're refinancing or selling your home, a WETT inspection becomes essential. Here's why: any modification to a fireplace — even purely cosmetic work like new tile, stone, or a refaced surround — can affect how the fireplace functions, how it draws air, whether it has proper clearances to combustibles, and whether the chimney system is safe for that appliance. Insurance companies in Ontario have increasingly strict requirements. Many insurers will not cover a home with an active wood-burning fireplace without a current WETT Level 1 (visual) inspection on file. If you refinance your mortgage or sell the property, the new lender or buyer's lender will likely require WETT documentation proving the system is safe. A WETT inspection typically costs \$250 to \$450 in Ottawa for a Level 1 visual inspection.

If You're Just Doing Surface Work Without Using the Fireplace

If you're purely refinishing the aesthetic surround — new tile, paint, stone facing, or a new mantel — and you have no intention of burning fires in the fireplace afterward, a WETT inspection is technically not required. However, even in this scenario, it's worth considering. If you ever change your mind and want to use the fireplace again in the future, you'll need that WETT clearance then anyway, and having it done after the refacing work ensures the inspection accounts for the modified structure. Some contractors recommend a quick Level 1 inspection after any fireplace modification just to document that the work was done safely — it becomes part of your home's fireplace record.

Critical Considerations for Modifications in Ottawa

Ottawa's freeze-thaw climate means that any modification to a masonry fireplace involves masonry work, and masonry durability is critical here. If your refacing involves rebuilding the face of the fireplace or the surround with new brick or stone, that's structural masonry work that affects how water enters and exits the firebox area. Poor masonry work on a fireplace surround can trap water against the chimney or firebox, leading to accelerated deterioration in Ottawa's extreme temperature swings. Before you start refacing work, have the existing chimney and firebox inspected (this can be part of a WETT Level 1 inspection) to make sure there are no hidden problems — cracked liner, missing mortar, water damage, or unsafe clearances — that refacing work might inadvertently

hide.

Clearance-to-Combustible Requirements

Ontario Building Code clearance requirements remain in effect regardless of whether you're refacing or modifying the fireplace. A fireplace must maintain minimum clearances from combustible materials (typically 6 inches from the sides and back for a masonry fireplace, though exact requirements depend on the appliance specifications). If your refacing work involves new wood framing, wall paneling, or other combustible materials around the fireplace, those clearances must be maintained and documented. This is another reason a WETT inspection after modification is genuinely useful — it verifies that your refacing work didn't inadvertently create unsafe clearances.

Bottom Line for Ottawa Homeowners

If you're refacing a wood-burning fireplace and plan to use it afterward, or if you might use it in the future, invest in a WETT Level 1 inspection after the refacing work is complete — it costs \$250 to \$450 and provides insurance compliance and documented proof that the system is safe. If you're permanently decommissioning the fireplace (filling it in, sealing it off, or converting it to a gas insert), WETT inspection becomes less relevant, though you would then need gas-specific compliance if you're installing a gas insert. For any refacing work involving structural masonry modifications or new framing near the fireplace, get a professional assessment before work begins to ensure the refacing doesn't create hidden problems or safety issues that Ottawa's climate will punish you for later.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Apple HVAC and mechanical
- The Egress Group Inc
- Elie The Carpet Guy Inc.
- Diamond renovations
- Colonnade Security Inc

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Q17

How much does a full fireplace renovation cost in Ottawa including new surround, mantel, and hearth?

A comprehensive fireplace renovation in Ottawa that includes a new surround, mantel, and hearth typically costs **\$4,500 to \$15,000 or more**, depending on materials, complexity, and whether you are working with an existing fireplace or starting from scratch. The largest variables are the surround material (tile, stone, or custom finishes), mantel size and material (wood, stone, or metal), and hearth dimensions and finish.

Here is how the costs break down for Ottawa at 2025-2026 rates:

Fireplace surround runs **\$2,000 to \$8,000** installed. A basic ceramic or porcelain tile surround with simple grout finish at the lower end of that range, while a full stone surround using natural slate, granite, or marble — especially if it extends floor-to-ceiling — can easily reach \$6,000 to \$8,000. Custom tile work with intricate patterns or high-end materials adds \$1,000 to \$3,000 to labour and materials. The complexity of your existing fireplace opening, any structural repairs needed, and whether the surround wraps around the sides of the fireplace all affect the final price.

Mantel installation costs **\$1,500 to \$6,000** depending on material and craftsmanship. A simple wood mantel shelf costs \$1,500 to \$3,000 installed, while a full custom mantel package with decorative corbels, trim work, and premium wood species can reach \$5,000 to \$6,000. Stone mantels cost slightly more, and if you want a built-in mantel integrated into the surrounding cabinetry, budget accordingly higher.

Hearth extension or full hearth replacement runs **\$1,000 to \$4,000** installed. A new tile or stone hearth that meets Ontario Building Code requirements (typically 16 to 20 inches of protection in front of the fireplace opening, depending on appliance type) costs \$1,500 to \$3,000, while a custom stone hearth or one that extends into the room as a full floor feature can reach \$4,000 or more.

What makes Ottawa fireplace renovations unique is the climate context. If your existing fireplace has a masonry surround or hearth that has been damaged by the freeze-thaw cycle — spalling brick, crumbling mortar, or water stains — you may need to address underlying waterproofing or structural repair **before** the cosmetic renovation can proceed. This can add \$500 to \$2,000 to your total cost. The chimney crown, flashing, and exterior masonry condition should be inspected and repaired if needed, or your beautiful new interior surround will eventually suffer water damage from moisture leaking in from above.

If your fireplace is currently non-functional or you want to upgrade its heating capability as part of the renovation, adding a gas insert or wood insert will increase costs significantly — a fireplace insert installation runs \$2,500 to \$7,000 before surround work. However, many Ottawa homeowners use a renovation as an opportunity to add a functioning heating appliance to their fireplace, which makes the project deliver both aesthetic and practical value during those brutally cold Ottawa winters.

The timing of your renovation matters in Ottawa. Tile grouting, stone setting, and any masonry-related work require temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius for materials to cure properly. Schedule your renovation for late spring, summer, or early fall rather than attempting it in winter — you will get better results and avoid the risk of frost

damage to fresh grout or mortar.

A final consideration: if your home is in a heritage district in Ottawa (the Glebe, Sandy Hill, New Edinburgh, or similar areas), the City of Ottawa heritage planning office may have restrictions on certain materials or styles visible from the street or exterior. Interior surround and mantel work is usually unrestricted, but confirm requirements before finalizing your design.

Get at least three written quotes that specify the exact materials, dimensions, labour breakdown, timeline, and warranty. Ottawa fireplace renovation contractors typically charge 10 to 15 percent less than Greater Toronto Area rates, so expect pricing to be reasonable compared to other major Canadian cities. If your project requires structural work or involves chimney repairs, you can browse experienced fireplace and hearth contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to find professionals who understand the specific challenges of renovating fireplaces in Ottawa's climate.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- RenoMotion Inc.
- Anchor Home Comfort
- ALTIOR CONSTRUCTION
- Sam's Brickworks

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Q18

What are the most popular fireplace surround materials Ottawa homeowners are choosing right now?

Ottawa homeowners are increasingly drawn to natural stone surrounds — particularly stacked slate, fieldstone, and limestone — and to contemporary tile finishes in matte blacks, charcoals, and warm greys that complement modern home aesthetics. But what's popular is shifting noticeably toward a mixed-material approach that combines stone or tile with wood mantels or shiplap, reflecting a broader trend toward relaxed, layered interiors rather than the formal, symmetrical fireplace surrounds of previous decades.

The appeal of stone and tile for Ottawa fireplace surrounds runs deeper than aesthetics. Both materials handle Ottawa's extreme temperature swings without the movement and expansion problems that can affect wood or painted drywall around a fireplace. A masonry fireplace or fireplace insert radiates significant heat — sometimes 150 to 200 degrees on the surround surface — and then cools rapidly once the fire dies. That freeze-thaw cycle at the hearth itself creates expansion and contraction stress that painted drywall simply cannot withstand over time. Natural stone and ceramic or porcelain tile are inherently stable at these temperature extremes, and they actually improve with age in Ottawa's climate rather than cracking or peeling.

Stacked slate and fieldstone remain the most popular choices, priced at \$4,000 to \$8,000 installed depending on surround size and the complexity of the installation. These materials create a warm, organic aesthetic that works equally well in heritage brick homes in Old Ottawa South and in modern minimalist builds in Kanata. The irregular texture and colour variation in slate or fieldstone makes each installation unique, and Ottawa homeowners appreciate that these materials look natural and native to the region — they feel at home in a Canadian capital. Installation involves setting individual stones with fire-rated mortar or thin-set adhesive, which is labour-intensive but creates a durable, permanent surround that will outlast multiple generations.

Contemporary large-format tiles — typically 24-inch by 24-inch or larger porcelain tiles in charcoal, black, or warm grey — are rising in popularity, especially in renovated homes or new builds where homeowners want a sleeker, minimalist aesthetic. These run \$2,500 to \$5,000 installed and offer several practical advantages: they are faster to install than individual stones, they create clean lines and a more contemporary feel, they are easier to clean and maintain, and large-format tiles minimize grout lines where dust and creosote can accumulate. Matte finishes are preferred over glossy because gloss can show fingerprints and dust, while matte creates a more sophisticated, grounded appearance.

Shiplap or reclaimed wood combined with stone or tile has emerged as a strong trend, particularly in secondary living spaces like basements or family rooms. The wood — usually painted white or left natural — runs horizontally above the fireplace surround while the tile or stone forms the immediate surround and hearth. This creates visual warmth and breaks up what can feel like a cold expanse of stone alone. Total cost for a mixed-material approach typically runs \$3,000 to \$7,000 installed.

Brick surrounds — either original masonry or newly installed brick veneer — are still common in Ottawa's heritage neighbourhoods and in homes where homeowners want to match existing chimney brick or period-appropriate aesthetics. New brick surrounds cost \$2,500 to \$6,000 installed depending on whether you are working with heritage reclaimed brick or modern new brick. The advantage of brick is its proven durability in Ottawa's climate and its classic Canadian appeal; the disadvantage is that brick can look dated in contemporary homes and requires regular maintenance (tuckpointing deteriorating mortar joints) to stay sound in our freeze-thaw climate.

Marble and granite surrounds are less common in Ottawa than in southern regions, partly because both materials are prone to thermal shock in extreme temperature variations — a burst of intense heat from the fireplace followed by rapid cooling can crack polished stone. When marble or granite are used, honed (not polished) finishes are preferred because they are less brittle, and the installation is usually kept simple to minimize seams that could fail under thermal stress.

One important practical consideration specific to Ottawa: whatever material you choose for your surround, it must meet Ontario Building Code clearance-to-combustible requirements, which specify minimum distances from any combustible material (wood framing, insulation, drywall) depending on the appliance type. A WETT-certified inspector or your installer will confirm these clearances, but understanding this up front helps you plan the surround appropriately — sometimes it means the surround sits further forward than you initially envisioned, or the structural opening needs to be slightly adjusted.

If you are planning a fireplace surround renovation or new installation and want to explore professional options for design consultation and installation, you can browse experienced fireplace and hearth contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to get quotes on materials, installation costs, and timeline for your specific space.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Homeupgraders
- JC Carpentry
- Valcor Construction
- Gillani Heating & Appliance Care Inc.
- JMY Renovations

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Is it worth converting my old wood-burning fireplace to a gas insert during a renovation in Ottawa?

Converting an old wood-burning fireplace to a gas insert is worth serious consideration in Ottawa, especially during a renovation when you already have contractors on-site and the project scope is flexible. The decision hinges on your heating priorities, budget, lifestyle preferences, and how much you actually use the fireplace.

Why This Matters in Ottawa's Climate

Ottawa's extreme winters make fireplace heating efficiency genuinely relevant to your household comfort and energy bills. An open wood-burning fireplace operates at roughly 30 to 40 percent efficiency — meaning 60 to 70 percent of the heat you create escapes up the chimney while pulling warm air from your home. A gas insert converts that same fireplace opening into an appliance that operates at 70 to 85 percent efficiency, actually heating the room rather than just creating ambiance. During Ottawa's long shoulder seasons (October through April), that efficiency difference translates to real money saved on heating costs.

Gas also eliminates the practical burden of wood management that comes with Ottawa's long burning season. If you are burning 4 to 8 cords of wood per winter — typical for an Ottawa household using a wood stove as supplemental heat — you are dealing with seasoning, stacking, storing, hauling, and the constant cycle of restocking the firebox. Wood also means mandatory annual chimney cleaning (and potentially twice-yearly for heavy users in Ottawa's climate), annual WETT inspections, and the risk of dangerous Stage 3 glazed creosote buildup during the long cold months.

The Real Cost Comparison

A gas insert into an existing masonry fireplace costs \$2,500 to \$5,500 installed in Ottawa, assuming your chimney is in reasonable condition and your fireplace opening is standard size. If your chimney needs relining before the insert can be safely vented, add \$2,000 to \$5,000 for stainless steel relining — this is often necessary in older chimneys where the original clay tile liner has cracked under decades of Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles.

Compare that to the cost of continuing to burn wood: a cord of seasoned hardwood costs \$350 to \$450 delivered in Ottawa, and burning 5 cords per season means \$1,750 to \$2,250 annually in fuel alone. Add annual chimney cleaning (\$175 to \$350), occasional chimney repairs, and your time spent managing the wood supply. A gas insert typically pays for itself within 5 to 8 years through heating cost savings, and it eliminates the labour and risk entirely.

Gas also has minimal operating costs beyond your natural gas bill. Annual service for a gas fireplace runs \$150 to \$250, compared to \$200 to \$400+ for WETT inspections and chimney cleaning. You will still need a chimney sweep

once per year (or every two years if usage is light) because your existing flue will still be exposed to some moisture and debris, but the maintenance burden drops dramatically.

Practical Advantages in Ottawa Winters

Gas inserts ignite with a wall switch or remote control — no waiting for kindling to catch, no watching the fire struggle to catch on damp firewood during October's unpredictable weather. On a -25 degree night in January when the power goes out, an electric-ignition gas insert will not work anyway (you need power for the ignition system and blower fan), so if backup heating is your concern, a wood stove remains superior. But for daily convenience and supplemental heat during Ottawa's core heating season, gas is dramatically easier.

Modern gas inserts produce a realistic flame effect using ceramic logs or glass beads, and high-end units are genuinely beautiful. If your renovation goal includes updating the fireplace aesthetic, a direct-vent gas insert gives you a cleaner look than an old wood-burning fireplace while providing actual heating capacity.

When Converting Makes Less Sense

If you genuinely love burning wood, genuinely use the fireplace regularly (not just for ambiance on weekends), and view the ritual of managing a fire as a meaningful part of your winter — conversion may diminish something valuable about your home and lifestyle. A well-maintained wood stove or fireplace is part of Ottawa's culture, and some homeowners prefer the authenticity and self-sufficiency of burning wood despite the work involved.

Conversion also makes less sense if your masonry chimney is severely deteriorated. If the chimney requires extensive rebuilding rather than just relining, the total cost of conversion (repair plus insert installation) may push your budget toward alternative options like a wood insert (which also improves efficiency while keeping the authentic wood-burning experience) or a completely new direct-vent gas fireplace in a different location that does not require using the existing chimney at all.

Critical Conversion Details

Before converting, you need a professional inspection of your existing chimney. Not every old masonry chimney is safe to use with a gas insert — the flue must be properly sized, structurally sound, and able to handle the venting requirements of a gas appliance. Your contractor should verify that your chimney is not too large for the insert (oversized flues cause draft problems with gas appliances), does not have significant structural damage that requires rebuilding, and does not have interior obstructions like abandoned cleanout doors that need sealing.

You will need a TSSA-licensed gas fitter to install the insert, run a gas line if one does not already exist near your fireplace, and tag the unit with a compliance label after installation. Gas line installation to your fireplace location runs \$500 to \$1,500 depending on distance and whether existing gas lines are nearby. All gas work is legally

required to be done by a licensed gas fitter — this is non-negotiable under Ontario law.

You should also have your chimney professionally cleaned before any insert is installed, and plan for annual chimney sweeping thereafter. Even though a gas insert produces minimal creosote, the chimney itself can still accumulate moisture, debris, and dust over time.

The Bottom Line

For most Ottawa homeowners doing a renovation, converting to a gas insert is a practical choice that trades the ritual and self-sufficiency of wood burning for dramatically improved efficiency, convenience, lower operating costs, and minimal maintenance. It makes the most sense if you view your fireplace primarily as supplemental heating and ambiance rather than as a statement about self-reliance or a cherished winter ritual. The conversion cost is reasonable during a renovation when other work is already planned, and the payback through reduced heating and maintenance costs is legitimate over a 10 to 15 year timeframe.

If you are ready to explore professional installation options, you can browse experienced fireplace contractors in Ottawa through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare estimates and get a detailed assessment of your specific chimney condition and conversion requirements.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- RenoMotion Inc.
- BFI Renovations
- Home Front Services
- The Deck Store Inc

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Q20

How much should I budget for a custom wood mantel installation on my Ottawa fireplace?

A custom wood mantel installation in Ottawa typically runs **\$1,500 to \$6,000** depending on the wood species, design complexity, size, and whether you're installing it on an existing fireplace or building it as part of a larger surround project. This includes the materials cost for the mantel itself plus labour for installation, finishing, and integration with your existing fireplace opening.

What Drives Custom Mantel Costs in Ottawa

The price variation is wide because custom mantels are genuinely custom — there is no standard product. A simple floating mantel made from a single slab of reclaimed barn wood or rustic pine might run \$1,500 to \$2,500 installed. A more elaborate mantel with decorative brackets, corbels, crown moulding, and detailed carpentry using premium hardwoods like walnut, oak, or cherry can easily reach \$3,500 to \$6,000 or beyond. The wood species matters significantly — reclaimed wood and rustic finishes tend to be more affordable than finished hardwoods, while exotic woods command premium prices.

Installation complexity also affects cost. If your fireplace opening is straightforward and the mantel can be mounted directly to the existing masonry with simple brackets, labour is minimal. If the mantel needs to be integrated into a broader fireplace surround project (tiling, stone facing, new hearth extension, or structural modifications to the fireplace opening), costs climb because you are paying for additional trades and coordination. Finishing work — staining, sealing, or hand-rubbing the wood — adds \$300 to \$800 depending on the quality level you want.

Ottawa's climate has a subtle but real impact on mantel selection and durability. Wood expands and contracts with seasonal humidity swings — the bone-dry indoor heat of Ottawa winters followed by humid summers creates genuine stress on solid wood. This is why high-quality custom mantels should be made from properly kiln-dried hardwood and sealed with a quality polyurethane or conversion varnish that allows the wood to move slightly without checking or cracking. Cheaper finishes fail faster in Ottawa's extreme indoor humidity swings.

Practical Next Steps

Start by deciding on your vision: are you drawn to rustic, reclaimed aesthetics or refined hardwood finish? Do you want a simple floating shelf or an elaborate mantel with decorative brackets and surround detail? Once you have a general direction, get at least three written quotes from local carpenters or fireplace specialists who can see your exact fireplace opening. Be specific about wood species, dimensions, bracket style, and finish when requesting quotes. Ask each contractor to specify the wood grade, the finish system they recommend for Ottawa's climate, and whether the quote includes removal of any existing mantel or fireplace surround modifications.

The mantel itself is often just part of a larger aesthetic vision. Many Ottawa homeowners invest in a custom mantel as part of a complete fireplace face-lift that might also include a new hearth extension, fireplace surround tiling or stone work, or a new gas or wood insert. If you are thinking about a broader renovation, the total project cost

(mantel plus surround work) typically runs \$3,000 to \$10,000, and getting everything done together by one contractor is usually more efficient than piecemeal work.

One important note: if you are installing a mantel above a wood-burning fireplace or wood stove, you must maintain proper clearances to combustibles. The Ontario Building Code specifies minimum distances from the fireplace opening to any wood mantel or surrounding materials — typically 12 inches for wood mantels above a wood-burning appliance. A qualified fireplace professional or WETT-certified installer should confirm these clearances before installation to ensure your beautiful new mantel does not create a fire hazard.

If you are ready to move forward, you can browse local fireplace and hearth carpenters through the **Ottawa Construction Network directory** to find contractors with experience in custom fireplace work. Getting three detailed quotes will give you a clear sense of what your specific mantel should cost.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Justyn Rook Contracting
- The Egress Group Inc
- ZinoM Concrete & Landscaping
- Joe Imerti Contracting
- Callandgone

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Q21

What permits do I need to renovate a fireplace in a heritage home in the Glebe or Sandy Hill?

Renovating a fireplace in a heritage home in the Glebe or Sandy Hill requires careful navigation of overlapping regulatory requirements — you'll need a City of Ottawa building permit for the work itself, plus approval from the City's heritage planning office before making any visible exterior changes to the chimney or fireplace structure.

Understanding the Heritage Layer

Ottawa's heritage districts — including the Glebe, Sandy Hill, New Edinburgh, Rockcliffe Park, and properties within National Capital Commission jurisdiction — have additional design controls beyond standard building code requirements. The City of Ottawa Heritage Committee reviews projects in designated heritage areas to ensure that renovations respect the character, materials, and appearance of the home and the streetscape. This is not a rubber-stamp process; it requires genuine thought about how your fireplace renovation affects the exterior appearance and historical integrity of your property.

Exterior chimney work faces the strictest scrutiny. Visible changes like replacing a chimney cap, repainting or repointing masonry, installing new flashing, or rebuilding a chimney above the roofline all require heritage approval before you can pull a building permit. The heritage committee will ask questions about chimney materials (does the replacement match the original brick or stone?), chimney cap design (does it follow period-appropriate proportions?), and colour matching (if repointing, does the mortar match the original in colour and joint profile?). Interior fireplace renovations — like replacing fireplace inserts, adding a new surround, or installing gas logs inside an existing firebox — are less likely to trigger heritage review if they do not affect exterior appearance, but you should confirm this with the heritage planning office before proceeding.

The permit process for heritage homes typically follows this sequence: First, contact the City of Ottawa Heritage Planning office (3-1-1 or ottawa.ca) to determine whether your specific property is heritage-designated and what restrictions apply to your planned work. Do not assume your address is in a heritage district — many streets in the Glebe and Sandy Hill are protected, but not all. The heritage office will tell you whether your project requires a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) or design review. Second, if your project is subject to heritage approval, prepare detailed plans showing before-and-after photos, material specifications, colour samples if repointing is involved, and drawings of any new elements. Some contractors in Ottawa are experienced with heritage fireplace renovations and can prepare these plans; others are not. Third, submit your heritage application through the City's online portal or in person at Ottawa City Hall (110 Laurier Avenue West). Allow 6 to 8 weeks for heritage review — this is not a quick process. Fourth, once you receive heritage approval (usually in the form of a letter stating the project complies with heritage guidelines), apply for a building permit through the City of Ottawa Building Code Services. Fifth, once the building permit is issued, you can engage a contractor to proceed with the work.

Interior-only fireplace renovations may not require heritage approval. If you are replacing a wood-burning fireplace insert with a gas insert, installing a new fireplace surround or mantel inside the house, or converting an open fireplace to an insert — and none of this work affects the chimney exterior, roofline, or outer wall appearance — you may only need a standard building permit without heritage review. Contact the heritage office to confirm before investing time in detailed plans. Interior renovations still require a building permit if they involve structural changes, electrical work (ESA approval for gas fireplace ignition systems or blower fans), or gas line installation (TSSA approval for a licensed gas fitter).

Gas fireplace work requires coordination between TSSA, the City, and heritage planning. If you are installing a new gas fireplace or gas insert and venting it through the chimney or via an exterior vent pipe, the TSSA-licensed gas fitter who installs the appliance and the gas line must work to specifications that comply with the Ontario Building Code, and any exterior venting — such as a new B-vent pipe or direct-vent termination on the chimney — must be approved by the heritage office. A direct-vent gas fireplace draws combustion air from outside through one pipe and exhausts through another, usually exiting low on an exterior wall; heritage committees sometimes question the visual impact of a modern direct-vent termination on a heritage home. This conversation is worth having early in the design phase.

WETT certification and chimney relining add another layer if you are planning wood-burning work. If you are installing a new wood-burning insert or wood stove into an existing chimney, a WETT-certified installer will need to inspect the chimney and determine whether it requires relining. If the chimney needs relining — which is common in older homes, as clay tile liners crack over time, especially in Ottawa's brutal freeze-thaw cycles — the relining material and method must also be heritage-compliant. Cast-in-place chimney relining, which involves pouring a cement-like material down the inside of the chimney, is generally acceptable because it does not change exterior appearance. Stainless steel liner installation is also usually acceptable because the liner sits inside the existing chimney. However, if relining requires visible exterior modifications — such as a new chimney cap or changes to the chimney crown — heritage approval is needed.

Practical timing and cost implications: Heritage approval adds 6 to 8 weeks to your project timeline, so plan accordingly. Do not assume you can pull a permit in spring and have your fireplace ready for heating season in November — budget for a heritage review process that extends into summer or early fall. Heritage reviews do not add direct costs to your permit fees, but they do require detailed plans and documentation, which may mean paying your contractor for plan preparation even before the project is approved. In heritage districts, material costs may also be slightly higher because matching original brickwork, stone, or mortar profiles can require sourcing specialized materials or custom work from experienced heritage contractors.

The Glebe and Sandy Hill context specifically: These neighbourhoods feature a significant concentration of early 20th-century homes with original masonry chimneys, many of which are showing signs of Ottawa's freeze-thaw damage — spalling brick, deteriorating mortar joints, and crumbling chimney crowns are extremely common in homes built between 1910 and 1960. The heritage committee understands this and is generally receptive to necessary repairs and replacement of chimneys that are actively failing. What they resist is unnecessary exterior changes, modernizing original features, or using materials and colours that do not match the home's period and character. If your fireplace renovation is driven by genuine safety concerns (a failing chimney, damaged mortar, cracks in the crown) rather than purely aesthetic preferences, the heritage approval process is typically straightforward.

When you are ready to engage a contractor for your heritage fireplace renovation, you can

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Can I replace my old brick fireplace surround with floor-to-ceiling porcelain tile in Ottawa?

Yes, you can absolutely replace your brick fireplace surround with porcelain tile in Ottawa — it is a popular and practical renovation that can modernize the look of a fireplace while improving durability and maintenance. Porcelain tile is actually superior to brick in many ways for Ottawa's climate, particularly because it is non-porous, resists staining from smoke and dust, handles freeze-thaw cycles better if the surround extends to an exterior wall, and is far easier to clean than aged brick.

Why This Works Well in Ottawa

The appeal of a tile fireplace surround comes down to three factors that matter especially in Ottawa homes. First, porcelain is nearly impervious to moisture and does not absorb the smoke residue, dust, and creosote particles that accumulate on brick over decades of wood burning — a brick surround can look permanently dirty no matter how hard you scrub, while porcelain wipes clean. Second, if your fireplace has an exterior wall component (common in Ottawa homes where the chimney runs up the back or side of the house), porcelain tile's non-porous nature means it will not suffer the spalling and freeze-thaw damage that can eventually ruin exterior brick in our brutal climate. Third, a floor-to-ceiling tile installation creates a modern, dramatic focal point and dramatically increases the perceived value of the living space without requiring structural changes to the fireplace or chimney itself.

What's Involved in the Installation

A porcelain tile fireplace surround retrofit typically costs **\$2,000 to \$8,000 installed in Ottawa**, depending on the tile grade, whether you go floor-to-ceiling or a more modest height, whether the installation includes the hearth extension, and whether removal of the old brick surround requires structural work. Premium large-format tiles (24 x 48 inches or larger) and custom installations cost more than standard subway tiles or smaller mosaic formats. Labour typically runs \$50 to \$85 per hour, and most surround projects take 3 to 5 days.

The process itself is straightforward. A licensed tile installer will remove the old brick surround (or leave it in place if it is structurally sound and serve as a substrate — this depends on the existing condition). The fireplace opening itself does not change — you are only removing or covering the decorative surround, not touching the firebox, damper, or chimney. The installer preps the wall with moisture-resistant cement board or isolation membrane, applies thin-set mortar, and lays the porcelain tile in your chosen pattern. Grout is applied, sealed (crucial for long-term durability in Ottawa's moisture-heavy winters), and the new surround is finished with caulk at the top and edges to allow for slight movement and prevent water infiltration.

One critical detail: if your fireplace surround extends to an exterior wall — which is common in Ottawa where chimneys often run up the outside of the house — the tile installer should install a moisture barrier behind the cement board to prevent water from wicking through from outside. This is especially important in our climate where freeze-thaw cycles push water through brick. A good installer will use a product like a waterproofing membrane or isolation board rated for exterior-interior transitions.

Materials and Design Considerations

Porcelain tile comes in endless finishes, colours, and sizes. Large-format tiles (18 x 36 inches and up) create a more contemporary, minimalist look and have fewer grout lines — they are more expensive to install because they require precision and specialized trowels, but many Ottawa homeowners love the clean aesthetic. Smaller tiles like subway tiles (3 x 6 inches) or hexagonal or herringbone patterns offer more visual interest and are slightly more forgiving to install. Finishes include polished (glossy, reflective, and prone to showing dust), matte (modern, hides dust well), brushed, and textured — matte and brushed finishes are typically more practical in a fireplace setting.

Colour choice should complement your room. Light porcelain tiles (white, cream, light grey) make a room feel larger and brighter, especially important in Ottawa's long, dark winters. Dark tiles (charcoal, black, dark grey) create drama and sophistication but show dust more readily. Mid-tone greys, warm beiges, and even subtle pattern tiles are safe middle grounds that work with most décor.

The hearth extension (the non-combustible floor extending in front of the fireplace opening) is governed by the Ontario Building Code — it typically needs to extend at least 16 to 18 inches in front and 8 inches on either side of the opening, depending on your appliance and the OBC requirements specific to your fireplace type. Many homeowners tile the hearth extension to match the surround for a seamless look — this is a smart choice in Ottawa because a matching tile surface is far easier to keep clean than a patchwork of different materials.

Important Warnings and Considerations

Do not assume your old brick surround can simply be tiled over without inspection. If the brick is loose, crumbling, or heavily deteriorated — common in Ottawa's freeze-thaw environment — you need to remove it and rebuild the substrate. A crumbling brick wall will cause the tile installation to crack and fail prematurely. Have a professional assess the condition before committing to the project.

Do not use regular porcelain tile in areas that will be exposed to direct heat from the firebox. Tile within 12 inches of the firebox opening should be rated for high temperature and set with high-temperature mortar — your installer should know this, but confirm it before work begins. Standard porcelain tile and regular thin-set mortar can crack or discolour from heat exposure.

Do not skip grout sealing. Porcelain tile itself is non-porous, but grout is porous and will absorb moisture, dust, and smoke residue. In Ottawa's damp winters, unsealed grout is a pathway for moisture to migrate behind the tile. Seal the grout with a penetrating sealer after the installation cures (typically 48 to 72 hours), and reapply every 1 to 2 years.

Ensure the installer uses an isolation membrane or waterproofing layer if any part of the surround extends to an exterior wall. This is not optional in Ottawa.

Next Steps

If your fireplace surround is a candidate for renovation — meaning the firebox and chimney are in good condition and the surround is purely decorative — tiling is one of the best investments you can make. Get at least three written quotes that specify the tile grade, installation method, grout type, sealing, and warranty. Ask the installer about their experience with fireplace tile work and ask for before-and-after photos

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How much does it cost to reface a fireplace with natural stone veneer in Ottawa?

A natural stone veneer fireplace refacing project in Ottawa typically costs **\$3,500 to \$8,500** for materials and labour, depending on the size of the fireplace, the type of stone selected, the complexity of the existing surround, and whether structural prep work is needed.

Here's why the cost varies so widely in Ottawa's market. A modest fireplace refacing — say, facing the firebox surround and a simple wall section in a single colour of stacked stone — might run \$3,500 to \$5,000 installed. A

larger project covering both the fireplace surround and the entire wall behind it, using premium stone varieties like real slate, granite, or reclaimed brick veneer, can easily reach \$6,500 to \$8,500 or more. Labour accounts for 40 to 50 percent of the total cost because stone installation is meticulous work — each piece must be cut, fitted, and mortared to create a finished appearance that will last decades in your home.

The substrate matters significantly. If your existing fireplace has a solid, sound masonry or drywall base, installation is straightforward. If the existing surface is damaged, uneven, or needs repair before stone can be installed, preparation costs add \$500 to \$1,500. Likewise, if you're removing old tile, brick, or plaster first, add another \$300 to \$800 in demolition and cleanup labour.

Stone selection dramatically impacts your budget. Manufactured stone veneer — engineered to look like natural stone but lighter and faster to install — runs \$4 to \$12 per square foot installed and is the most economical choice, typically falling into the \$3,500 to \$5,500 range for a standard surround. Real slate or granite veneer costs \$8 to \$20 per square foot installed and pushes projects toward the \$6,000 to \$8,500 or higher range. Reclaimed or antique brick veneer is premium material that can exceed \$10 per square foot installed. Stack stone, thin ledge stone, and tumbled finishes are popular in Ottawa homes because they create visual texture and complement modern and traditional aesthetic styles equally well.

One practical consideration specific to Ottawa: if your fireplace has an active wood-burning or gas insert, the stone installer must maintain proper clearances to heat sources — typically 6 to 8 inches of non-combustible material or proper air space around the firebox opening. This is not just a safety code requirement; it's essential for preventing heat damage to the stone and surrounding materials in your home. A professional stone installer familiar with WETT and OBC requirements will know these clearances, but always confirm this before work begins.

Timing matters in Ottawa's climate. Stone installation requires consistent temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius for adhesive and grout to cure properly, which means fireplace refacing work is best scheduled for late spring (May), summer (June through August), or early fall (September and early October). If you're planning a stone refacing, booking early in spring ensures contractors have availability and weather will cooperate with proper curing times.

Get three written quotes that specify the exact stone type and colour, total square footage to be covered, whether demolition of existing finishes is included, warranty on labour and materials, timeline, and cleanup responsibility. Many contractors will offer a small selection of stone samples so you can see colour, texture, and finish in your actual lighting before committing.

If you're ready to move forward and want to explore contractors experienced in natural stone fireplace refacing, you can browse local fireplace specialists through the **Ottawa Construction Network directory** to compare profiles and reach out directly.

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