

FROM HOUSE TO HOME  
ISSUE: SEPTEMBER 2006

## Fireplaces: Then & Now

text | [Amanda Daniels](#)

Published in [spaces](#) • [transformations](#)

# W



e love to ask the question: “What makes a room unforgettable?” Is it a color, a texture, a piece of art, or the architecture? Many designers would say that it’s all of these things together, along with something else: the unique application of style on a necessary or common object. Going beyond the ordinary--in a way that manifests one’s personality, heritage or philosophy--can leave the indelible impression of a uniquely “well-dressed” room. In each transformation, we have been stressing the importance of bringing style and beauty to functional or otherwise necessary home structures.

In this case, we address structures that appear in the main living space of most homes: the built-in bookcases and the fireplace often sandwiched in between. These large, bland necessities command center stage in the room, but get very little in the way of true transformative energy. In new construction, they typically come “standard,” and stay that way. In older homes, you may find something worth working with or salvaging, but most are begging for an inspired makeover.

### Problem

This newly constructed home has a large, open living area with the constant glow of natural light. Unfortunately, right after it’s completion, the main wall of this stately home wore two giant, white, built-in bookcases like an awful pair of Styrofoam wings! Plain, less than basic, and undeserving of their position flanking the fireplace, they needed to be transformed before they were used for the first time. The fireplace mantle is elegantly carved from wood with nice key accents, yet reaching above it two stories was a bland stretch of mocha-painted sheetrock. Not impressive for a home of this stature. The floor just beneath the fireplace had two shades of marble: green with creme streaks, but mostly mauve with earth tone accents. The bookcases were simply unacceptable, and the carefully carved fireplace really just needed something to look up to.

### Concept

» Advertisement «

Our team wanted to bring some authenticity and intimacy to the airy room. The expanse of sheetrock above

the fireplace was too “pre-fab” and sterile, therefore working with a rustic material in a warm neutral shade would create a more cozy atmosphere. The bookcases were so unflattering, that the homeowners urged us to tear them down and start again! However, a true transformation is the act of transforming something that is already there. Besides, the structures were solid and built with nice scale. With a “rustic neutral” going up the entire wall above the fireplace, the bookcases could really use a dark luster to anchor their positions and create some boundaries in the room.

### **Solution**

Our team made an amazing discovery while working on this transformation: it’s a product called “Weathered Stone.” Basically stretchy sheets of canvas with a unique plaster hand-finish that looks exactly like stone, or in some cases, leather, this product has so many applications that we had to restrain ourselves! Sharpening our focus, we cut the sheets into three separate sizes, like random pieces of stone, and adhered them with the special glue. Wrapping around corners was no problem, and the material is so forgiving that if a cut is slightly off and you have a mistake, you can stretch it, grout it, and forget it! In a few hours, we had what appeared to be a two story, 100% authentic stone fireplace with carved wood mantle. The special grout that comes with it can be dabbed on generously with fingertips, a spatula, or other tools, and the excess is just sponged off the finished sheets, giving it an even richer color tone.

Next we had to anchor our fireplace transformation with something gorgeous on each side. Using sheets of espresso-stained paneling, bead board and several styles of elaborate trim, we covered every single inch of the built-ins. The main surface of the units resulted from an exciting inspiration: the foyer floor. It’s an eye catching, marble and wood criss-cross pattern. We took that pattern, incorporated the green accent marble in front of the fireplace, and recreated it with the dark, espresso-stained wood. The homeowners laughed, because at this point, a simple coffee mug sitting on this luxurious surface looked gorgeous by comparison! We were definitely going in the right direction.

Installing small accent lights, on a dimmer switch, on the underside of each shelf allows the homeowners to showcase books, sculpture and art. Covering the cabinet doors with the same bead-board on the back of the unit and installing antique copper pulls gives the units a finished look. The interior sides of the units are the flat, stained paneling, the side trim has linear carving, and the top trim is elaborate dental molding. Glossy, dark and boasting green marble accents, the units now stand in sharp, gorgeous contrast to the rustic stone fireplace.

Next to the funny coffee-mug experiment and compliment, the best indicator of the homeowners’ satisfaction came when they enthusiastically agreed that this transformation added immense monetary value to their home, at a relatively low cost! However, designers will tell you that the real value comes in the everyday improvement in quality of life, as homeowners find themselves spending more time with family and friends in an environment that promotes warmth and happiness.

---

### ***About the Author:***



**Amanda Daniels**

As a mother, writer, and model, Amanda is based out of Atlanta, Georgia. She enjoys such varied activities as boxing, hockey, baseball, and writing fiction.

---

from house to HOME™ is a registered trademark of Publication Services of America, Inc.

©2007 Publication Services of America, Inc.