

4 reasons not to slap that flat-screen TV over your fireplace

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The practice of mounting a TV over a fireplace has somehow become extremely popular in the US. If you didn't do it yourself, chances are very good that you know someone who has. Who it was that thought up this terrible idea, and why they found it appealing in the first place are two mysteries that will likely follow me to my grave. But that's all in the past now. And since science has yet to crank out a functional time machine that would allow me to preemptively ground the idea before it ever took off, the best I can do at this point is try to save you, dear reader, from perpetuating this mistake.



Please don't mistake my contempt for TV's over fireplaces as an insult on the sensibilities of those of you who have them set up that way. It's not your job to know better. At some point between the time your [home](#) was built and that moment when your TV was mounted above the place where you *burn things* to generate *heat*, someone – an A/V installer, an ergonomics expert, an interior designer or electronics enthusiast – should have come along to tell you why it was a bad idea. Shame on them if they didn't. And tsk tsk if they did, but you didn't listen. Oh well, we all make mistakes.

What's important now is that we spread a little understanding regarding *why* sticking a TV above a fireplace is such a bad idea. There are actually several reasons – most of them objec-

tive – which make a compelling argument on their own, but when you add them all together, it almost seems silly that this fad ever came to be.

Fire + electronics = bad

Electronics don't care for heat, and they care for smoke even less. Ever seen the [windows](#) inside the car of a cigarette smoker? Unless the smoking driver is an equally habitual window washer, those windows are covered with a hazy film of filth. Exposed to the smoke of burning wood, the same film will build up on the components inside the cabinet of a TV. You may not see the particulate when you have a fire, but it is there (you can smell it). And once that particulate builds up, so does the heat generated by the TV.

Most electronic devices simply operate best and most reliably at lower temperatures. Beyond that, excessive heat can cause temperature-sensitive materials to degrade quickly, and conductive materials can even sprout little metal whiskers, causing shorts within the TV's circuitry.

[Televisions](#) already generate plenty of heat on their own, but by stifling the natural dissipation of heat with smoke, or introducing higher-than-normal levels of heat from below and behind the TV, you are significantly reducing your TV's lifespan at best, and a dooming it to sudden death at worst.

I spoke to Brian Sevigny, owner of Portland, Oregon-based A/V installation service, Digital Connex. He told me he gets asked to install TV's over fireplaces frequently. When I asked him if he encouraged or discouraged the practice, he was quick to jump in. "Discourage," said Sevigny firmly, "primarily because of the heat and the smoke."

It's a pain in the neck

Placing a TV above a fireplace moves the image you're trying to watch well above eye level. Think back to the last time you went to the movie theater and had to sit in one of the front three rows. Chances are you walked out of the theater with a stiff neck. Craning your neck into an unnatural position for any extended period of time is going to cause temporary discomfort, but doing so for even short periods of time day after day can have lasting effects, like chronic headaches.

... neck headaches become a problem as well when you start protruding your chin forward with that 'looking up' posture.



I spoke to Brad Simpson, a physical therapist and Clinical Director at Life's Work Physical Therapy. Brad's clinic treats patients with multiple types of musculoskeletal problems and is an expert in ergonomics, and he says that repeatedly sitting in an unnatural position will have lasting repercussions.

"It ends up putting your body in a position where your deep-neck stabilizers, muscle-wise - it's kind of like the core of your lower back, but up in your neck - aren't able to function. That position where you're having to push your head forward and up in order to look up at the television compromises those muscles" Simpson says. "Having your head forward like that causes a shearing force within your mid-cervical spine. That's where a lot of pain ends up coming from ... you lose the ability for your neck to stabilize."

And muscle pain isn't the only thing you can suffer from. "Headaches are a huge problem in our population, and neck headaches become a problem as well when you start protruding your chin forward with that 'looking up' posture." Simpson also indicated this poor posture leads to improper breathing, which causes us to over-use certain muscles which become yet another source of pain. My takeaway from our interview: It's not worth the pain.

Six degrees of separation from a beautiful picture

An LCD screen (which is [what you find on “LED” TVs](#)) is essentially made up of a bunch of tiny, shuttered windows. These windows open and close in order to let the TV’s backlight through, thus creating an image. The problem with these windows is that they have a very limited viewing angle. If you move too far left, right, up or down, you start seeing a fraction of the produced light (picture). The result is a washed out, lifeless picture – hardly what you had in mind when you laid out hard-earned cash for a new TV.

In some cases, Plasma [TVs](#) will lose brightness due to filters that are put into place by the manufacturer. And then there’s the issue of anti-glare treatments, which don’t work properly unless you view the TV from straight on. Besides, plasma TVs tend to run hot already, which takes us back to point number one.

Granted, a mounting bracket with a generous down-angle can accommodate for these these off-axis viewing issues to a certain degree, but that’s hardly attractive.

It’s just not cute

If you ask my wife, she’ll tell you I have the design-sense of a color-blind hippopotamus. Having accepted my total lack of skills in the decor department long ago, I reached out to Garrison Hullinger, owner of Garrison Hullinger Interior Design, and asked him if he had a TV mounted over his fireplace. “No, I live in a 100-plus-year-old home and would never put a TV in my formal living room over the fireplace,” Hullinger told me. “We also have a beach house with a fireplace in the formal living room, and choose not to hang a TV in that room.”

Maybe my ugly-radar isn’t so far off after all.

To be fair, it probably seems logical to mount a TV over the fireplace when you purchase a home where the preparations to do it have already been made. Hullinger told me about 25 percent of the homes he’s walked into had one location that was wired and ready for a TV over the fireplace. Installer Brian Sevigny echoed that estimation when he told me that almost all of the new construction he’s seen “will have electrical and coax connections already installed above the fireplace.”

“Because it’s there” may be a good enough reason to climb a mountain known for its death toll, but it’s not a good enough excuse to mount a TV over a fireplace. There are simply too many good reason *not* to do it. I understand that the fireplace often takes up prime real estate in our homes, but leave it to providing warmth and ambiance the way it was intended to, not as a pedestal for a piece of expensive electronics. It’s just not worth it.

Top image courtesy of [photosphobos/Shutterstock](#)

Country Hearth Toledo, Ohio Interjection

LCD, Plasma, and DLP TVs operate at threshold temperatures, meaning that if they are configured properly they operate at almost their Maximum temperatures. The manufacturers states that rarely are TVs configured properly for their maximum life expectancy—out of the factory, in fact they bet that none of them are. The only time a TV is configured properly is by a factory represented installation agency. This configuration is typically costly and the consumer rarely is willing to pay for it. If a TV is exposed to slightly elevated temperature it faults out, or shuts down for 10 to 15mins. Some manufacturers state that their units can fault-out 4 to 6 times, whereas 8 to 12 times is average for better brands. After that the TV is basically garbage, it is unrepairable. Good luck collecting on the warranty if they are aware it was mounted over a fireplace.

You Bought a High Definition TV?

If you mounted it over a fireplace it will not appear as High Definition if the vertical heat waves are Rippling over the face of the picture. Distortion—Yeh like the highway ahead on a hot summers day.

We called all of the major manufacturers of Flat Screen TVs, They won’t discourage you from mounting a Big Flat Screen TV above a fireplace, because it helps promote sales. But they are very resistant to honoring the warranty.

That’s our interjection of information we have found. We never promoted it, and never will.