

Campfires 101: Building Campfires for Balanced Living

By Christine Eisner

A campfire in your dining room? Actually, campfires exist when objects, routines, people and even animals come together to create a sense of well-being, comfort and community. By working them into the rhythms of day-to-day living, they have the power to encourage experiences that feed the soul – and you don't even need a match!

Just as you feel content and rejuvenated sitting before a crackling fire in the evening, you can recreate that same warm glow where you live and work. In nomadic cultures campfires were a necessity – a source of warmth and sustenance. Campfires are just as important today. In fact, I am convinced that creating – and experiencing – campfires may be the key to balanced living.

Creating a campfire is actually very easy. As with the wood-and-sticks variety, your efforts need to be intentional. Materials should be selected with care and placed so they feel “right.” Once lit, these campfires also need to be tended. All it takes is appreciating their presence so that they may energize daily living. So, what about creating some campfires in your life and home? Here are a few of the ones in mine:

An Easy Sit-Down Dinner

There is a reason that everyone always ends up in the kitchen. A kitchen is definitely a campfire. Unlike stand-up meals in front of the fridge and take-out containers alongside Facebook, a mealtime campfire is an invitation to change gears and savor, rather than just consume, food. Create a mealtime campfire by setting the table or countertop with placemats, flatware and napkins – and don't forget some candles, with matches in easy reach. Even a tray pre-set for one makes it easy to treat yourself to a gentle experience that can offset a chaotic day.



Taking a Break

Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.
- William Morris

Of course, not all seating areas are created equal. The ones that reign supreme emphasize personal experiences, instead of physical appearances. A punch list for a family-room campfire might include some grounding elements like lamps, a rug, end tables, pillows or a cozy throw, and some other things that “speak to you.” Add to these some nibble food, and this campfire becomes a key part of a lifestyle routine, instead of a “display” for passers-by. One of my favorite places for treasures that are both useful and beautiful is Scott Antique Market. This coffee table and lamps were Scott's purchases. The table consists of two vintage cigar palates stacked one on top of the other. Aesthetically, it fits perfectly into our lifestyle, and, functionally, there is surface area above and room below for magazines and games. (Eisner will lead a tour of Scott Antique Market on Nov. 7. For more information on how to sign up for this event, visit www.atlantaintownpaper.com.)



When Day is Done...

A front- or backdoor campfire has the power to completely transform the end of a chaotic day. Instead of returning to a dark house, why not create a campfire that welcomes you home? With a lamp on an entry table, casting its glow on photographs or other treasured objects, a landing place for your keys and perhaps an easy-to-use coat rack, this is a campfire that says “Home, sweet home.” By putting the lamp on a timer, and setting it to turn on at dusk and off a few hours later, this campfire practically tends itself.



Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is one of the ultimate campfires. While turkey is almost a given, it is the intentional and irresistible gathering of traditions, surroundings and people that creates memories that last a lot longer than the feast. Whether you are a family of one or 25, the key is to discover what is important to you and make that the center of your campfire. For some, it might be a food-laden dining table, decked out everything from the “fancy” china to crystal finger bowls. For others, it might be a multi-generational game of touch football, and for others, it might be taking in a walk or movie, followed by an encore of leftover turkey sandwiches.



Workplace

Who says work can't be enjoyable? A workplace campfire makes it easy to make the most of your time and talents. Bring in positive energy with a favorite lamp, music or some objects that inspire. If you've got flexibility, consider a change of locale. I do some of my best thinking and writing when I am in my courtyard, with my laptop, phone and paperwork close at hand. In the shade of a cherry tree and listening to the sounds of nature, the experience is enjoyable as well as productive.



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