



BURNING BRIGHT

USE THESE TECHNIQUES AND TIPS TO GET PROFESSIONAL-LOOKING FINISH ON YOUR OUTDOOR FIREPLACE

By Lachlan Jones

Photographs: Tony Lowe



Grind high points off the mould, then put a fine 100mm fibreglass mesh over the joins

Once this is applied, apply a flick coat (or scratch coat)

Use the flick-coat method only for a sand and cement system



In the previous issue of *The Shed* (Issue No. 76), we built a kitset block fireplace from Aztec Fires. This month, we're putting on the finishing touches.

A quick Google search will return thousands of finishing options for outdoor fires. From brick to timber to polished concrete, the options seem endless. It is, of course, ideal to tie the look of your fireplace in with the surrounding area, as the outdoor fire

will undoubtedly become your main entertaining area in the summer months and can't be beaten on a still winter's evening.

Regardless of the desired finish, you will need a few hands on deck to ensure levels are just right and that everything is in good shape from every angle. You'll only get one shot at finishing so it's certainly worth ensuring that you do it properly. ▶

“You'll only get one shot at finishing so it's certainly worth ensuring that you do it properly”



This is the sand cement used for the key coat only



Key-coat mix

Plaster perfection

Our owners of the newly built fire decided to go for a sand and cement plaster finish on their fireplace, so here we'll step you through what's involved and give you a few expert tips and tricks for the plastering process.

If you've decided a plaster finish is what you're after, there are two options to consider. One is a bagged product that has a fibre called 'Putz' in its mix. This makes it easier for the non-professional

to use because of its formula that uses fibres to help to bind the material as opposed to concrete, which can be quite tricky.

Always check your structure is level first — it may have sunk into the dirt as it has settled over the time since installation. Our one was 25mm different, so we were able to make up this difference with the plaster.

We used a steel trowel to apply our plaster. ▶

Plastering tips and tricks

- The structure needs to be dampened down with a hose prior to plastering.
- This kitset is pumice based, so it will suck the plaster onto it. Applying a masonry sealer first will make it easier for a handyman to stop the sucking of moisture and reduce work time.
- The plaster needs to be 25mm thick. To ensure consistency, the straight edge can come in handy to make up for any variation in moulds.
- The sand and cement system needs to be hosed with plenty of water the day after application to reduce or eliminate cracking.
- Fine-mesh coat requires resin.

“Always check your structure is level first — it may have sunk into the dirt as it has settled”



The six-inch broad knife used for mesh-coat application and the trowel used for sand and cement application



Left: Yellow plastic trowel for more accurate finishing
Right: Blue trowel used for a more rustic finish
Below left: Textured finishes can hide a multitude of sins



The scratch coat on perimeter around stainless and refractory components



Above and below: The flick coat can be applied with a cut down block layer's trowel





Above: Key coat ready for sand and cement

Below: Plaster needs to be applied to the corners to hold and form straight edges. For this to be achieved, a smooth piece of timber or aluminium should be used



Once applied and levelled we can then trowel on the mortar, being careful not to move the straight edge. It can help to have someone holding the straight edge. Now that the edge has been formed, you'll need to screed off excess plaster by shaving small amounts on a 45-degree angle upwards from the inside out to prevent the corners collapsing. It is preferable to use a slightly bowed piece of sharp-edge timber for this step (we used a 40x10mm piece of sharp-edged pine from Mitre 10)

Done and dusted

As you can see, the completed fire looks fantastic and does the job, just like a bought one. Finally, one vital part of finishing your plastered fireplace is that you really should paint the plaster after a couple of days. Some folks like that unpainted raw colour and look, but it will crack before you know it. Undercoating the plaster and giving it a couple of top coats with a good brand of concrete paint will ensure cracks are kept to a minimum and give you years of good looks.

Your outdoor fire will become a focal point for outdoor entertaining and your family and friends will no doubt enjoy hearing you describe your build process in excruciating detail every time you light it up.

“Your family and friends will no doubt enjoy hearing you describe your build process in excruciating detail”

The Shed thanks all those involved in this outdoor fire project and we are rather envious of the owners, the Lowe family, who tell us they are looking forward to many an enjoyable evening sitting in the garden watching the flames with a chilled beverage in hand. Nice. 📄

