

## Preserving Memories in the Wake of Loss: A Tribute to Hearths, Fireplaces, and Chimneys By Janet Grey

In the aftermath of the Eaton Canyon and Palisades fires, I feel a deep calling to connect with homeowners who wish to reflect on and document what remains of their homes. Through my photography and my work on Instagram through @housesofhollywood, I have long sought to honor the beauty and individuality of residential architecture, and nurtured a fascination with specific architectural elements and details, including chimneys. Now, in this moment of profound loss, my focus has shifted to preserving the spirit of these homes—particularly the hearths, fireplaces, and chimneys that still stand as symbols of resilience, hope, and the personal memories they hold.

Even when everything else has burned to the ground, the chimneys remain—silent sentinels, steadfast and enduring. They represent not just the architectural features of their day, but also serve as witnesses to the life, love, and memories that took place within the walls of each home. These chimneys have stood the test of time - through celebrations and challenges, momentous occasions and quiet moments, lives well-lived and lives that overcame unimaginable difficulties. They are monuments to history, to family, and to the human spirit.

To me, documenting these structures is a way of ensuring that these memories are not erased as though they never happened—not left to disappear into dust like the ashes piled around them.

A house may be gone, but its chimney stands as proof of the stories it held—proof that life was lived here, that love and laughter filled its rooms, that milestones and memories were created around the hearth.

The hearth, after all, has always been the heart of the home—a gathering place for warmth, connection and comfort. For centuries, fireplaces and chimneys have brought people together. From simple brick structures to the ornate Batchelder tile fireplaces, each one has its own character and personality, almost as if they could speak. Each one is a work of art, rendered more layered, textured, storied and complex by the profound intensity that it has just withstood. Not just functional; they are deeply symbolic, representing the warmth and security that every home aspires to provide and now also the strength of will required to endure even the fiercest challenges, and the conviction that one will stand through it all, survive and eventually thrive once again.

There is, nevertheless, a strange irony in the fact that a fireplace and chimney's purpose is to contain flames and remove smoke, while now they stand in the aftermath as some of the only things that were not completely consumed by them – the smoke and flames of a fire that literally consumed almost everything else. It's a poignant reminder of both vulnerability and strength, of how life can endure even in the face of destruction.

Through my Eaton Fire Chimney Project, I hope to honor these hearths, fireplaces and chimneys by capturing their beauty, resilience, and significance before they, too, are lost. My goal is not just to document these architectural remnants, but to preserve the memories they hold and the stories they tell.

My hope is that, in honoring these enduring structures, I will also honor those to whom they provided so much comfort—and that somehow, in turn, this will provide them with at least a small measure of much-needed comfort at this trying time.

To those who have lost their homes: if you (or someone you know) would like to share your story and/or be photographed, with or without your standing chimney, or if you would just like your chimney/home site documented, I would be honored to connect with you. I also invite homeowners to reach out if they'd like me to look for pre-fire photographs of their home to share with them — a small token to help preserve the life and love that filled those spaces.

This project is about remembrance, healing, and ensuring that the spirit of what was will not be forgotten. Together, we can honor these homes and the lives they sheltered, celebrating their history, their beauty, and their enduring place in our hearts.

With compassion,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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