



If your fireplace is a "zero-clearance" factory insert, you may find that the tile is actually just glued to gypsum drywall as in the picture above. Taking the tile off that is going to destroy the drywall, so can make your job easier by removing both simultaneously. Saw along the wall panel at the edge of the tile, and then pry the gypsum drywall/tile off together.

When you are done, it is likely that there will be thinset cement remaining on the surface and that must be chiseled off like the picture to the left. You don't have to make it perfectly smooth if you are tiling back over it. You will be spreading another coat of thinset over it, so some residue is permissible, but the more uneven the surface, the harder your tiling is going to be.

PREPARING RAW MASONRY

If you are one of the lucky few whose existing fireplace is amenable to the installation of the new materials directly over it, you have only a little work to do. As previously discussed, if necessary, you will need to knock off any high points. If we were installing tiles over this fireplace on the right, for example, we would need to knock off the front of protruding middle brick. Often, if the job is small, we'll simply use a hammer and cold chisel. If it's larger, we'll use a combination rotary hammer like the one shown in the Preparation section of this book. Smaller and lighter generally is an advantage here, so if you buy or rent one, get something small.



In order to ensure that there is nothing on the surface that would inhibit the bonding of our new surface; we typically clean the area to be covered with a very stiff wire brush. This effectively removes soot, effervescence, and surface scale. If the job is large, you can use a knotted wire cup brush mounted in a drill or portable grinder. I find it helpful to have a partner hold a vacuum hose to catch most of the dust.



INSTALLING CEMENTITIOUS BACKER BOARD

If your installation requires the installation of a backer board to provide a flat, bondable surface for your chosen material, your first task will be to get the backer board securely attached to the fireplace. If you have a bondable surface (unpainted masonry, for example), the backer board should be attached with thinset cement for the most secure results, with the exception of when you are using the backer board for crack isolation. You can use masonry screws, described below, to hold the backer board in place while the cement sets. See the tiling section of this book for information on mixing and using thinset cement.

A more common problem is that your existing fireplace doesn't provide a bondable surface, and so the backer board must be mechanically fastened. Keep in mind that, for most fireplaces, your