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How to shop for... BATHS

We talk tubs with Melbourne interior designer and bathroom specialist Carolyn Burns-McCrave.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS Be guided by your gut feeling. The key thing is to find a bath that's pleasing to your eye. If you look at it and think 'what a lovely shape' you're on the right track. Head to a showroom, leave your dignity at the door and hop in and try the bath; you'll soon get a sense of whether or not it's a contender.

SIZE & SCALE Scale can be tricky. My tip is that if a bath looks the right size in the showroom, it's probably too small. Once you've found a bath style you like, mark out its dimensions in your

bathroom so you get a true sense of the size when it's in position, keeping in mind that it's only a low element. If it's a freestanding bath, particularly a curved model, the eye will flow around it, into the corners of the room. A built-in bath hob with a drop-in bath is a different matter; you need to be conscious of size because there's a risk it could look bulky.

WHO IS USING IT You also need to think about the people who are going to be using the bath. How tall are they? What ages are they? Drop-ins

are brilliant if you have young children because there's plenty of room to line up shampoo and toys. You'll get years of good use out of a drop-in bath until they hit about seven and only want to shower.

TOP TUBS If you use your bath all the time it's worth investing in a quality model. I love stone-composite baths; they feel so lovely, you can't help but run your hands over them. If you're only putting in a bath so the room looks complete or you're covered for resale, an acrylic bath will do the job perfectly well and they're great at retaining heat. While quality can vary, fibreglass and steel are best for heat retention; acrylic and stone-composite tend to be on par; a double-walled acrylic is often your best bet for heat retention.

WEIGHTY ISSUE One thing you need to consider if you're opting for a stone-composite bath is its weight. The baths themselves can weigh about 120kg, then add in the weight of the water and one or two people. You may need extra engineering on upper floors.

PERSONAL BEST I'm a big fan of the classic slipper bath, where one end is slightly higher and supports you in a reclining position. This style of bath is brilliant in an awkwardly shaped room, where it's hard to achieve a good sense of symmetry. For a modern take on the slipper bath I love the Kado Arc.

ON TRENDS Aesthetics and comfort should be your top considerations when looking at baths; fortunately the choices on the market are better than ever. Because of their sculptural quality, freestanding baths are here to stay, but what we might see evolving is more colour and texture in their design. **H&G**

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