

# Symmetry

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## On Their Own

### Freestanding Tubs Make a Statement

*By Julie Catalano*

**Rub a dub dub, just look at these tubs.** Sleek, unique and standing on their own, they hold the promise of a soothing soak or invigorating scrub while taking luxury to a whole new level. Like a classic centerpiece on a perfectly set table, freestanding tubs are grabbing the spotlight as the ultimate focal point in bathroom design.

Stand-alone tubs might bring to mind the bare bones containers of the Old West or the Victorian-style claw foot, but today's iterations go far beyond that stereotypical picture, with a mind-boggling range of sizes, shapes, colors and materials. From vintage Old World to chic contemporary to classically roll-topped, made of everything from enameled cast iron to acrylic, to polished copper, stainless steel, stone such as granite or marble, all the way to polished woods and more.

"There are so many options it's unbelievable," says Mike Cottrell, outside sales account manager for Moore Supply Company's The Bathroom and Kitchen Showplace in Austin. "Freestanding tubs are definitely becoming more popular as people want to create more of a spa-like environment for a master bath."

Fortunately that doesn't mean you need a bathroom the size of a spa — but it doesn't hurt. The diversity of shapes and dimensions means that almost all but the smallest bathrooms can usually accommodate a stand-alone tub as an alternative to a build-in. "It does need a little niche," says Cottrell. "A spot where it can rest comfortably." For some that might mean building a deck, setting it in an alcove, or placing it underneath a window.

"You can get them as small as 60 by 32 inches," says Debbie Williams, showroom consultant at Economy Supply in Round Rock, "and still absolutely make a statement. Whether you have a single or double bathroom doors, when you open them, the first thing you're going to see is that tub."

Freestanding tubs also give designers more leeway in creative placement of other bathroom elements, often creating the illusion of more space.

Of course there are practical matters to consider, like plumbing. Where exactly does the water come from if a tub is smack-dab in the middle of a room? Same place it always has — from pipes coming up through the floor or wall and attached to faucet fixtures. "If you place the tub against the wall, you can have a wall-mounted tub filler which saves you from having all those pipes showing," says Marla Jaffe, sales designer, plumbing/cabinet design at KIVA Kitchen & Bath in Austin. And forget ugly or unsightly hardware ruining the aesthetics of a freestanding tub. "There are nice-looking metal pipes that come up through the floor," often hidden by a deck or platform. For a real wow factor, there are ceiling mount tub fillers like Laminar Flow by Kohler® that deliver a clear column of water from above or the side.

Left: A custom-made Resin Tub with fiber optic lighting from Audino Construction, Inc.

Top Right: A Stainless Steel Elliptical Tub from Diamond Spas.

Bottom Right: The Drayton Collection from Victoria + Albert Baths.

Bottom Left: The Old World Bathtub from Stone Forest, available in Carrara marble, limestone, papiro cream, multi-color onyx, honey onyx and travertine romano.





Top Left: The Abrazo by Kohler®

Top Right: Laminar Flow by Kohler®

Bottom Left: BainUltra's Essencia ThermaSens™

And that brings us to budget. Yes, there's a price to be paid for all of this fabulous form and function — but that doesn't mean you'll get soaked. Says Williams, "When I start talking to people about Victoria + Albert tubs" — a British company featuring the ENGLISHCAST® finish made of volcanic limestone with high grade resins — "people will say they can't afford it. But they often don't cost any more than a cast iron tub and I think you're getting a lot more bang for your buck." Size and materials obviously play a part: A 72-inch tub is more than a 60-inch; polished marble or mahogany will take the cost way up from a lower-end \$1800 acrylic to upwards of \$3000-\$5000 and beyond (the Abrazo by Kohler® is around \$7200). Plumbing budgets can be controlled by the placement of the tub against a wall instead

of in the middle of the room. "You can order tub spouts in lengths of nine to twelve inches, and then you just have your trim plate on the wall to turn the water on," adds Williams. One "bell and whistle" that takes a freestanding tub over the top is the addition of an air tub, what Jaffe calls "the wave of the future." Air tubs use "the same kind of motor as a blow dryer, but bigger." Warm air hits the water, creating an all over gently simmering, bubbling effect instead of the sometimes forceful jets of a whirlpool. "Much more relaxing," says Jaffe, "and you can use bubble bath and bath oil, because there are no pipes or things to get gunked up. You're more tempted to stay in the tub longer and relax." Canadian company Bain Ultra features the ThermaSens™ bath system with three distinct therapies: aromatherapy (scent), thermotherapy (heat) and chromatherapy (colored lights) to create especially soothing effects.

Before you completely zone out, the experts offer a few words of advice on choosing a freestanding tub. "Talk to your

contractor and make sure you discuss the full scope of the price difference between a freestanding and a build-in," says Mike Cottrell. "A plumbing bid may come back a little higher than you planned to spend, but oftentimes in the overall scheme it can be close to a wash because you're spending less on doing a tile or granite backsplash." Debbie Williams adds, "Most people are thinking cast iron, but that can weigh upwards of 300 pounds and it pulls warmth from the water trying to warm itself. Acrylics are warmer." Finally, says Jaffe, the waste (drain) and overflow (the circular disk at the top) is often a separate plumbing piece. "If the company you're buying the tub from offers that, you won't have any problems with proper fit." Once you've handled all the practical matters, you can sink in, relax and soak up the luxurious ambience of your new freestanding tub. You've earned it. ■

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## RESOURCES

**Moore Supply Company**  
512.454.4619  
[www.bkshowplace.com](http://www.bkshowplace.com)

**Economy Supply Co.**  
512.244.3326  
[www.economysupplytexas.com](http://www.economysupplytexas.com)

**KIVA Kitchen & Bath/McNairs Appliance Gallery**  
512.454.4526  
[www.kivahome.com](http://www.kivahome.com)