

KITCHENS & BATHS



Rethinking the Kitchen

Fearless design decisions that yield amazing results

PAGE 24

• Kitchen lighting strategies

PAGE 38

• Healthier building materials

PAGE 28

• Installing glass shower doors

PAGE 44

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Bathtub Buyer's Guide

Get the perfect tub for any bathroom

BY PATRICK McCOMBE



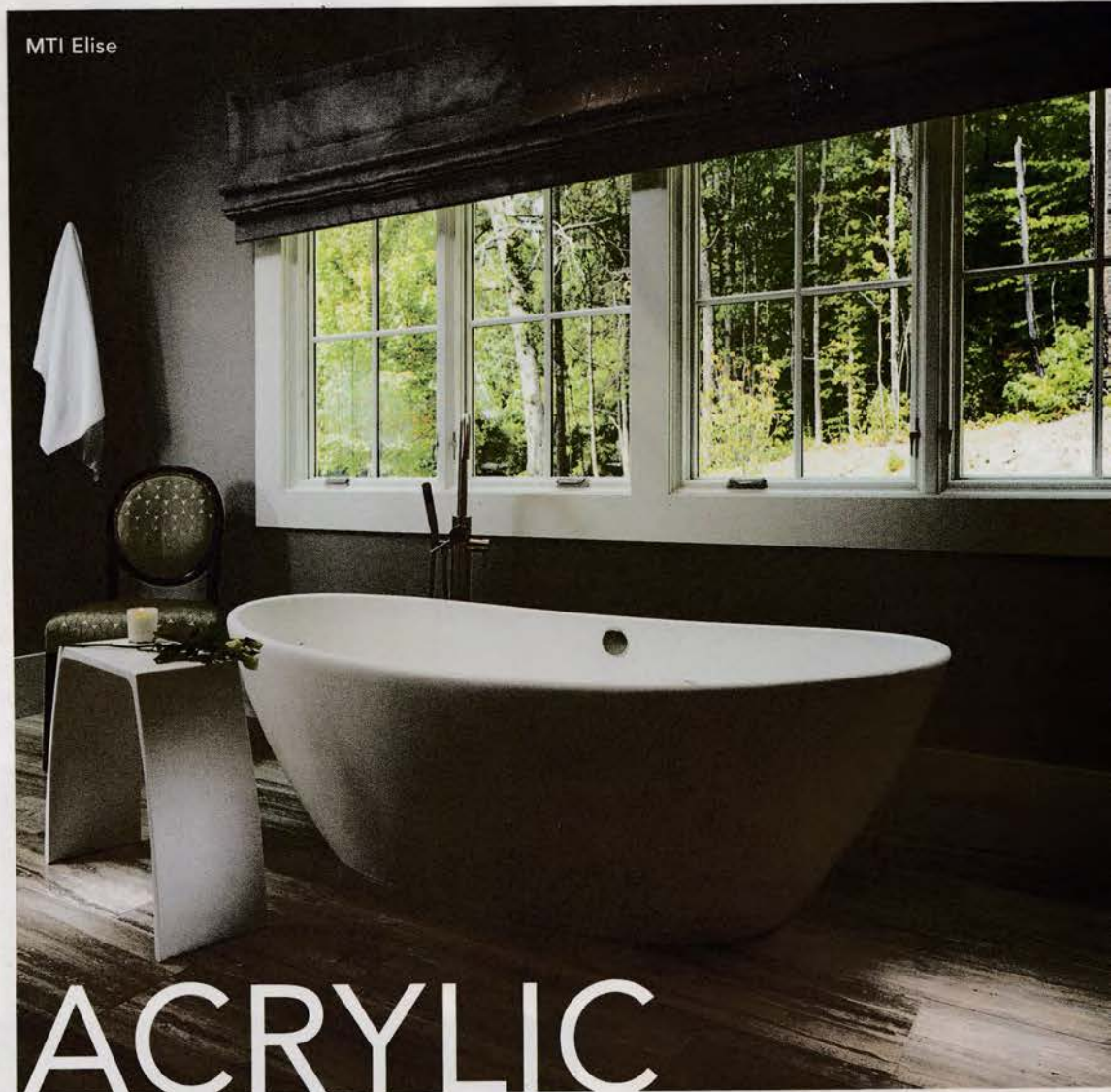
Kallista
P50062-00-0

After a long day, it's hard to imagine anything more relaxing than a soak in a hot bathtub. But figuring out what kind of tub to buy can be challenging, with so many materials, shapes, and sizes to consider. The myriad of options can make the decision process overwhelming, and the stakes are fairly high, because this is a big-ticket item. A recent Home Advisor report says it costs between \$1000 and \$5200 to replace or install a new bathtub. Knowing what materials are available and the features and construction to look for will ensure you don't make a very expensive mistake and can have the most worry-free soaks possible. □

Patrick McCombe is senior editor.

5 TYPES OF TUB

Any discussion about a bathtub starts with what it's made of. Although you can get bathtubs made from copper, stainless steel, stone, and even wood, mainstream tubs are made from one of five materials: acrylic, cast iron, cultured stone, fiberglass, or steel.



1 Acrylic tubs can be virtually any shape, and they can look good for a long time because their color goes all the way through the plastic resins that they're made from. Acrylic is easy to clean and is warm to the touch, so you can lean back for a soak right away without recoiling from contact with a cold surface. A light scrubbing with a liquid nonabrasive cleaner will usually remove hard water and other stains.

PROS

- Available in a wide variety of shapes and styles
- Impact and fade resistant
- Often available with matching shower surrounds

CONS

- Difficult to repair
- More susceptible to stains than porcelain
- Inexpensive versions flex during use

AVERAGE COST

\$400 to \$800 (with some up to \$5000 or more)





Kohler Artifacts
K-21000-P5-0

CAST IRON

2 The durability of cast iron is unsurpassed because of its ultrathick porcelain finish. This layer is thicker than the enamel on steel tubs because cast iron is a rougher base. It's also comfortable for bathing because the thicker composition keeps water hot longer. Perhaps the biggest downside to cast iron is its weight, which makes installation more difficult in many instances.

PROS

- Available in many sizes and shapes
- Durable high-gloss finish
- Retains heat well

CONS

- Although durable, the finish can be chipped or scratched
- Heavy
- More expensive than other standard-size tubs

AVERAGE COST

\$400 to \$800 (with some up to \$5000 or more)

3 Available in many colors and patterns, a cultured stone tub can be a spectacular focal point. The crushed stone and resin composition is stylish, but it's expensive and heavier than all other mainstream bathtub materials, which can be a problem in remodels and even in new homes if its significant weight (hundreds of pounds) is not considered. Most wood-framed floor systems will need structural upgrades to resist sagging.

PROS

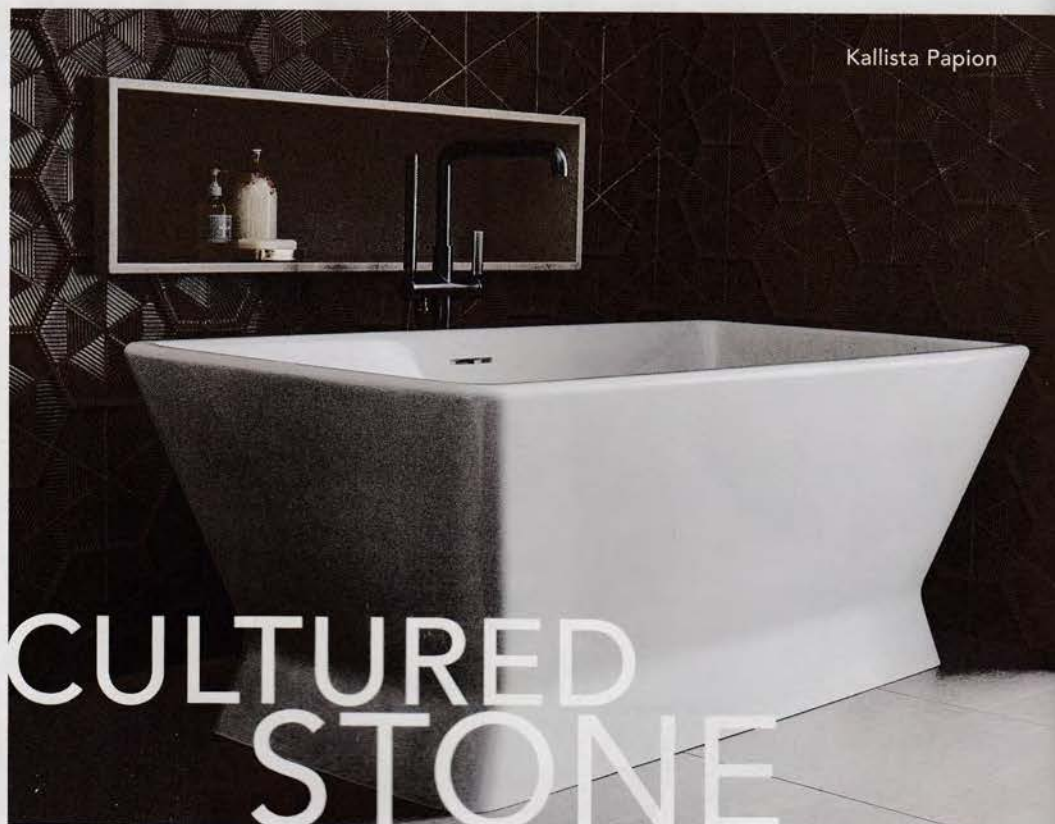
- Luxurious focal point
- Many colors available
- Retains heat well

CONS

- May require structural upgrades
- Very heavy
- Expensive

AVERAGE COST

Starts at \$1000



Kallista Papion

CULTURED STONE

Installation options

There are six basic styles of bathtub. Virtually all tubs require a 2-in. waste line and either 1/2-in. or 3/4-in. supply lines. The larger-diameter supply pipes will fill the tub faster, but you'll have to flush twice the volume of cool water before the hot water starts flowing, unless the water heater is close by or a hot-water recirculation system is installed.

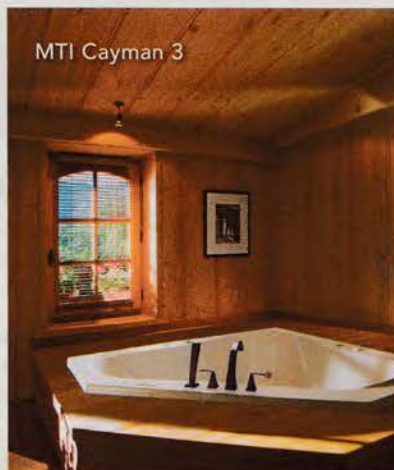
Alcove and corner



Duravit Daro
700027

ALCOVE Placed within three walls and allowing access from only one side of the tub, alcove installations are an easy way to get a tub/shower combination. The two most common alcove tub sizes are 60 in. by 30 in. and 60 in. by 32 in. These are the rough-in dimensions of the tub—a typical 60-in. by 32-in. tub will have a smaller bathing well, about 55 in. by 24 in. at the top, narrowing to 45 in. by 22 in. at the bottom. Thirty-in. tubs have an even smaller bathing well (55 in. by 22 in.), which many adults find too narrow to be comfortable.

CORNER As the name implies, a corner tub installation locates the tub in a 90° corner formed by intersecting walls. Corner tubs can be freestanding, drop-in, or undermount. Installing a corner tub is virtually the same as installing a tub elsewhere in the bathroom, but because the arrangement leaves less room for the tub filler, you have to carefully consider the placement of the filler and the hot and cold taps, so you don't have to crawl over them as you get in and out of the tub.



MTI Cayman 3



Duravit Starck
700012

Freestanding and soaking

FREESTANDING Prior to the building boom following World War II, nearly all bathtubs in the U.S. were freestanding. Freestanding tubs can be fully exposed with finished flooring underneath or they can be skirted with panels made from virtually any water-resistant material. Freestanding tubs are most often cast iron or acrylic, but they can also be made from more exotic materials like cultured stone, copper, and even wood. Both waste and supply lines that connect to freestanding tubs are often on display, so their aesthetics should be considered as part of the design.

SOAKING Soaking tubs are often freestanding, but they're usually deeper, wider, and longer than conventional freestanding tubs. Common lengths are 6½ ft. or 7 ft., allowing even the tallest family members to recline comfortably—some tubs can even accommodate two adults. The tubs themselves weigh hundreds of pounds or more, not including the water, so most wood framing will require structural upgrades to deal with the weight.

Drop-in and undermount

DROP-IN This type of bathtub sits on top of a wood-framed structure that is built ahead of the tub installation. Come installation time, the tub is lowered into place and the plumbing connections are completed. The tub filler is often mounted on top of the deck, but it can also emerge from the floor or from an adjacent wall. Platforms can be completely freestanding or attached to one or more walls. They can also be installed in a corner.

UNDERMOUNT This is similar to a platform installation in that it is installed in a site-built enclosure that's constructed ahead of the tub installation. Once the tub is in place, the rim of the tub and the top of the enclosure are covered by a deck top made of stone, tile, or other waterproof material. The tub itself is supported by the floor system. The tub filler can be mounted on the deck or it can emerge from an adjacent wall or from the floor.



BainUltra Amma 7242



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