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# The Ultimate Bathtub Guide

*Clear advice for  
how to choose  
the best tub type  
for you*



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# Get Informed

## The Pros and Cons of a Freestanding Soaking Tub vs. an Alcove Bathtub



### Why do bathroom remodeling projects (and products) have to be so doggone complicated?

If you're remodeling, you may be struggling attempting to figure out the following:

- Should I choose a shower or bathtub? Or better yet, can I fit both?
- If I decide to use a tub – is it better to select a freestanding soaking tub which can go anywhere, or an alcove tub which is neatly tucked in between framed walls?
- What are the pros and cons of freestanding soaking tubs (which is open on all sides) vs. alcove tubs (which are framed in between 2 or 3 walls)? Which will serve my family best?

And while I'd love to tell you there was one only one right answer (just like your boring 7th grade Geometry teacher used to say), when it comes to the debate over freestanding soaking tubs vs. alcove tubs, there's no choice which is right for everyone.

Your top selection will be driven by the functionality (and fashionable look) you want from your bathtub. And this will depend on who(m) will be using the tub and the decor you want.

In this article my goal is simple. I want to present the pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages) of freestanding soaking tubs and alcove tubs so you can come to the right selection for you. At the end, I'd love to hear which option you feel is best for your situation and why.

**So, with this goal in mind, let's first begin with the pros of free standing bathtubs.**

## The Pros of Freestanding Soaking Tubs

### 1 They look elegant

When you step into a bathroom with a freestanding soaking tub (whether it's made of acrylic, solid surface, cast iron, copper, to name just a few), your instant reaction will be WOW!

It doesn't matter if you're looking at an acrylic slipper bathtub with a high back for comfort, or a vintage cast iron clawfoot tub which reminds you of simpler days gone by, you have no choice but to be impacted by the look of a freestanding tub. They make a statement. THEY ARE NOT TO BE DENIED!



### 2 Freestanding tubs make your bathroom look larger and don't create a 'boxed in' feeling

Since freestanding tubs are not built into a corner or alcove, you can see around all sides of them. They literally show more of your bathroom floor and make a bathroom (visually at least) – live larger.

Even a small bathroom will feel more open, and you won't feel confined to a tight alcove when bathing.





### 3 Freestanding tubs are more comfortable than alcove tubs

Since freestanding tubs are approximately 50% deeper than alcove tubs (the height around the sides ranges from 23" to 44" for a freestanding tub vs. 12" to 18" for alcove tubs) they hold more water. In addition, they provide more inside space (a big bonus for the big and tall people in your family). There's even designs which work for 2 people at the same time (OK – that sounds like fun).



### 4 They come in (seemingly) limitless designs, shapes and sizes and work with any décor

Whether you're looking for a classic and elegant copper slipper tub for a traditional home, a white porcelain-covered vintage clawfoot tub, or an edgy contemporary acrylic soaking tub for a modern home, you'll find a wide range of design options.



With a freestanding tub – there's no reason to settle for plain and boring.

### 5 You can place a freestanding tub anywhere

Since all sides of a freestanding tub are finished, you have the flexibility of placing them ANYWHERE in the room. Perhaps you want the tub inside an enclosed shower and wet room area. Or perhaps you want to make the tub the focal point of your room and put it smack dab in the middle. Or perhaps you want to place the tub next to a window to enjoy the views of the city, or your rural landscape while sipping your wine.



You have perfect flexibility on where to put this tub (and if you ask your supplier for a free tub placement template, this will make the tub location decision even easier).

### 6 It'll give your home a fresh look and add to its resale value

If you walk into your 1980's bathroom and are staring at a Jacuzzi tub which hasn't worked in decades, has steps to climb to get in, tile grout joints which has seen it's better days (years ago), and everything about it says OLD, OLD, OLD... raise your hand. And if you want a good laugh, check out this 'wonderful' Jacuzzi tub project below!

And there are more of these out-of-date whirlpool tubs from the 1980's and 1990's than you can 'shake a stick at' (as your grandmother used to say). And the bottom line is...

THEY LOOK OLD. THEY LOOK UGLY. THEY HURT YOUR ABILITY TO SELL YOUR HOME.

And if you want an updated look, a smart way to get it is with fashion-forward freestanding tubs. You'll see them everywhere in Interior Design magazines. They're smart and they're current.



### 7 There's a wide range of material options to choose from

If you love the antique feel of a cast iron clawfoot tub, or the durability of a colored solid surface bathtub, or the sleek (and cost-effective) elegance of an acrylic freestanding tub, these are all possibilities.

There are so many material choices in freestanding tubs (including wood and copper as well) – you won't have trouble finding your favorite material made in a freestanding tub (although I'll warn you, prices will vary greatly).

**And now – to be balanced, let's look at the disadvantages ('er cons) of freestanding soaking tubs.**



### The Cons of Freestanding Soaking Tub

#### 1 They're more expensive than alcove tubs

Even though you have to add the cost of framing, alcove tubs are still significantly less expensive than a freestanding tub. And if money is tight, a freestanding tub will not be the right option to save a few bucks on your remodel.



## 2 They can be heavy and require additional support for your floor

If you choose a solid surface or cast iron freestanding tub you need to know they're heavy and can require additional support underneath your subfloor. However, if you want a freestanding tub, but don't want to add structural reinforcements, a smart alternative is an acrylic freestanding bathtub.



## 3 Storage for your soap and shampoo can be a challenge

Since most freestanding tubs (except those with deck mount faucets) have no ledges around the unit, you'll need to use other strategies for your soap and shampoo storage (like rolling caddies or shelves or recessed niches if you've placed your tub close to a wall).

## 4 It's hard to bathe small children or for someone with mobility problems to use

Since the sides of freestanding can range from 23" to 44" high, it's impractical to bathe a small child in this tub and it's difficult for a family member with mobility issues to use.

## 5 Showering in a freestanding tub isn't simple

Even though it's possible to find a 'shower conversion kit' to use a freestanding tub as a shower, it's not the simplest, nor most practical thing to do. You will inevitably get more water on the floor with this make-shift shower arrangement than you will with a built in alcove tub which does double-duty as a shower.

## 6 Installing safety grab bars isn't practical

If you put your freestanding tub in the middle of the room, there's literally NO PLACE for a grab bar. And if you place the tub close to a wall, you can get a grab bar on one surface, but this placement won't provide additional support when getting in (or out) of the tub.

**OK, – so now that we've looked at the advantages and disadvantages of freestanding bathtubs, let's turn our attention to the pros and cons of built in alcove tubs.**

## The Pros of a Built-In Alcove Tub

### 1 Alcove tubs are less expensive than freestanding tubs

Since alcove tubs aren't as big, or finished on all sides, or made with more exotic materials (which can be the case with freestanding tubs), you'll find they're significantly less expensive (even with the required framing) than a standalone tub.

### 2 They use less water

While alcove bathtubs can vary greatly in height (with 14" to 16" heights being most popular), depth and design – what's universally true is they'll hold significantly less water than a freestanding soaking tub. This is an advantage if you're focused on conserving water.



### 3 It can be used as a combination shower and tub

This can be a H-U-G-E benefit of an alcove tub. Since your bathroom may be tighter than you'd like (and if you're always spewing some 'choice words' when running into your partner while getting ready you know what I mean) – being able to get 'double-duty' out of your tub can be essential.

And if you have a small bathroom, it's often impractical to have both a tub and a shower. So, it's nice to know when you use an alcove tub – it can double as a shower. It's a BOGO special!



### 4 Storage comes 'standard.'

If you're like most people, you don't have enough space for soaps, shampoos, face creams, loofas, you name it. And with the freestanding tubs discussed earlier you have limited (to no) space for your supplies.

With an alcove tub – on the other hand – there's a built in ledge for storage. And while this can be helpful, you'll want to keep in mind it (likely) won't eliminate the need for other shelves or even a larger horizontal recessed niche like you'll see below.





## 5 An alcove tub is safer to enter

Since an alcove tub is usually 14" to 16" tall (generally smaller than a freestanding tub), it's shorter – and simpler to enter. Now, if you're dealing with a family with mobility issues it still may be better to go with a low profile shower, but if you do need the tub function, a lower 'skirt' height ('er the distance to step into the tub) is smart.

## 6 An alcove tub is simpler to clean

Since you don't have to bend over as far to clean the bottom of the bathtub, (if you're the one lucky enough – sarcasm intended – to be 'charged' with cleaning your tub), an alcove tub will be the less painful option to clean.

And certain clawfoot freestanding tubs can be the worst of all because you have to 'attempt' to clean under the tub and around the 'feet' of the tub as well as cleaning the bottom of the tub.

## 7 You can add bypass tub doors or walk in tub glass to keep the water inside

Since alcove tubs are butted to one or more walls, you can add a bypass glass tub door or walk in glass tub enclosure. This will keep the water inside – where you want it to be. With a freestanding tub there's not an effective way to use glass to keep water contained.



## 8 Alcove tubs are more space efficient

Since standard alcove tubs are stocked in sizes as small as 60" x 30" and are tucked neatly against the walls (and you don't need space for a tub filler which is common with freestanding tubs), an alcove tub uses less room than a freestanding tub.

## 9 Ability to keep the existing drain location in a tub replacement project

Since alcove replacement tubs are made with right and left hand drains 8" to 9" from the wall – they have the same 'footprint' as the old tubs they're replacing. This will get rid of your worry about a costly plumber visit to reposition the drain. When it comes to smaller standalone tubs (which can fit in an alcove), many have center drains which requires additional plumbing materials and labor to move the drain.

**OK, so now let's look at the disadvantages ('er cons) of alcove tubs.**

## The Cons of a Built-In Alcove Tub

### 1 Alcove tubs need to be placed against the walls

Since alcove tubs are (by their definition) placed up against the wall, they don't give you the (nearly) unlimited placement options of a freestanding bathtub.

### 2 These tubs aren't exciting. They don't make a 'statement!'

Don't you hate it when 'fancy-schmancy' designers talk about 'making a statement?' And while we may laugh at their 'more-stylish-than-thou' attitude, they are experienced with products which turn a boring, outdated bathroom into a spa experience.

And while alcove tubs do a wonderful job when it comes to 'function' (they're compact, and double as a shower etc.), when it comes to fashion, they're woefully inadequate. Sizes, colors, and designs are limited. They're simply a functional tub built into a corner or a 3-sided alcove. Now, you can make them more exciting with jets, but then you're adding a lot of cost and complexity.

### 3 Alcove tubs aren't available in as many material options

Since alcove tubs are 'tucked away,' and not considered a key bathroom design element, you'll find them available in fewer exotic materials than with freestanding tubs. They're more about function than fashion.

### 4 You may need to build framed walls to encase your alcove tub

If you don't already have finished walls for your alcove tub, you'll have extra costs create them. In a small remodel, this cost can be more significant than you think.

## Feel like you understand what you need in your shower replacement kit?

**I hope I didn't give you TMI (Too Much Information) by listing the advantages and disadvantages of these 2 types of tubs, but I want you to be informed as possible before you spend your hard-earned money on the wrong product. However, now I'd love to hear from you. So, which choice works best for you – the freestanding tub or the built-in alcove tub?**

**And if you're still having a hard time deciding, or need prices on these options, let one of the Bathroom Product Specialists at Innovate Building Solutions (OK – I'll admit that's my company) help you. Call 877-668-5888 or click for a Free Design Consultation.**

**And if you're looking for a contractor to help with your project, ask for a referral for a company in our installing dealer network.**

# Get it Right

## 13 Common Bathtub Remodeling Mistakes You DO NOT Want to Make



If you've decided to replace your existing tub in your bathroom remodel and you're already getting overwhelmed with too many choices, raise your hand. It can be hard to wrap your arms around questions like the following:

- Should I choose an alcove tub, a freestanding tub, or a drop in bathtub?
- How can I make sure the tub will fit my space, or even make it up the stairs, around the hallway and through the door?
- How can I make sure the tub will be safe, and roomy, and give me the option for a tub/shower combo?

- What tub material should I choose? I know fiberglass, acrylic, cast iron and solid surface are all options – but I'm not sure which is best, or which I can afford.
- How can I make sure the tub will stand the test of time, won't need to be replaced in a few short years, and won't leak?

Since a failed tub (especially alcove and drop-in tubs) can also result in needing to replace your surrounding walls and tub deck materials, a bad selection can be very costly indeed.

**So, what can you do to keep yourself out of (or into) hot water (sorry about the bad tub pun there!)? Read 13 common bathtub remodeling mistakes so you're NOT the victim of any of these problems yourself. Let's check them out.**

### 1 You buy a 'bargain-basement' tub, only to pay dearly later

I don't know how many people remember the Fram Oil Filter commercial in the early 1970's with the slogan you can "pay me now or pay me later."

And when it comes to bathtub replacements this is one area being a 'bargain-basement' shopper can come to bite you in the tail (and cause you to 'pay more later'). You see not all material selections will 'live' the same. And if you're thinking about an alcove tub – choosing the low-cost fiberglass unit as your material of choice can be 'penny-wise, pound foolish' as my dad used to say.

Since everything (wall surrounds, glass tub doors) is built 'over' the flanges of an alcove tub, if you choose a cheap fiberglass unit which gets stained, or cracks, and can't be cleaned, you're 'stuck with it' until you tear the entire bathtub enclosure out. And this can be a painful fix.

In addition, cast iron tubs – which are prone to chipping can be problematic as well.

Safer options are acrylic and solid surface. Quite frankly, they look better, longer.

### 2 You buy a tub which is too low – or too high

Just like Goldilocks needed the bowl of porridge which was 'just right,' you too need the height of your tub to be 'just right' for the people in your home. You need it to be easy to use.

For example, if you want a tub primarily for long soaks to unwind after a long day and climbing into a tub isn't hard for you to do, then a 23" to 28" freestanding tub will be the ticket.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a tub to bathe the kids (and you're short yourself), then an alcove tub with a shorter height (say 14" to 18") will be more fitting.

Pay attention to the height of the tub deck to make sure it'll work the way you want it to. While a 'fashionable freestanding tub' can be all the rage, it's useless if it's too tall (and isn't safe) for you and your family.



### 3 You buy a tub which doesn't fit in the space, or you can't get it in the door (oops!)

While some tubs can be light and simple to maneuver, others can be a bear to get up the stairs, around the hallway, through the door (hopefully) and set in place. And especially if you're talking about a cast iron or solid surface tub, these bad-boys are uber-heavy.

So, what can you do to make sure you don't mess up and buy the wrong sized tub which won't fit in its intended spot- or one which you can't navigate up the stairs and through the door? Here's 2 things:

Know ALL the dimensions and have a game plan (before slapping your credit card down) to make sure the route you'll use to get the tub into the bathroom will be practical.

After you've gotten down to the studs use a tub template (especially in the case of a large freestanding tub) to see how it'll live in your bathroom. Some suppliers will even provide tub templates for free.

### 4 You don't think about drain location and don't (really) know your right (hand drain) from your left

OK - I don't mean to be mean or rude here, but some people don't know their right (hand drain) from their left (hand drain). Then, they buy the wrong tub.

Simply put when a tub has a 'left hand drain' the orientation is from the outside of the tub looking in. While this may seem like a 'funny' mistake to make, it's not when you're looking at forking over a restock and/or shipping fee to send back the wrong tub. This mistake is more common than you think.



### 5 You don't ask about the warranty or online reviews

It's one thing to replace a stand alone tub which failed - because it's 'sitting alone' and isn't 'surrounded' (literally) by the other elements of the tub/shower.



It's quite another thing to replace, not only a failed tub, but also (by extension) the wall surrounds and your glass shower door will need to be removed and replaced. And if you choose an alcove tub (which is the most common tub out there) - you'll have a V-E-R-Y expensive redo if the tub cracks or just looks stained and dirty after a few years and your spouse wants it OUT ASAP!

It's for this reason, I'd recommend asking about the warranty of your tub and read reviews. Better tubs will have 10 or even 25 year warranties and will have upbeat reviews to give you piece of mind you've made a sound choice.

### 6 Not considering if you need the tub to pull 'double-duty' for you

If you have a small bathroom and need a tub AND shower combo - however, you also love the elegance of a freestanding tub - I'd warn you to stay away from the temptation of buying this type of tub.

Sure, there are 'conversion kits' to allow a freestanding tub to be used as a shower - but they're simply not as practical (nor cost-effective) as your 'run-of-the-mill' alcove tub.

I'd recommend if you need the 'double-duty' function of a tub and shower - don't mess around - get the 'plain-old' alcove tub and call it a day. It'll not only be space-efficient, but it'll do a good job keeping water inside the tub and not on your bathroom floor.





## 7 Will my butt (or someone else's in my family) fit in this doggone tub?

OK – I could make this point with more P.C. (politically correct) language, but I think you get what I mean. If the inside of the tub (also called the 'bathing well') is too small, it'll be tough for the big and tall members of your family to enjoy using it. While most people pay attention to the 'exterior dimensions' of a tub (let's say it's a 60" x 30" unit) – what you also need to consider are the interior dimensions (also referred to as the 'bathing well').

Don't get a tub only to find out (after it's too late) it's too doggone small to enjoy soaking in it!



## 8 What's the extra costs I need to budget (beyond the tub)?

While it's always smart to pay attention to the initial purchase costs of a tub – it's not (by any stretch of the imagination) the only cost you have in a bathtub replacement project.

For example, if you're considering a freestanding tub, you'll also (unless you use the more cost-effective deck mount faucets) have the cost of a tub filler outside the tub. And tub fillers aren't 'cheap dates.'

And if you're thinking about a drop in tub, you'll have the cost to frame and cover the surrounding deck.

And if you're installing a new alcove tub – where no walls exist today – you'll have the cost to frame and finish these walls.

So – when choosing any type of tub, make sure you not only pay attention to the cost of the tub, but also to the 'entire cost' of installing the tub and plumbing fixtures which supply the water.



## 9 Does the tub has a slip resistant bottom surface?

Not everyone in your household is as steady on their feet as they were in their high school years. And too many of us AARP eligible folks can be saddened by this reality (and NO, I have never gotten my AARP card – even though I'm eligible, because I'm still trying to pretend, I'm too young for that!).

No matter if you're eligible or not for the 'congratulations-I'm-officially-old' AARP card, you'll want to make sure your tub bottom is safe. A way to do this is to ask if it's an anti-slip tub meeting ADA (Americans with Disability Act) and ANSI (American National Standards Institute) requirements.



## 10 Will your bathroom floor need to be reinforced due to your tub material choice?

A large solid surface freestanding tub or a cast iron tub (before you fill it with water) can put A LOT of weight on your floor (and 500, 600 and 700 lbs. for a solid surface tub is not out of the question). And after you've added 50, 60 or 70 gallons of water in (and 70 gallons of water weighs another 584 lbs.), you're north of 1,000 lbs. And this is even BEFORE one or more people climb in.

That's A LOT of weight!

And while I'm not an engineer (and my Kappa Sigma fraternity brothers at Carnegie-Mellon would argue I'm not smart enough to be one either) if I'm using a large solid surface freestanding tub, I'd make sure BEFORE the tub was put in the joists were sized to support this weight. Seek the input of a professional engineer if you're looking to add a 'big 'ol' heavy tub!

## 11 Will the tub be a pain to clean?

If you're the one who is 'lucky enough' (sarcasm intended) to be stuck with cleaning the tub, this is one bit of advice you'll want to pay attention to. Consider how simple the tub is to clean.

For example, if you're dreaming about the vintage look of a clawfoot tub, be aware you'll have to clean under the tub, around it's feet and will have to bend over into the tub to clean the bottom. Sure – these tubs look great, but they ARE NOT a pleasure to clean.



And logically, a shorter tub (with a lower skirt) will be easier to clean than a taller tub, although you will get more water spilling over the edge if you want to use it for soaking or bathing your rowdy 'little angels.'

Don't get blinded by a cool tub and miss factoring in what cleaning it will be like.



## 12 How will wall panels or tile walls be installed around the tub to make sure everything is waterproof?

If you get leaking through your tub surround products, and causes a leak underneath your tub, HOUSTON – you have a problem. And this problem may force you to yank out the tub and everything around it. So, how do you prevent this catastrophe?

First make sure the tub has an integral tile flange. This is a piece which goes around the three sides (in the case of an alcove tub). Then your wall surround materials (which are installed after the tub is in) will go in front of the flange (and sealant will be applied between the tub deck and the bottom of the tub wall surround materials).

And if you want to be extra safe and stop leaking, look into laminate tub surround panels. You'll swear they're real tile, yet you'll get rid of the porous grout joints of an actual tile wall.

Making sure you have a waterproof tub installation is critical to keep BIG problems away!



## 13 Will this tub 'make sense' with my décor?

While it can be enticing to buy the first tub you see on sale – because it looks sooooo cool in the picture on the Internet, don't do this. You want a tub (which a fancy-schmancy designer would say) 'makes sense' with the rest of your décor (and will be comfortable).

For example, while I love the angled lines of the contemporary freestanding tub below, if I was installing it in a room with a 'Transitionalist' feel (with Shaker cabinets and/or a Modern Farmhouse look), it's not the right fit.

On the other hand, if I wanted an uber-contemporary bathroom a cast iron clawfoot tub would obviously look out of place.

And if you're having a hard time choosing the right tub for your project, contact a Bathroom Product Specialist for help.



## So, were there any bathtub remodeling mistakes above you weren't aware of? Do you need help deciding your best option or getting a quote for tub and bathroom products?

**I know a tub replacement (and certainly a bathroom remodeling) project can be overwhelming. You want to make smart choices. You want to make stylish choices. And you really, really, really DO NOT WANT to mess up!**

**I hope this article identifying 13 common bathtub remodeling mistakes has identified some problems which now will not be your issues. And while I know identifying the mistakes can be helpful, these pieces of advice may still not answer specific questions you have about your project.**

**So, towards this end – me and my team would love to help. If you're looking for product and design input and/or wholesale direct pricing on a freestanding tub or alcove bathtubs or if you're debating whether to use a tub at all (or go with a low curb shower instead), our team can help you with the pros and cons of these options.**

**Call 877-668-5888 or click for a Free Design Consultation to get assistance from a Bathroom Product Specialists at Innovate Building Solutions (OK – I'll admit that's my company) .**

# Get Started

## How to Compare Tub Shower Combo Kits



**You never knew replacing your existing stained or cracked, one piece fiberglass tub shower combo was going to be such a pain. While you know your kids and/or partner didn't give it a lot of T.L.C., you didn't think it would look this bad in this short a time.**

And now that you're finally upgrading your bathroom you DO NOT want to repeat the mistakes of the past.

And in this project, you're determined to make your alcove bathtub and shower a space you can actually enjoy. And here's a few things you know you DO NOT want to put up with again:

- A bathtub which is flimsy, feels like it's going to crack, and squeaks when you walk on it.
- Wall panels, or a tile surround, which don't cover your shower head. These short wall surrounds are a cleaning hassle for you (who is the unlucky one who ends up doing the job) and you're constantly repainting.
- Shaky, out of date, polished brass tub doors with tracks at the bottom which captures everything disgusting in them. You're so excited to get rid of these cheap doors which 'might have been' in style when mullets were the rage.
- Jacuzzi jets which haven't worked for years, and you have no need for today.
- Looking at the ugly molded pattern on the front of the tub which was designed years ago...by someone with bad taste.
- The tub deck is too high and makes it hard to bathe your toddler or it's too low (and not tall enough) to enjoy a relaxing soak after a hard day's work.
- Ugly, plasticky bathtub wall surround panels which (likely) were the cheapest thing the original home builder could get their hands on.

So – if you're looking for a higher quality tub shower combo and not sure where to look and/or how to compare systems you've seen on the Internet or in your local home center, you've come to the right place.

**Below we'll dig into 16 factors to make sure you don't make a mistake and get stuck with the wrong bath shower combo (and make a decision which forces you to use a substandard system for another 20 years!). I'll break these factors into four categories – (category #1) the tub, (category #2) the tub shower walls, (category #3) the tub glass and (category #4) general questions.**

### Category #1 – Tub questions

#### 1 Who will be using the tub shower? How tall should the tub deck be?

It's smart to have a bathtub (at least that's what all the realtors say) because it can be used from everyone from grandkids to grandparents. However, as you might guess, with a wide range of age spans – and a wider range of mobility – the choice of the best sized tub (and height of the tub deck) varies.



For example, if you're looking for a tub to bathe your toddler (or a lower height to step over for an elderly parent), a shorter 14" tub deck can be perfect.

If you're looking for a mid-height bathtub which can be used for soaking and isn't too hard to climb into, an 18" tub deck can make sense.

And finally, if you're craving the deep soaking experience – a 21" high alcove soaker will allow you to fill it with 70 gallons of water to relax to your hearts content.



## 2 Should you put your 'money where your feet are?'

It certainly doesn't feel like a quality showering experience when you hear squeaking and movement when you step into your combined tub shower system. And it's even worse if this squeaking turns into a crack. In this situation it's entirely possible you'll be replacing the entire system down the road (and that WILL NOT be a cheap date).

To protect against this catastrophe, insist on a heavier, high quality bathtub. And one of the 'tricks' the cheap tub retailers don't show you (so you won't know you're not getting a flimsy tub) – is they don't share the weight of their bathtubs.

For a tub with bulk – which stands the test of time – make sure it 'weighs in' at 75 lbs. or more. You'll feel the difference every time you get in.

## 3 Is the tub going into a 60" 'standard,' or non-standard alcove? And what can you do to 'make' a non-standard space work without spending big bucks?

The size of your alcove has a huge impact on final project costs.

For example, let's say your alcove is 66" x 30" (vs. the standard 60" x 30"). If this is your situation you may be asking, how can I make this work when standard tubs are 60"? Here's 3 options:

- Option #1) Build a 6" deep 'ledge' behind a 60" tub. Use the ledge for soap and shampoo. Buy wall panels which work with 66" wide walls (look for one where you won't notice seams).
- Option #2) Reframe the opening to 60".
- Option #3) Buy a built in bathtub and create a 'platform' to drop it into the space. Budget not only for the cost of the tub, but also the cost of framing, and the cost of the material to use on the tub deck. Find an option (either wall panels or tile walls) for the 66" back wall.

## 4 Is there enough room for your 'bigger' family members?

OK – this is where I'm going to attempt to be P.C. (politically correct) and stay out of trouble. But – if people in your household have a hard time using the tub (because they felt like a sardine in it), I'm sure they're not alone.

And when you're buying a tub (and a tub shower combo) there's one thing you need to pay attention to (beyond exterior dimensions). That one thing is 'interior dimensions' (which is called, in bathtub manufacturing geek terminology, the bathing well).

Look for tubs with thinner (yet sturdy) surrounding walls which give you a bigger bathing well – so even the 'big and tall' people in your family won't feel like a distorted pretzel when using the bathtub.



## 5 Should you use a freestanding tub vs. an alcove tub shower combo?

If you need a tub which doubles as a shower – you can't beat an alcove bathtub replacement which fits tight to your walls. You can bathe AND shower in the same space, and the water won't end up all over the floor.

However, if you're not using this space for showering AND you want to add style, impact, and a cool bathing experience – then change directions and install a freestanding bathtub. They're all the rage. They provide more soaking space. They can be put anywhere in the room.



## Category #2 – Wall surround questions

## 6 How high is your shower head on the wall? Will the wall panels (or tile) cover the shower head?

Most shower heads are set 84" from the bathroom floor. And when you see there isn't any tile or wall surround panels around the shower head – this not only looks stupid – it's also a maintenance problem waiting to happen.

And when you buy low-budget 60" high tub wall panels (with a standard height tub – from 14" to 21" high) you'll end up with zero wall surround coverage around your shower head. The moisture resistant greenboard around the shower head will need to be maintained and/or replaced sooner than later.

For a better quality bath and shower combo kit, use decorative grout free wall panels (or build a tile surround) which reaches the ceiling. For a standard 8' ceiling you'll need panels which are 80" high or taller.

Your alcove surround will look more stylish and be easier to maintain.



7

## Will your wall panels – or tile– enhance the decor and make your bathroom look bigger?

Let's face it, alcove tub shower combo kits are not generally being installed in the big 'ol bathrooms you see on pages of your favorite Interior Design magazines. No, these tub shower systems are going into your hard-working kid's bathroom, hall bathroom, or (smaller than you'd like) master bathroom.

And these bathrooms ARE NOT LARGE! And the last thing you want is for this bathroom to feel even smaller.

So, you may be wondering what can you do to add style AND make your bath look bigger – even if it's only an optical illusion (as David Copperfield used to say)?

I'd suggest using decorative tiles or decorative grout free tub panels in large format patterns. They're simple to maintain and their large format look visually 'opens up' your space.



## Category #3 – Tub door questions

8

### Do you want a full tub door, partial door, or no door at all ('er curtains)?"

Your answer to factor #1 (which discussed who is using the tub/shower space) has a major impact on what type of tub door or curtains you choose.

You see if you're looking to bathe little ones (at least while they're still little) it's best to forgo the door so it's easy to reach in and wash them up.

On the other hand, if you want a hybrid option – which also creates an open, contemporary look – the partial door (also known as the pivoting tub screen) is smart.

And if you really want to keep water contained (and have an easy way to access the valve to turn the hot water on), the bypass tub door is smart.



## Category #4 – General questions

9

### What's your budget? Do you want a tub shower combo system which is built to last, or are you doing a quick 'fix and flip?'

If you're looking for the 'best alcove tub' for your project, this can mean different things to different people.

For example, if you're looking to fix and flip a property in a low value area of town, you may want a low budget fiberglass bathtub surround with FRP (which stands for Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic) panels you pick up at a local home center. They're cheap. They're available. They can freshen things up to get the home sold...on a small budget.

However, if you're planning to stay in your home for 5 years, 10 years (or until they wheel you out) and want a quality tub shower combo kit, you'll want a heavier bathtub replacement, 3/8" thick tub shower wall panels, and 3/8" thick frameless tub doors. They may cost 2 to 3 times what you'd pay for the uber-cheap option, but they'll last, and you'll enjoy the space.



And when you're shopping for options, don't limit yourself to what you can find at your local home center. These big-box stores sell lower grade products at budget-basement prices. For the better quality tubs, panels, and glass, look for wholesale bathroom product specialty retailers.

10

### Are you the one cleaning the tub, walls, and tub doors?

If only you weren't the one stuck cleaning the bathroom – and your alcove bathtub and shower. If only your (make-believe) butler or maid had finally shown up for work!

However, your existing fiberglass tub (which you cannot for the life of you clean the grime out of), tile walls with moldy grout joints, and flimsy sliding tub doors with evil channels at the bottom, are all pains you're stuck maintaining.

However, if you're looking for low maintenance (and want to say bye-bye Felicia to these problems) here's a few products you'll want to research before accepting the least cost options.

- #1 low maintenance option for the tub – Look at a solid surface or acrylic bathtub. Stay clear of fiberglass bathtubs which are impossible to clean.
- #2 low maintenance option for the wall surrounds – Stay away from tile like the plague (or COVID). Buy stylish grout free tub shower surrounds.
- #3 low maintenance option for the tub door – Use a frameless bypass tub door or tub screen without channels at the bottom (or do without a door altogether and go with curtains – although you'll likely be replacing those curtains many times over the life of your home).





## 11 When do you need the bath shower combo system?

Did you ever find the perfect product and then when you try to buy it, found out it's out of stock?

With supply chain shortages (and if you think about it, the term 'supply chain' wasn't even in your vocabulary pre-pandemic) finding what you need when you need it can be a major pain in the you-know-what.

Here's what I'd recommend. Look for complete tub shower combo kits you source from one supplier. Look for a company who stocks ALL the components (the tub, the wall panels, and the glass door – if you're going to use one).

Make sure you can get what you want when you need it.

## 12 Is the bath shower system flimsy? Is it guaranteed to stand the 'test of time' (and the abuse of your family)?

You've heard the phrase 'put your money where your mouth is.' Unfortunately, when it comes to low cost tubs you'll find if there's little money spent, there's short guarantees and flimsy products to go with your purchase.

And here's the B-I-G problem with getting a low cost tub. They fail quicker than thicker, heavier tubs. Basically – everything above the tub is 'built onto' the tub (and over the integral flanges of the tub). So, if the tub goes bad you can't just 'slip it out' and leave your wall panels and tub shower glass intact.

No, you'll be pulling everything out. You'll be redoing wall backer board and rebuying adhesives (at the minimum). And that's assuming – of course – you can actually get the original contractor back to do 'round 2' of your tub installation.

Since tubs are the 'foundation' of the tub shower combo system, it's not smart to 'cheap-out' on them if you're planning on staying in this home for a while. This is why I'd insist on tubs which have a 10 year product warranty or longer (and tubs which weigh 75 lbs. or more – see factor #2).

**WARRANTY**

## 13 Is this tub shower combo system being installed in new construction or renovation?

Cheaper fiberglass tub shower combo systems for new construction are built as one unit and brought into your hall bathroom, kids' bath or master bath before framing is complete (so they can fit in the door).

If you're doing a renovation project, these one piece units WILL NOT be an option (they won't fit in the door of a finished home). You'll need to buy your tub, your wall coverings (tile or wall panels) and glass door separately and put them in one unit at a time.

## 14 Will a tub and shower combo system make sense for your needs... in the long run?

Let's face it – you're not remodeling your bathroom every day – or every year for that matter. And (hopefully) it's something you won't be doing for another 10,15,20, or 25 years if your penny-pinching-partner has anything to say about it.

So, when deciding whether you want a tub at all, you need to understand the pros and cons of a tub vs. a shower.

And to learn more about this debate (and get the opposite point of view many realtors tell you when they say you must have a tub) read 4 Reasons You Shouldn't Listen to Your Realtor – why a shower is better than a tub, even for resale).



## 15 What accessories should you buy for your tub shower combo, so it doesn't end up looking like a 'dollar store' special?

If you have a Dollar Store plastic shower caddy hanging over your shower head, raise your hand (OK, sorry to embarrass you).

And if you HATE when your partner throws the wet towels over the glass tub door, you can put your hand up now.

The reason you're living with these problems is there was little to no thought put into bathtub storage when the original system was slapped in by the builder.

So, before you commit to a wall surround – or glass tub door – figure out if they'll have adequate place for your partner's never-ending shampoos, conditioners, lotions, potions and bath towels.

Would an oversized horizontal or vertical recessed niche help?

Would a towel rack on the back of the tub door help?

Would you like a stylish grab bar (which doubles as a towel bar) so you wouldn't worry every time mom or dad is getting into or out of the bathtub?



## 16 What's the quality of the customer service and warranties which come with this kit?

It's easy to remember times you've experienced customer service which made you want to scream. When you needed help NOW and were put on hold for 45 minutes. Then you had the 'privilege' (sarcasm intended) hearing 'how their menus had changed' and 'how important your phone call was to them!' What a bunch of crap!

You get mad at yourself because you didn't realize this service was going to be so bad UNTIL AFTER you became a customer!

To make sure you don't get victimized with bad service after buying a tub shower combo replacement kit, read on-line reviews of the companies you're considering. No matter what company you'll buy from things can – and do – occasionally go wrong. The question becomes, how does your potential supplier handle challenges? How will they treat you when your phone call isn't a pleasant one and the crap is hitting the fan?

In addition to investigating the customer service experience (or lack thereof), dig into product warranties. How many 'loopholes' are built into the warranty which allow the supplier to 'wiggle out' of helping you? As a matter of fact, some on-line e-commerce companies (who often sell to DIY'ers) even void the warranty if the materials are installed by a DIY'er. Imagine you sell to DIY'ers and then tell them to 'hit the bricks' when the proverbial (you know what) hits the fan!

## So, are you now comfortable comparing tub shower combo kits? Do you need help with your project?

**I recognize buying a tub shower combo kit IS NOT an everyday event (unless you're a bathroom remodeler). And I also know there's a big cost (literally) to buying the wrong product from the wrong supplier or manufacturer.**

**My goal in this article WAS NOT to tell you what the best system is for you. The goal is to guide you with 16 factors to help it become more obvious what system will make the most sense for you.**

**And while I hope I've helped you do this; I also recognize you may have specific questions about your bathroom you need answers to figure out the perfect alcove bathtub replacement kit for you.**

**Towards this end, I'd love for you to reach out to me and my team for assistance (whether this is with bathroom design, pricing your tub shower combo kit, or simply to get more educational resources to make an informed decision).**

**Call 877-668-5888 or click for a Free Design Consultation. Our company (Innovate Building Solutions) wholesales high quality tub shower kits nationwide and would be happy to answer your questions.**

**And if you're looking for a nicer tub shower kit installed in your Cleveland Ohio home, call The Bath Doctor at 216-531-6085. If you're outside Cleveland Ohio (which is undoubtedly most of you) ask for a referral to one of our installing dealers).**



**We serve local and national clients. If you are outside of Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio we invite you to call 877-668-5888 or visit [www.InnovateTubShowerKits.com](http://www.InnovateTubShowerKits.com) or [www.InnovateFreestandingTubs.com](http://www.InnovateFreestandingTubs.com)**

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