

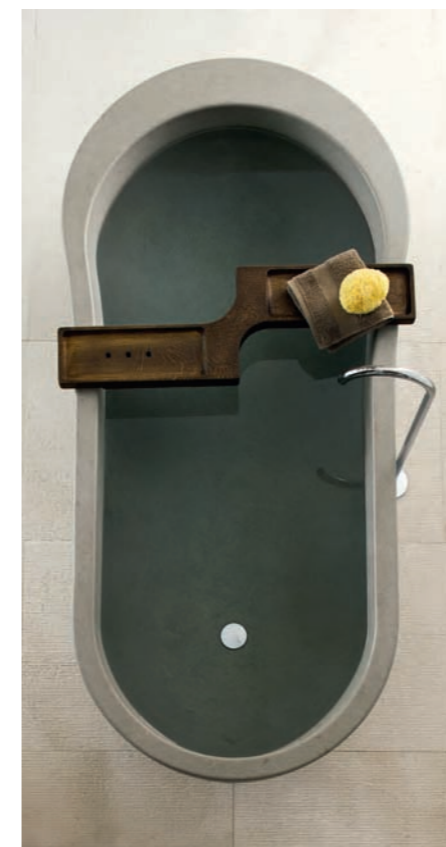
Timeless and elegant, the La Rochelle cast iron Bateau Bath is £1,995 from The Cast Iron Bath Company



STAND OUT FEATURE

Sink in to the luxury of a fabulous, freestanding bath. Designed to be the focal point, a stand alone tub will add the ultimate wow factor to any size, shape or style of bathroom

FEATURE LARA SARGENT



Achieve the look of a spa setting at home in the shapely Alone bath in Sinai stone with dual tray in a dark cherry oak solid wood, £16,450, Neutra Design

*f*reestanding baths, placed majestically in the middle of the bathroom, are the last word in 21st Century luxury and perfectly harness the boutique hotel-at-home look that remains so hot (particularly if you plan on a daring bath-in-bedroom set up). By their very nature, stand-alone baths create a dramatic and decadent centrepiece but don't dismiss them if you favour modern, pared-down interiors. It's true, many freestanding roll-tops and Bateau baths faithfully reproduce antique designs beautifully, but traditional cast iron models (try The Usk from Drummonds) can look equally as striking in a contemporary setting as in a period property. And it's not all claw-feet and gilt paint either, as the traditional tub has been given a modern-day makeover with clean, sleek lines, on-trend colours and hi-tech materials which are lighter, warmer and can be moulded into any shape – from curvaceous ovals to deep, angular cubes. As an alternative, how about a velvet-smooth, wooden version which can be manufactured with super deep sides for a luxurious soak?

Before you blow your entire bathroom budget on a fabulous, French-style, roll-top (we love the Jennings bath from The Water Monopoly), don't forget space issues. A huge tub shoehorned into a small room will look and feel cramped, and simply squeezing it into an unused corner won't do it justice. A standard-sized bath measures 1700mm x 700mm but that's really designed for one. For two people or a more comfortable soak, aim for a minimum of 1800mm x 800mm and if you've got room, it makes sense to go even larger. A double-ended bath with two sloping ends and central tap holes is a good all-rounder and today's models include clean-cut, sweeping elliptical shapes, decadent panelled tubs and traditional roll-tops. Don't rely on the external dimensions quoted in a sales brochure, as what initially appears to be a large bath, may be smaller than you think. Look closely at the internal dimensions and if it has backrests or a sculpted interior which can all take up precious room inside. The only way you'll truly find out if a bath is big and comfortable enough, is to actually lie in it when visiting a showroom (do remember to ask permission first!).

There's also weight to consider. Can your floors withstand a heavy, cast iron or stone bath (up to a whopping 2,000kg in some cases and even heavier when filled with water and people.) Would you be better off with a lightweight composite version? There's also a distinct trend towards coloured finishes in gorgeous shades from designer paint palettes – the perfect way to create an individual look. **EKBB**



ABOVE Complement a neutral colour palette with a hand-polished copper finish. Bateau bath in Stanneus, £4,200, Ripples **ABOVE RIGHT** Deep, double-ended and eye-catching – the Toulouse bath is a luxurious centrepiece for both traditional and contemporary surroundings, £3,200, Victoria + Albert Baths **BELOW** Experiment with highly reflective materials to enhance natural light. The Voltaire freestanding oval bath in a burnished cast iron finish is £13,221, Waterworks



Which material?

ACRYLIC Acrylic is supremely light and versatile and can be moulded into a number of shapes and sizes including curvaceous, double-ended eggs and huge geometric monoliths. Acrylic retains the heat so bath water is kept warm for longer. Look out for reinforced acrylic for hidden strength and rigidity. Baths from Adamsez, for example, are made from a topnotch acrylic called Lucite and strengthened with a tough cast resin skin and gel coat.

CAST IRON Cast iron baths are strong, durable and stain-resistant with excellent heat-retaining properties. Several layers of enamel are fused into the bath for a glossy finish while the outside can be polished, primed ready for painting or clad with luxurious metals such as copper or brass. Cast iron baths tend to come in traditional shapes such as roll-tops, slippers, Bateau and boat baths, based on original designs from the 18th and 19th Centuries

COMPOSITES Composites are a brilliant choice for the 21st Century bathroom. Pricier but more durable than acrylic and warmer, lighter and more flexible than cast iron, composite baths are a man-made mix of resins and natural ground minerals like limestone or quartz. Baths are made by pouring the composite into a single-skin mould, so internal dimensions tend to be generous with steeper sides. Designs are virtually endless, from modernist rectangles to a fluid, curvaceous sphere, and being a solid material, any scratches simply polish out. Try Quarrycast from Victoria + Albert Baths and Cristalplant® from C.P. Hart.

ENAMELLED STEEL Enamelled steel baths from the likes of Bette and Kaldewei are light and robust with slim silhouettes offering increased bathing space. A layer of enamel (around 3.5mm) is fused on to the steel surface to give a tough, glass-like shine which is virtually impossible to scratch or damage. Latest trends include coloured steel baths and contrasting real wood panelling.

STONE Stone baths will inject a luxurious statement into any bathroom. A beautiful marble creation from Limestone Gallery or a solid limestone egg bath from Lapidica will set you back almost £8,000 at least, but these strong, velvet-smooth pieces are like works of art and will last for years. Stone baths are extremely heavy and needed to be fitted by a stone specialist.

WOOD Wood baths are warm, tactile and earthy but also durable and resistant to water damage. William Garvey's laminated teak baths come in smooth, elliptical shapes, sleek rectangles and deep Japanese-style plunge pools as well as bespoke designs to suit your needs.



Use classic veined Bianco Carrara marble to create an eye-catching focal point. The Duo bathtub designed by Matteo Thun and Antonio Rodriguez is a beautiful example of a fusion between natural form and material, from £16,450, Neutra Design

On the bridge

Keep essential pampering kit close at hand with a stylish bath rack

COMPILED BY KIRSTEN JONES



ACROSS THE WATER
Oak wood bridge tray,
around £400, Neutra Design



1 Bamboo bath bridge, £45, Fired Earth **2** Cross bath rack with mirror, £463, Hicks & Hicks **3** Bath rack, £534, Drummonds
4 Bhavani bath rack, £39.95, Nkuku **5** Rubberised bamboo bath bridge rack, £28, John Lewis **6** Soap and sponge tray
in chrome plate, £270, Samuel Heath **7** Original bath rack, £498, C.P. Hart **8** Oak bath rack, £65, Labour & Wait
9 Acacia bathroom tray, £18, John Lewis **10** Umbra Aquala expandable bamboo bathtub caddy, £49.94, Victorian Plumbing

FOR STOCKISTS, SEE PAGE 150