



Sliding mirrored doors conceal this neat solution from Betta Wardrobes.

Hanging rules

How much hanging space do you need, and how high? Here's the drill:

- The ideal hanging length for coats and dresses is 1.5 metres, and for hanging skirts, shirts and folded trousers, one metre.
- If you don't have much space, double rows of hanging will maximise your storage capacity.
- A combination of 25 per cent full-height hanging space and 75 per cent half-height suits most people.
- Wardrobes should be at least 45 centimetres deep, ideally 60 centimetres, to comfortably hold your hanging items.

Little extras

Look for clever accessories and features you can buy or build in to make your wardrobe even more efficient:

- A pull-out trouser rack, holding several rails to hang trousers over.
- Shoe racks just the right size for slotting in shoes.
- Special racks and hooks to hold belts and ties.
- Shallow jewellery drawers, with grid-style compartments built in. Some can be lockable.
- A fold-out ironing board.
- A swivelling shelf to hold a small television.

Shoe rack by Soho



Mix and match... You can choose exactly what you need from the Elfa system's extensive range at Howards Storage World.

Closet case

A well-planned, built-in wardrobe is a must for those who like to keep everything in its place, **JODIE THOMSON** writes.

THE days of cramming your clothes, shoes and other stuff into a makeshift wardrobe in your bedroom are gone. These days, a wall of built-in wardrobes is virtually an essential feature of every modern bedroom. One step up the luxury ladder, and increasingly popular, are walk-in or walk-through wardrobes, with an entire little room or hallway devoted to storing your clothing and belongings.

But not all built-ins or walk-ins are born equal. Poorly designed and badly built wardrobes will lower the tone of any home, not to mention drive you crazy each time you try to reach a too-high rail, or squeeze winter woollies into too-small drawers. And cheap wardrobe finishes and designs

will likewise devalue an otherwise attractive interior.

The solution is careful planning and expert advice on the design basics of wardrobes, good quality workmanship and spending in the right places, so you don't end up with a cheap-looking product.

Who to call

You can spend a little or a lot on your wardrobes, but whatever your budget, it's wise to get them designed and built by specialist companies or tradespeople.

At the budget end, there are specialist wardrobe companies that will measure up and build wardrobes to fit your space. You choose the look and design from a standard

range of finishes and fittings. At the top end, interior designers will design and plan built-in storage, selecting finishes and design elements to complement the rest of the home's interior.

Some people rely on their builder to design and fit their built-in storage, but this can lead to problems.

"Sometimes the builders try and do it all, but the design isn't always as good," says Diana Bal, a wardrobe designer with Soho Design. "It's best to get some specialist advice."

The internal fittings can be the most expensive part of a wardrobe, but a cheaper option is just having a simple carcass built, and using freestanding modular drawers and shelves inside. Look for specialist storage, such as the Elfa system, from Howards Storage World, which includes a lightweight selection of wardrobe essentials you can mix and match, such as basket drawers, shelves, hooks, rods, shoe racks, and tie and belt holders.

Seamless solutions

There are wardrobes to suit every budget, but what's most important is choosing your built-in so it blends seamlessly with the



Divide and conquer... Interior planning is key in this design by Norska.



Hidden asset... You'd hardly know this wardrobe by Poliform is there behind a discreet wall.

room it's in and matches the quality of the rest of your home.

"We like to make built-ins blend into a wall," says interior designer Stefanie Loeb, of Smart Design Studio. "It's quite beautiful to make them disappear, whereas if they look too heavy or dark they will make the room appear smaller."

Simple satin polyurethane or laminate in white or a tone matched to the wall paint will do that best. Another option is doors in white, frosted glass.

"They take on a bluish or greenish tinge, like glass splashbacks, and are very popular on Sydney's northern beaches," Bal says. "They're great for the wow factor if you like the modern look."

Doors and handles

For serious glamour and big budgets, consider wardrobe doors finished in a soft texture, such as leather.

"We've used leather panels on the doors, matched to leather on an upholstered bedhead," Loeb says. "It gives that beautiful, warm, luxurious feeling and looks ageless."

The style of door is also key to the look and function of built-ins. Standard hinged doors are a safe choice and will suit most spaces, but sliding doors have their place.

"The nice thing about sliding doors is that you can use doors that are quite big, whereas hinged doors have to be certain proportions," Loeb says. "But the disadvantage of sliding doors is you never get the doors on one plane, so there's always that step in and out."

When it comes to handles, it's best to stick to something discreet and timeless, such as small, brushed chrome knobs or tabs - or even go without.

"I'm not a fan of handles, as they're the first thing that dates," Loeb says. "I prefer

continuous rails or recessed finger pulls down the length of the door so you don't have fiddly handles."

Rails, drawers and shelves

Inside your wardrobes is where the serious planning really needs to take place. A consultation with an expert planner or designer will help you get the right mix of full- and half-length hanging rails, drawers and open shelving.

"I like to go on-site and talk to the clients about what their needs are," Bal says. "If they're really tall, a standard rail height won't work. I ask if they have a lot of suits they need to hang, things like whether they like to hang or fold T-shirts."

The other big design decision is whether to take your built-ins right to the ceiling or finish them at a certain height, leaving a gap under the ceiling. In most cases, it's better to build wardrobes right to the ceiling, as this gives a cleaner, sleeker look. The exception to the rule is older-style houses with higher than average ceilings.

"In beautiful old homes with decorative cornices, it's better to finish the wardrobes below the ceiling to let the cornices run right around," Loeb says.

With wardrobes that go right up to the ceiling, you often end up with shelves you can only reach with a stepladder. But these can be handy for things you use rarely, such as suitcases.

"And you can get certain types of stepladders that you can hang on the back of the wardrobe door so it's easy to reach and use," Loeb says.

Handy little extras

What really makes some built-in wardrobes stand out from the crowd are extra, often unseen, features that make them a dream

to use. For example, some people like jewellery compartments built into their drawers, Bal says.

Internal lights that flick on when you open the doors are also a smart idea. "They're not that expensive, just a little pin that releases the light," Loeb says.

Another feature guaranteed to add a luxurious feel to built-ins is a soft-close mechanism on drawers and doors.

"You just give the drawers a slight push and they close themselves and don't bang," Loeb says. "And the doors have a little spring in them so they close softly too."

Walk-in robes

No longer just for the ultra rich, walk-in or walk-through wardrobes are increasingly popular in all sorts of homes. Some are specially dedicated rooms, others just big enough to stand in. Walk-through wardrobes are a smart option in smaller spaces, often built into the hallway between a master bedroom and the en suite bathroom.

You can choose standard covered doors, or keep the whole lot open, so you can see your clothing and accessories at a glance.

"If it's purely a room that you only walk into to get clothing, you could keep it all open, but otherwise I'd recommend doors, for a neater look," Loeb says.

When you're planning a walk-in or walk-through, think of adding a few key accessories to make it a truly pampering space. If you can squeeze it in, a comfortable ottoman is a must.

"It's just beautiful to lay out your clothes on it, or have somewhere comfortable to sit and put on your shoes," Loeb says.

Other nice additions to the space are a rug, and full-length mirrors on opposite walls, so you can see a front and back view of your outfit when getting dressed.

Door options

The type of doors you choose will determine the look and cost of your wardrobes. You can pay as little as \$900 for a standard-sized wardrobe with mirrored, sliding doors, up to \$20,000 or more for a custom-designed wardrobe with solid timber doors.

- Mirrors:** The cheapest option is aluminium-framed, mirrored sliding doors.
- Melteca:** Another cheap option, Melteca is a lightweight, solid material, just 9mm thick, that is framed with aluminium and can only be used on sliding doors.
- Polypanel:** A fibreglass sliding door with a timber-look finish. Lightweight and easy to clean, it's a good option for kids' rooms.
- Laminate:** Inexpensive and hard-wearing, laminate doors come in a range of colours.
- MDF:** It can be painted with standard paint or more expensive and durable polyurethane finish in a satin or gloss.
- Glass:** You can get solid glass doors with a frosted finish in a variety of colours. Or just include panels of glass in doors to add visual interest.
- Timber veneer:** Gives the warmth of timber for much less than the price of solid timber.
- Solid timber:** The Rolls Royce of wardrobe doors, solid timber doors can come in a range of timber types and stains.