



wardrobe dreams

The key to perfect clothes storage is within the doors of a carefully constructed closet

WORDS CATHERINE McCORMACK

THERE'S A PROFOUND joy that comes with having a well-organised wardrobe. Clutter becomes a thing of the past, it's easy to put your hands on what you want and your clothes will look good for longer. A breathtaking wardrobe, like this sumptuous space by Closet Theory, is high on the wishlist for most of us – including the *House Rules* contestants (tune in to the show to see their drool-worthy creations). In the meantime, here's our guide to making all your wardrobe dreams come true. >



Dressing room

Size is a major consideration when choosing between a freestanding or built-in robe. Freestanding designs are generally smaller and cheaper, and can be moved at whim – ideal if you're renting. However, the beauty of built-in and walk-in wardrobes is that they can be designed specifically to suit you and your needs.

Built-in wardrobes start at 1200mm wide, with a minimum depth of 600mm. "Never compromise the depth of your wardrobe to save space," warns Diana Bal of joinery and cabinetmaking company Soho Design Group. "You need that for hanging clothes." A small walk-in robe will need two or more walls and a floor space of at least 1800mm x 1200mm. "For two people, 2000mm x 2000mm is a minimum," adds Diana.

For an abundance of storage space, it's hard to go past floor-to-ceiling cupboards that stretch from wall to wall. "These continue the clean lines and look tailored and integrated in a space," says interior designer Mitch Ferguson of Karanda Interiors. Expect to pay from around \$1200 for a two-door built-in with a standard fit-out (drawers, shelves and hanging space) and from around \$2500 for a walk-in design. "Of course, the same wardrobe with different finishes can be as much as double the cost," says Diana.

"AVOID WINDOWS THAT FACE DIRECTLY ONTO YOUR CLOTHES – *sunlight* CAN CAUSE MORE DAMAGE THAN MILDEW" ~ DIANA BAL, SOHO DESIGN GROUP

Clothes call

Whether you opt for a decorative freestanding piece, a sensible built-in cupboard or a luxe walk-in robe will depend on your budget, available space and – of course – what you need it to contain. Before you start shopping around, audit your belongings and determine what your needs really are, and which type of storage will work for you. Lots of dresses or a partner with a penchant for shirts? Plenty of hanging space is a must. Jumper and jeans girl? You might prefer a preponderance of shelves and drawers. Take accessories into consideration, too – handbags, shoes and jewellery will all need designated spaces.



PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT) GAP INTERIORS/LIZZIE OIME, (BOTTOM RIGHT) GAP INTERIORS/DOUGLAS GIBB, (OPPOSITE) LISA PETROLE



WARDROBE WORRIES SORTED!

PROBLEM: SMALL ROOM

SOLUTION: Full-height mirrored doors reflect light and views into the room, giving the illusion of more space. They're also great for dressing.

PROBLEM: GROWING KIDS

SOLUTION: Keep the internal design as flexible as possible – consider adjustable shelves and deep drawers. This way the wardrobe can grow and change as they do.

PROBLEM: "WE'RE RENTING"

SOLUTION: Try a freestanding piece or a modular system such as Ximula, available from Spaceworks, which can be added to and reconfigured as needed, then packed up and taken with you when you move.

PROBLEM: DAMP & MILDEW

SOLUTION: Underlying structural issues should always be addressed before installing a wardrobe. To increase airflow and prevent mould, choose a wall-mounted wardrobe system with no floor or back panel, and always ensure clothes are completely dry before putting them away.

PROBLEM: SHOE & HANDBAG OBSESSION

SOLUTION: Pull-out shoe drawers are hard to beat, as are built-in pigeonholes for your handbags. Hooks on the back of closet doors can also be helpful.

Fabulous finishes

Hardwoods are rarely used in custom-made wardrobes these days, as they're expensive and can warp over time. "With satin board, MDF and high-density fibreboard, there's a little bit more of a guarantee the timber will stay as it is," explains Michael Allsopp of bespoke cabinetry design company Spaceworks. Frosted glass and mirror are inherently sleek and contemporary in style, while mirrored panelling combined with Shaker-profile doors offers old-world elegance, as pictured here. A new trend is to use painted or printed MDF, Perspex and glass. "A recent project featured a stunning Hong Kong skyline printed on the surface of our wardrobe doors," says Scott Kelly from Stegbar. "It looked amazing." Want something with soul? Timber-look laminates and veneers are a good option, especially for kids' rooms, says Michael. "They're tough, cost-effective and you can get the Gumption out if you need to clean them." The texture is also excellent at hiding dust, marks and fingerprints. >



Insider dealings

Functionality is just as important as good looks in wardrobe design. Internal features should be designed to best suit your belongings, be that dresses, suits, ties or shoes. Features that come as standard include adjustable shelving, pull-out drawers and hanging space. You'll pay extra for more bespoke storage, but it can be worth it to keep clothes uncreased and clutter under control: favourite add-ons include extra-deep, soft-close drawers, pull-out shoe shelves, and belt and tie racks. A full-length mirror is always a must, as is ample hanging space for dresses.

A growing trend is a dedicated make-up mirror. "Häfele's Cool White LED Strips give off a fantastic natural light – perfect for above a make-up mirror!" says Dimitra Protopsaltis of Diamond Interiors. Bulbs or LED strip lights can also be wired to a sensor that will switch them on automatically when the doors open.

"I LOVE A PULL-DOWN RAIL SYSTEM; IT ALLOWS YOU TO INSTALL A RAIL *higher* UP THAN USUAL AND PULL IT DOWN AS NEEDED"

~ DIMITRA PROTOPSALTIS, DIAMOND INTERIORS

Walk-in wonders

The luxury of a walk-in robe is irresistible if you have the space. "It can be a real show stopper," says Mitch Ferguson of Karanda Interiors. Most often these are housed in a room or area of their own, such as behind a screen or partition wall at the head of the bed. Overcrowding is a common problem, as is a poor use of the space, so it pays to seek the advice of a specialist. Take inspiration from the dressing areas of chic clothing boutiques, not to mention these dreamy spaces by Highgate House (right) and LA Closet Design (far right). The little details are what create a truly five-star robe: shallow, pull-out shelves for ties, reminiscent of a gentleman's tailor, a felt-lined jewellery drawer or a glass-topped perfume shelf. >



PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT) ALBERT FONT/BBB, (BOTTOM LEFT) KARA ROSEN/LUND/HIGHGATE HOUSE/DESIGNER LEIGH BOSWELL, (BOTTOM RIGHT) LA CLOSET DESIGN/LISA ADAMS



Styles to suit

Your wardrobe – and maybe even its contents – can amp up a room's aesthetic appeal. For a dose of French chic, look to reclaimed antique or distressed armoires, or mirrored and bone-inlay designs that exude pure glam. Alternatively, open shelving and freestanding clothes racks – where your clothes hang in plain sight – have an industrial vibe that sits nicely in a contemporary space. Try Ikea for simply stylish clothes racks (as pictured, left).

For built-ins, tailor the look of your wardrobe to the style of your house. "Older-style Shaker doors work really well in homes with period features, as opposed to V-groove or white glass, which have a relaxed, beachy vibe," says Diana Bal of Soho Design Group. Mirrored doors can help make a small space feel bigger, but aren't recommended for children's rooms. "You'll be cleaning them constantly!" warns Diana.

Sliding doors offer a sleek finish – and save on space – but you will play peek-a-boo with your clothes. "The mechanism in hinged doors tends to last a little bit longer," says Michael Allsop of Spaceworks. If wardrobe doors, when standing open, impinge on your space, invest in 170-degree hinges, which allow the door to open right back.

"FREESTANDING *open* SHELVING ALLOWS YOU TO ADD COLOUR AND PERSONALITY TO A ROOM"

~ MITCH FERGUSON, KARANDA INTERIORS

Perfect positioning

Wardrobe placement may be a defining factor in your bedroom's functionality. Diana's advice is to avoid the first wall you see on entering the room and opt for one that doesn't interfere with the layout of furniture. Walls with a window can be another good option, as they provide an opportunity to include a bench seat in the design. For a small room, look for negative space, such as a former fireplace, and consider turning that into a wardrobe. Other good spots include below a staircase or pitched roof, or under a loft bed.

A long stretch of built-in cabinetry can look overly functional or dominate the space. To combat this, Michael Allsop suggests choosing a streamlined door design and finishing the wardrobe in the same colour as the walls, as pictured here. "This way, it looks like wall panelling rather than a wardrobe," he explains.

In a period home, avoid taking the wardrobe to the full height of the wall as it may disturb a decorative ceiling. If your ceilings are higher than 2100mm, it can be useful to split the wardrobe doors to create a shorter set at the top; this forms a space to stow away items you only need occasionally. "Storage this high is unlikely to be used every day, so you can keep more useable things in the bottom section," explains Michael. **hb**



PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP LEFT) MIKKEL VANG, (TOP RIGHT) IKEA, (BOTTOM RIGHT) FERRAN FREXAS/RBA