



Check Out Just How Luxe a Fish Tank Can Look: An Aquarium Upgrade Guide for Grownups

By Jennifer Kelly Geddes

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Odds are that you (or your kids) have owned a fishbowl or tiny tank, populated by a few guppies or goldfish that—up to a point—were fun to watch as they went around swimming in circles.

If you've ever longed, though, for one of those gorgeous, James Bond-villain-style aquariums teeming with exotic sea creatures, from jellyfish to sharks, we're here to say that it's entirely within your reach today, thanks to the rising tide of luxury aquariums for regular old homes.

Yup, home fish geeks are a thing, according to the [New York Times](#), with the aquarium business claiming a 400% surge in demand since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Some folks are splurging tens of thousands of dollars to install the type of watery paradise you might typically see in public zoos, spending as much as \$750,000 on tanks weighing 75,000 pounds.

But if you're thinking of diving into (or at least dipping a toe into) this trend, there are a few things you should know first. Here are a few factors to consider before you upgrade your fish tank, from amateur fun to a gorgeous centerpiece in your home.

How much does a fish tank cost?



Photo by Fiorentino Group Architects

You can cheap out and get a modest freshwater tank for about \$200, says **Larry Liberstein**, owner of [Aquarius Aquariums](#). However, if you're going for impact, you'll want one of the big boys, which means "a large reef aquarium that could easily cost more than \$10,000."

Don't forget the cost of the fish, some of which carry price tags in the hundreds of dollars.

Ordering a tank that's in stock is cheaper than having one custom-installed, of course, and the materials you pick can raise the price, too. (Glass may be more affordable than acrylic, particularly if you pick a stock dimension, but going the custom route has similar costs.)

Want to delve deeper? There's a glass choice, too—but it'll cost you.

“There’s the price for standard glass, which is the material most tanks are made from, and then there are tanks made from low-iron glass, which has superior clarity but is at least double the cost,” explains Liberstein.

Mike Park, retail manager at [Manhattan Aquariums](#), urges potential fish fans to “know your budget going into this process.”

He says that when people see the floor model in his store and ask the price, their jaw drops.

“This is a labor of love, just like with any pet,” he says.

Where to put a fish tank



Photo by The Fish Gallery

The first step a tank specialist will take is to view the space, says Park, who notes that some homes have already been set up for a tank, with the requisite water lines installed and appropriate flooring to hold the weight.

But in other instances, he says, “We work from the ground up, which means we have contractors come in to place water lines, drains, and electrical.”

Water damage is possible as you embark on the fish business, so choose your tank location carefully, says **Matt O’Rourke**, president of [ZPLUMBERZ](#), a national plumbing, drain, and sewer repair franchise.

“Protect your floor with a drain or drop pan, because if there’s spillage, you want to be sure that water is directed away from creating property damage,” he says.

O’Rourke estimates homeowners could spend up to \$1,500 on installation, depending on the difficulty of the plumbing work and the current location of the drains and water supply. He also notes that the volume of the water is another serious consideration.

“Water weighs 8.33 pounds per gallon,” he says, “so the construction of the tank and the surrounding space needs to be able to support that additional weight.”

Fish tank types to consider



Photo by The Fish Gallery

“Aquarium installation can take several forms, from a stand-alone tank that can be carried in and set up in a matter of hours with no modifications at all to ones that are more involved,” says Liberstein.

For these more detailed (read expensive) options, walls may have to come down, he adds, “and custom cabinets built in, along with additional flooring support.”

For those who live in an apartment, this means getting approval from the owners of the building or the board of a co-op.

What size fish tank is best?



Photo by Living Color Aquariums

You probably imagine that a small tank is easier to maintain than a bigger one. It ain't necessarily so, say the experts.

“It’s true that a large aquarium can be more work, but a too-small tank’s water, and other conditions, can change negatively very quickly, and that can be difficult for people who are new to the hobby,” says Liberstein.

When a tank “goes south,” the water may turn yellow, thanks to too much waste or food particles. The No. 1 reason fish fail to thrive is dirty H₂O.

Liberstein says your best bet is to “find an aquarium that’s in the middle for new owners.”

Tips to tap into your fish sense



Photo by Cathleen Curtin Architects LLC

It's fine to be a newbie going into the fish game, but at least do some research before you begin.

Park, who can't count how many people have asked him about keeping a clownfish in their freshwater tank (thank you, Nemo), says, "We're here to educate and guide folks on their journey, but we want to make sure you understand what that journey is."

Don't forget about the maintenance end of fish-keeping. Just as your plants need watering on a schedule (lest they perish), your piscine pals also need food and clean, filtered water regularly.

"This is not just a set-it-and-forget-it piece of furniture, but a living entity that needs to be nurtured, so be prepared to get your hands wet," says Park.

Not around enough or don't want to worry about your fish tank's alkalinity and ammonium levels? Park's team (and other fish tank retailers) offer a service that takes care of your tank, top to bottom.



Photo by The Fish Gallery

While demand has shot up of late for huge home aquariums, Park says his business dipped at first during the pandemic and then shot back up again.

Like much of the world, Liberstein is “dealing with supply issues on most items—even on the fish themselves.”

Yup, your yellow tang just might be sitting in a shipping container in some backed-up port, waiting to disembark.

What’s the ROI on luxury aquariums?

Before adding a high-end aquarium to your home, make sure you’re a true fish fan, not a dabbler, since a return on investment in your future isn’t likely.

According to **Cedric Stewart**, a real estate agent with [Keller Williams](#), maintaining a high-end aquarium in the home is not so different from having a pool or outdoor water pond stocked with fish.

Many homebuyers may fear that maintaining one is the equivalent of having a part-time job.

“You have to get trained and then clean it, perform maintenance, and keep the fish alive, which is a hassle for some, and the reason why swimming pools don’t help sell homes,” Stewart says.

Even if your tank is swanky and custom (that is, built into a cabinet or wall), Stewart says, you run the risk of “making your living room look like a Red Lobster.” #Fishfail!

The bottom line? Add one of these amenities only if it’s purely for your own enjoyment.