

# Nine/36 The Ultimate Design Guidebook

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RESIDENTIAL



prepared by  
**KENURO architects**

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# Introducing Nine/36: The Ultimate Design Guidebook

## Why Nine/36?

Because you get:

- Nine actionable design tips every quarter, 36 a year
- Simple, jargon-free advice on layout, lighting, customer flow & more
- Strategies to boost comfort, style & functionality

## Who's It For?

Homeowners looking to:

- Master their spaces
- Stay ahead with tech
- Elevate their style

## Why Use It?

Nine/36 empowers you with:

- Quick, impactful upgrades
- Expert insights made easy
- Tailored design strategies

## **KENURO Architects – Designing Spaces That Work**

We're a Sydney-based architecture firm creating beautiful, functional living spaces.

Explore the tips, experiment with ideas, and watch your home evolve.  
Let's design better, together.



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# 01 MDF Cabinet Finishes Decoded

Did you know that over 90% of modern cabinetry is built using MDF (Medium-Density Fiberboard)? While solid timber and plywood options exist, they're far less common, typically reserved for high-end or specialty projects. The reason? MDF offers unbeatable affordability, stability, and versatility.

But here's the catch: MDF is only as good as its finish. Without the right protective layer, moisture warps it, stains soak in, and everyday wear leaves marks. That's why your finish choice isn't just about looks—it's about: Durability, Maintenance, Long-term value, Style flexibility.

In this guide, we break down every MDF finish option—pros, cons, and best uses, so you can choose wisely. Because great design shouldn't come at the expense of practicality.

## 1. LAMINATE

A decorative paper layer fused to MDF under high pressure, topped with a resin coating.

### Pros:

- Budget-friendly
- Huge range of colors/patterns (even metallic or stone looks)
- Stain- and scratch-resistant
- Easy to clean

### Cons:

- Visible seams at edges (requires edge banding)
- Cannot be refinished if damaged

**Best for:** Kitchens, offices, retail spaces.

**Pro Tip:** Pair with ABS-edged banding (not PVC) for a seamless, durable edge.



## 2. MELAMINE

Resin-infused paper bonded to MDF under heat.

### Pros:

- Cheapest finish
- Decent scratch resistance
- Easy to wipe clean

### Cons:

- Plasticky feel
- Edges swell if exposed to moisture
- Limited design options (usually solid colors or basic wood grains)

**Best for:** Garage storage, laundry cabinets, rental properties.

**Watch Out:** Cheap melamine chips when drilled —opt for post-formed edges for longevity.

## 3. POLYURETHANE

A two-component, spray-applied paint that cures into a rock-hard coating.

### Pros:

- Flawless, smooth surface (no brush marks)
- Extremely durable (resists chips, stains, and UV yellowing)
- Customizable sheen (matte to high-gloss)

### Cons:

- Expensive (requires professional spraying)
- Hard to touch up (entire panel may need refinishing)

**Best for:** High-end kitchens, modern wardrobes.

**Pro Tip:** For a cheaper alternative, use acrylic paint—but expect less durability.



## 5. THERMOFOIL

A vinyl film heat-wrapped around MDF.

### Pros:

- No visible seams (great for curved cabinets)
- Moisture-resistant
- Affordable

### Cons:

- Can peel near heat sources (e.g., ovens)
- Limited textures (usually high-gloss or matte)

**Best for:** Bathrooms, modern kitchens with curved designs.

**Pro Tip:** Avoid using near cooktops—opt for heat-resistant grades if needed.

**Remember:** MDF itself is vulnerable to water—always seal edges properly!

### Why Selection of Right Finish Matters:

The right finish elevates MDF from “builder-grade” to “designer-worthy.” Whether you crave the drama of high-gloss acrylic or the practicality of laminate, there’s a perfect match for every style and budget.

## 4. ACRYLIC

A PMMA (plexiglass) layer bonded to MDF.

### Pros:

- Reflective, glass-like finish
- Resists yellowing and scratches
- Feels cool and smooth to the touch

### Cons:

- Shows fingerprints and dust
- Pricier than laminate

**Best for:** Contemporary kitchens, display cabinets.

**Fun Fact:** Acrylic is also used for aquarium tanks—proving its toughness!

## 6. WOOD VENEER

Thin slices of real wood glued to MDF.

### Pros:

- Authentic wood grain
- Can be stained to match other timber elements

### Cons:

- Not as durable as laminate
- Susceptible to water damage

**Best for:** Mid-range projects wanting a wood look.

**Fun Fact:** Some veneers are peeled from logs in one continuous sheet—like unrolling a paper towel!



## 02 Powering with Solar

Why This Matters for Architects & Homeowners:

Installing solar panels isn't just about placing modules on a roof—it's a structural, aesthetic, and regulatory challenge that demands careful planning. In NSW, where solar adoption is high but building regulations vary by council, a poorly integrated system can lead to structural failures, aesthetic clashes, compliance rejections.

### Solar Panels Placement

- **North-facing (Ideal):** 20-30° pitch for max year-round output
- **East/West-facing:** Still viable! Loses only ~15% efficiency (great for morning/afternoon usage)
- **Flat roofs:** Use tilt frames (10° minimum) to prevent water pooling
- **Setbacks:** Maintain 500mm clearance from roof edges for fire compliance and maintenance access.
- **PV vs. Skylights:** Coordinate early to avoid conflicts – panels typically need 2x the space of skylights for equivalent output.
- **Pre-1980s Homes:** Require engineer verification for dead/live loads. Reinforce rafters if spacing exceeds 900mm.

### Battery Placement: NSW-Specific Rules

Best Locations:

- Garage (Ideal): Stable temps, easy access
- Utility Room: Must have 600mm clearance around sides
- Outdoor: Only if rated for IP65 (like Tesla Powerwall+)

Never Install:

- Under stairs (fire risk)
- Bedrooms (humming noise)
- Flood-prone areas (even 10cm water can damage)



### Tile Roofs (Terracotta/Concrete)

- **Mounting Strategy:** Use hook-and-rail systems (e.g., Schletter or Clenergy) to avoid tile damage.
- **Weight Load:** Ensure rafters can support  $\geq 30\text{kg/m}^2$  (terracotta tiles + panels).
- **Aesthetic Fix:** Specify solar-friendly tile replacements (e.g., Bristle's solar-blend tiles) for seamless integration.
- **Pro Tip:** For heritage homes, propose rear-roof-only placement to minimize visibility.

### Metal Roofs (Colorbond, Zinc, etc)

- **No-Penetration Option:** Use solar clip systems (e.g., S-5! clamps) to avoid drilling.
- **Thermal Expansion:** Allow 5mm gaps at mounting points for metal movement.
- **Color Matching:** Panels with black frames blend best with Monument, Surfmist, or Woodland Grey roofs.
- **Pro Tip:** Align panel rows with existing roof ribs for visual harmony.

### Flat Roofs (Membrane, Bitumen)

- **Ballasted Systems:** Use concrete blocks (no penetrations) but verify load capacity ( $\geq 150\text{kg/m}^2$ ).
- **Tilt Frames:** Opt for 10-15° angled racks to prevent water pooling (NSW building code requirement).
- **Wind Uplift:** Specify aerodynamic designs (e.g., SunLock) for coastal/high-wind zones.
- **Pro Tip:** Paint mounting frames to match roof membrane (e.g., Dulux Acratex).

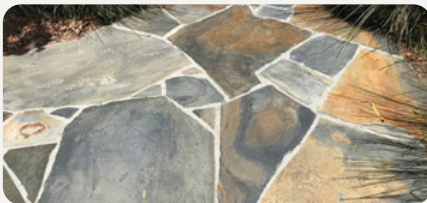
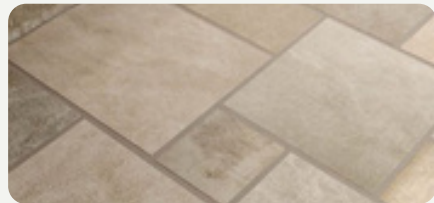


# 03 Natural Stone for Garden Hardscapes

Natural stone remains the premier choice for discerning architects and designers, offering unmatched durability, aesthetic versatility, and sustainable credentials. Unlike manufactured materials, stone develops a rich patina over time, blending organically with its surroundings while maintaining structural integrity for generations. When specified and installed correctly, it elevates outdoor spaces from mere surfaces to experiential landscapes that engage the senses.

## Top Stone Choices for Australian Gardens

Stone type	Best for	Finish options	Maintenance	Cleaning
Bluestone	Paths, pool decks	Honed, thermal, flamed	Every 3-5 yrs	Mild soap
Sandstone	Rustic paths, courtyards	Tumbled, sawn	Annual	Soft brush
Limestone	Formal gardens	Honed, brushed	Every 2 yrs	No acids!
Granite	Steps, edging	Polished, flamed	Never	Pressure wash
Slate	Water features, steps	Cleft, honed	Biennial	Mild detergent
Travertine	Pool decks, dining areas	Filled, brushed	Annual	Enzyme cleaner



## Key Design Considerations

### Layout & Pattern

- Large slabs (600mm+): Modern, clean lines
- Irregular flagstone: Organic, natural look
- Modular units: Geometric precision

### Edge Detailing

- Knapped (natural) for rustic charm
- Pencil-rounded for comfort
- Recessed joints with groundcover plants

### Drainage Essentials

- Minimum 1:60 slope toward garden beds
- Permeable bases: 100mm compacted gravel + 20mm sand
- Dry-laid stone: Allows drainage and planting

### Aging Characteristics

- Anticipate patina development (sandstone darkens, limestone lightens)
- Plan for moss growth in shaded areas (increase joint width to 25mm)
- Specify load-bearing capacity for future garden additions (e.g., water features)

### Safety Enhancements

- Increase slip resistance (R11+) near water features
- Install contrast edging for visually impaired users
- Radius all step nosings (minimum 5mm)

# 04 Metallic Finishes in Bathrooms

Bathrooms are no longer just functional spaces—they've evolved into personal sanctuaries where design meets luxury. Metallic finishes play a pivotal role in elevating these interiors, adding sophistication, contrast, and timeless appeal. In 2025, brushed nickel, matte black, and living brass dominate bathroom fixtures and fittings, each bringing a distinct character. This guide explores these trending finishes and offers expert tips to harmonize them seamlessly into your designs.

## 2025's Top Metallic Bathroom Finishes

### 1. Brushed Nickel – The Modern Classic

A refined alternative to chrome, brushed nickel offers a soft, muted sheen that resists fingerprints and water spots. Its versatility makes it ideal for both contemporary and transitional bathrooms.

- Neutral tone pairs effortlessly with marble, stone and wood.
- Durable and low-maintenance, perfect for high-use areas.

Best For:

- Faucets, shower systems, and towel bars.
- Pairing with cool-toned tiles and monochromatic schemes.



### 2. Matte Black – Bold & Timeless

Matte black continues its reign in 2025, delivering a striking contrast against light surfaces while maintaining an understated elegance.

- Conceals water spots better than polished metals.
- Works beautifully with terrazzo and concrete finishes.

Best For:

- Statement faucets, freestanding tubs & cabinet hardware.
- Contrasting with warm wood vanities or bold-colored walls.

### 3. Living Brass – Warm & Evolving

Unlike static polished brass, living brass develops a natural patina over time, adding depth and organic charm.

- Brings warmth to neutral and earthy palettes.
- Complements handmade tiles and textured surfaces.

Best For:

- Wall-mounted faucets, vanity lighting, and custom mirrors.
- Enhancing spa-like bathrooms with stone vessel sinks.



#### Design Tips for a Cohesive Look

Avoid mixing multiple metals in one bathroom.  
Match bathroom metals to hardware such as door handles



# 05 DIY Vertical Gardens

In today's dense urban landscapes, vertical gardens have emerged as a revolutionary way to integrate greenery into compact living spaces. These living walls not only enhance air quality and reduce urban heat but also transform bland walls into vibrant, breathing art installations. This edition explores simple yet stunning DIY vertical garden solutions that anyone can create—no professional landscaping required.

## Vertical Garden Systems for Every Space

### Modular Panel Systems (Easiest for Beginners)

Pre-planted panels with integrated irrigation make vertical gardening accessible.

- Lightweight frames with built-in water reservoirs
- Ideal for herbs, succulents, and small flowering plants
- Can cover entire walls or act as room dividers

Best For:

- Balcony privacy screens
- Kitchen herb walls
- Office accent walls



### Repurposed Pallet Gardens (Budget-Friendly)

Upcycled wooden pallets become instant planters when laid horizontally or mounted vertically.

- Naturally slatted design provides drainage and air flow
- Perfect for strawberries, lettuce, or cascading vines
- Rustic aesthetic complements industrial interiors

Pro Tip:

- Line with landscape fabric before adding soil to prevent erosion.

### Hanging Pocket Gardens (Best for Renters)

Fabric pocket organizers transform into portable green walls.

- No drilling or permanent installation
- Lightweight and movable with changing seasons
- Excellent for ferns, philodendrons, and other shade lovers

Innovative Use:

- Create a "plant curtain" in front of sun-facing windows for natural filtering.



### Design Tips for Success

Sunny walls: Try sedums, lavender, or cherry tomatoes

Shady spots: Opt for ferns, begonias, or mint

For small walls, use self-watering spikes or water-retaining soil mixes

Use waterproof backing on indoor installations

Create patterns using colored foliage plants

Incorporate subtle LED strip lighting to highlight textures after dark

# 06 Invisible Induction Cooktops

The kitchen of the future is here, where cooking surfaces disappear completely when not in use. Invisible induction cooktops represent the ultimate fusion of cutting-edge technology and minimalist design, offering full cooking functionality that vanishes into countertops. This revolutionary approach redefines kitchen aesthetics while maintaining professional-grade performance, creating spaces that transform from sleek food prep surfaces to powerful cooking stations in seconds.

## The Technology Behind the Magic

### How Invisible Induction Works

These systems embed induction coils beneath solid surface countertops, activated only when needed.

Activation Methods:

- Touch controls hidden under counter edges
- Smartphone app activation
- Motion sensors that detect compatible cookware

Material Science:

- Works through 12mm thick counter materials (quartz, porcelain, or specialized composites)
- No visible burners or markings when inactive
- Heat remains contained to cookware footprint



### Design Advantages

Beyond aesthetics, these systems solve multiple kitchen challenges.

Space Optimization:

- Reclaims entire counter areas when not cooking
- Eliminates traditional cooktop "dead zones"
- Enables multi-functional kitchen islands

Safety Innovations:

- Automatic shut-off when cookware is removed
- Child lock capabilities
- No residual heat on counter surfaces



### Design Tips for Perfect Integration

Power Requirements

- Requires 240V circuits like traditional induction
- Plan for potential future expansion (pre-wire for additional zones)

User Education

- First-time users need orientation (where to place pans)
- Include clear maintenance instructions (special cleaners for some surfaces)

Countertop Selection is Critical

- Best with homogeneous materials (porcelain > quartz > solid surface)
- Avoid natural stone - can develop hairline cracks over time

Lighting Considerations

- Subtle under-counter lighting helps locate inactive zones
- Avoid direct overhead lighting that can wash out activation indicators

# 07 Dopamine Decor

In an era where our surroundings profoundly impact mental well-being, Dopamine Decor has emerged as a design revolution. This vibrant movement uses color psychology to create spaces that actively elevate mood, boost energy, and spark creativity. More than just an aesthetic trend, it's a science-backed approach to designing interiors that make you feel genuinely happier the moment you walk in.

## Harnessing Color Psychology for Joyful Interiors

### The Color-Emotion Connection

Specific hues trigger neurological responses that influence emotions:

- Sunshine Yellow: Stimulates optimism and mental clarity (ideal for home offices)
- Coral Pink: Promotes warmth and comfort (perfect for bedrooms)
- Electric Blue: Enhances focus and calm (excellent for study nooks)
- Emerald Green: Creates balance and renewal (great for living rooms)



### The 60-30-10 Rule with a Twist

- 60% neutral base (for visual rest)
- 30% secondary happy hue
- 10% "dopamine hits" through ultra-saturated accents

### Surprise Elements

- Ceiling treatments in bold colors
- Unexpectedly colorful built-ins
- Rainbow-hued window mullions

### Design Tips for Maximum Impact

Start Small but Bold

- Paint just your interior doors in high-gloss happy hues
- Use colorful LED strips under floating shelves

Consider Room Orientation

- South-facing rooms need warm, saturated tones
- North-facing spaces can handle cooler, brighter colors

The Memory Factor

- Incorporate at least one childhood-inspired color element for nostalgia-triggered joy

Dynamic vs. Constant

- Balance permanent colorful elements with changeable accents (pillows, art)

The Happiness Test

- Before finalizing, ask: Does this space make me smile when I enter?





# 08 Mood-Responsive Lighting

Lighting has evolved from mere illumination to becoming an emotional conductor of space. The latest innovation in intelligent environments – mood-responsive lighting systems – use AI to read human cues and automatically adjust ambiance. These systems don't just respond to voice commands; they anticipate needs by analyzing biometrics, daily rhythms, and even social dynamics, creating lighting that harmonizes perfectly with our emotional states.

## AI-Curated Ambiance for Emotional Wellbeing

### How AI Lighting Reads You

Next-gen systems combine multiple data inputs:

Biometric Sensors (via wearables or room scanners):

- Pupil dilation → adjusts brightness
- Heart rate variability → modifies color temperature
- Body temperature → shifts cool/warm spectrum

Behavioral Patterns:

- Morning routines → energizing light sequences
- Evening relaxation → gradual amber transitions
- Social gatherings → dynamic accent lighting

Environmental Factors:

- Natural light levels → complementary artificial lighting
- Weather conditions → compensatory ambiance



### Design Integration Strategies

Zoning for Emotional Diversity

- Create micro-climates within open plans (energizing kitchen vs. calming lounge)

The Transparency Principle

- Always allow users to see/override the AI's decisions

Architectural Camouflage

- Hide sensors in decorative elements (molding, art pieces)

Material Interactions

- Specify surfaces that enhance light effects (reflective backsplashes, matte ceilings)

Fail-Safe Protocols

- Program default "safe modes" for sensor malfunctions

### Implementation Checklist

- Layer ambient, task, and accent lighting for full spectrum control
- Pre-wire for future biometric integrations
- Test color rendering index (CRI >90 for accurate skin tones)
- Include manual override stations with tactile controls



# 09 The Art of Selecting the Perfect Bedhead

The bedhead serves as both a functional support and the focal point of bedroom design—a decorative anchor that sets the tone for your sanctuary. More than just a backdrop, the right bedhead enhances comfort, influences spatial perception, and expresses personal style. This guide explores how to select a bedhead that harmonizes with your lifestyle, space requirements, and design vision.

## Key Considerations for the Ideal Bedhead

### Functional Priorities

#### Comfort & Ergonomics

- Upholstered options (velvet, linen, leather) for back support and softness
- Adjustable designs with built-in reading lights or charging ports
- Height considerations – taller bedheads (900 - 1200mm) for a grand statement, lower (600 - 750mm) for minimalist spaces

#### Space Optimization

- Wall-mounted to save floor space in compact rooms
- Storage-integrated (shelves, hidden compartments) for multifunctionality
- Room-divider styles in studio layouts

#### Material Selection Guide

Material	Best for	Maintenance
Linen / Upholstered	Cozy, textured elegance	Regular vacuuming, spot cleaning
Leather	Luxe, timeless appeal	Condition annually, avoid direct sunlight
Wood	Warmth and organic feel	Dust regularly, polish occasionally
Metal	Industrial/modern edge	Wipe with damp cloth
Rattan/Cane	Bohemian or coastal vibes	Light dusting, avoid moisture



### Design Tips for a Cohesive Look

#### Proportional Balance

- Bedhead height should relate to ceiling height (taller ceilings can handle dramatic headboards)
- Width should extend slightly beyond mattress (typically 50-100mm wider than bed frame)

#### Color Strategy

- Match to flooring for grounded elegance
- Contrast with wall color for definition
- Pull from existing room accents for harmony

#### Texture Play

- Pair smooth leather with nubby throws
- Combine wood tones with metallic bedside lamps

#### Lighting Synergy

- Install wall sconces at perfect reading height
- Backlight floating designs for ambient glow

#### Future-Proofing

- Neutral bases allow for easier style evolution
- Removable covers extend design longevity

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