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The TopTattooDesign.Com Guide to Tattoos



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Choosing the Perfect Position for Your New Tattoo

Millions of people, in recent years, have tuned into the very special art of tattooing as a way to have something of permanent meaning placed on their bodies.

You're one of them, and you think having a tattoo would be absolutely mind-blowing, but you just don't know enough about what kind of tattoo to get, or even more importantly, which part of your body you want tattooed.

The first thing you should decide is whether you want a tattoo that can be hidden. It depends largely on your own personality. If you approach the world with an "in-your-face" attitude, you may want a tattoo positioned so that will be visible most of the time.

On the other hand, if you are somewhat shy or just like to keep secrets, having a tattoo on a place you normally keep covered may make you feel unique, and even a little sexy.

And keep in mind that a tattoo which seems perfect to you when you are in your twenties may leave you asking "What was I thinking?" in later years. So don't commit to a first tattoo positioned where you will be forced to look at it every day for the rest of your life.

Think about your social life. If it calls for you to attend very many upscale events, and you are female, are you going to want your tattoo visible when you wear a strapless dress?

But even if you are aristocracy, you can still manage a tattoo. Lady Churchill sported a wrist tattoo which she simply covered with a diamond bracelet on state occasions!

Will having a plainly visible tattoo cause friction between you and someone close? For example, would your husband or wife see your tattoo as a come-on to others? If so, put it where it will be a secret for just the two of you.

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Then there's the work situation. Will your current or potential employer be OK with you sporting a visible tattoo? Many of them aren't.

And then there's the problem of weight gain or loss. The odds are strong that you will not remain at the identical weight you are the day you get your tattoo. And even if you do, the human body has an unfortunate tendency to reshape itself during middle age. A tattoo which looks great on the flat stomach of your 20s may be an embarrassment when you get middle-aged spread.

The same holds if you lose weight after your tattoo is in place. Your skin may become loose; how will that affect your tattoo?

You should also consider your pain threshold when deciding where to place your tattoo. The most painful tattooing occurs on designs close to the bone, like shins, elbows, and knees. If you are someone who breaks into a cold sweat at the thought of going to the dentist, you should probably limit your choice of tattoo locations to the more padded areas of your anatomy.

But once you've sorted through all the tattoo positioning pitfalls, you can get some visualization help at <http://www.bmezine.com>. They have several pages with photographs of recently completed tattoos which will give you a much clearer picture of how you might end up looking. The photos cover everything from foot and ankle to breast and collar bone designs of every possible size and intricacy.

Where you position your tattoo says nearly as much about you as your tattoo itself. So be sure to choose a spot which will let you enjoy your tattoo for the rest of your life!

Guidelines for Choosing the Best Tattoo Parlors

If you were going to invest in a piece of art, would you feel better about buying it from an accredited gallery which could prove it was authentic, or from someone selling it from the trunk of their car?

So think of the tattoo you are about to get as a piece of art, because that's what it should be. Tattoos are one of the most ancient forms of body art, for which you will be providing the canvas.

And because tattoos have soared in popularity over the past decade, there is no shortage of tattoo "studios" more than willing to practice their artistry on you.

How do you separate the best tattoo parlors from the rest?

Let me confess. I have, for years, indulged in oil painting as a hobby. I have an easel, brushes, a palette, paints and mediums too numerous to count, palette knives, and even a smock. I have won a few awards in amateur competitions, and even sold a few pieces of my work.

Does that make me a professional artist?

No more than owning inks, needles, designs, and renting a store space makes someone a professional tattoo artist. Before you decide to patronize a particular tattoo parlor, learn what a successful parlor should look like. If the one you are considering doesn't measure up, take your money, and your canvas, elsewhere.

When you start looking for the best tattoo parlor, you'll be able to tell a lot simply by paying attention to your first impressions when walking in the door.

If you see clutter, overflowing ashtrays, dirt in the corners and dust on the furniture, will you really be able to overlook them?

Pay attention to the quality of the tattoo designs on display. Tattoo "flash", all those design posters covering the walls of every studio, are, or should be, anyway, copyrighted artwork purchased from professional artists.

Do they have the bright colors and clear definition of professional artistic prints?

Can you see the copyright and the artist's name?

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If the flash you are looking at appears washed-out, and you can't see any identifying marks, you may be looking at designs bootlegged from anywhere; the same people who sell traditional artwork or bootlegged movies from the trunks of their cars are perfectly capable of selling stolen tattoo designs.

Any merchandise that has a market is merchandise which can be counterfeited, and the soaring popularity of tattoos has made tattoo designs prime bootlegging material.

If the shop you are visiting was willing to cheat legitimate artists out of the royalties they should be getting for their tattoo designs, will they be willing to give you full value for the money you spend on your tattoo?

The best tattoo parlors offer new needles, fresh high quality ink, clean gloves, and artists who will spend all the time necessary to make sure your tattoo is the best it can be.

How is the lighting in the studio? At the best tattoo parlors, your tattoo will be done in natural light, so that you can judge how it will permanently appear. Or will it be done under fluorescent lighting, or in a dimly lit corner?

Fluorescent lighting will heighten the effect of yellow and greens inks while graying the blues and reds.

If the studio's cleanliness, flash, and lighting seem acceptable, it's time to learn about their history.

1. How long have they been at their present location and can they give you the names of some satisfied customers?
2. Do they have a portfolio with pictures of their healed tattoos to show you?
3. Do the artists know how to avoid scarring, or what to do if they see plasma leaking during the tattooing process?
4. Do they even know what plasma is?

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There are some terms you can throw around to find out how familiar a tattoo studio's employees are with safety regulations.

Asking whether they practice "Standard Precautions" will let you know if they are in compliance with the OSHA guidelines for controlling bloodborne diseases.

Standard precautions mean that the best tattoo parlors will have artists who sterilize their packaged needles and tubes in an autoclave before opening them for use.

Any equipment they use on a customer, including inks, glove, razors, ink cups, and ointments, will be discarded after use, and the artist will wipe down the work area with a virucide, to destroy any lingering germs or viruses.

The best tattoo parlors dispose of any sharp instruments in the same way that hospitals do, in "sharps" containers, and any other materials which have come into contact with blood in biohazard containers.

The simple rule is that anything which is exposed to human blood, in the best tattoo parlors, will either be disposed of or autoclaved after use.

It may seem uncomfortable, but you want your tattoo artist to treat you as if your blood were infectious. Even though you know it isn't, you can't say the same for everyone else who has been tattooed at that particular parlor.

So the best tattoo parlors will approach everyone that way. Don't take it personally.

If the person who greets you when you enter the parlor is reluctant to answer your questions on the parlor's safety practices, and can't refer you to another employee who will, scratch that tattoo parlor off your list.

And if you live in a state which requires its tattoo parlors to be certified, you are in luck.

In the U.S., only three states, New Jersey, Maine, Massachusetts, require their tattoo artists to be certified by the American Academy of Micropigmentation: <http://www.micropigmentation.org/>

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And only one state, Oregon, has a state certification program. Oregon's tattoo artists have to complete and pass a 368-hour training course at a state-approved training school.

New Mexico, North Dakota, and Washington D.C. have no regulations on tattooing at all.

So if you're in a state which is either unregulated, or only requires its tattoo parlors to pass an occasional Health Department inspection, the easiest way for you to find the best tattoo parlors is to look for those whose artists belong to the Alliance of Professional Tattooists.

The APT admits only those artists who have educated themselves in proper tattoo safety.

Look at choosing the best tattoo parlors the same way you would look at choosing the best art galleries.

You are buying artwork, and you, and the rest of the world will be looking at it for the rest of your life.

The best tattoo parlors take pride in their work.

And you'll probably be able to tell you are in one of the best the minute you walk through its door.

Tattoo Safety: Coming to the Point

If you came of age in the 1960s and decided to get a tattoo, you probably did it to show that you didn't want to belong to the rich trendy establishment.

But if you came of age in the past ten years and got a tattoo, you probably did it to show that you did belong to the rich trendy establishment.

Tattooing as a form of self-expression has moved from the domain of heavy metal "bad boy" rock stars, military lifers, and Harley-Davidson road hogs in the 1970s to being common among film stars, athletes, and pop stars.

From Sir Ian McKellen to Angelina Jolie, Mike Tyson to David Beckham, and Eminem to Brittany Spears, tattoos have become mainstream.

Dating back to King Harold II, who died in 1066 at the Battle of Hastings, and whose disfigured corpse was identified, legend has it, by the "Edith and England" tattooed on his chest, even members of the various royal houses of Europe have indulged themselves in the colorful art. Princess Stephanie of Monaco is only the most recent in a long line of them.

Life Magazine, in 1936, estimated that about 6%, or ten million, of all Americans had tattoos; in 2003, according to a Harris Poll, nearly one in six, or about fifty million, given today's population of three hundred million, are sporting them.

And only last year, in 2006, the American Academy of Dermatology reported that almost one in four of all Americans between the ages of 18 and 50, and more than one in three of those between 18 and 29, have a tattoo.

Tattoos, in other words, are hot. And with the burgeoning demand for them, there is a burgeoning demand for tattoo parlors. But anytime there's money to be made, there will be those who want to make it in the easiest way possible.

So if you are considering getting a tattoo of you own, you need to watch your own, possibly soon to be decorated, back.

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Tattooing is not without its risks.

If it is done in sanitary conditions by an experienced tattoo artist, it usually will not result in any lasting health problems. But tattoo safety relies on the person injecting a foreign substance permanently into one's skin.

And it's only natural that some people who get tattoos will experience adverse reactions, ranging from skin irritation to allergies to infection, even when the parlors they use practice the highest standards of tattoo safety.

Even the FDA, as the watchdog of the cosmetics industry, has weighed in on the dyes used in tattooing ink. It has given them the all clear for use in lipsticks, but has remained silent as to their suitability for permanent skin injections. On the other hand, it has not yet tried to regulate their use.

You should know, however, that some red tattoo inks contain mercuric sulfide and ferric hydrate, and mercuric sulfide, present in cinnabar and vermilion inks, is associated with increased allergic reactions sometimes to the forming of granular lesions.

These lesions are little nodules which appear because the body's immune system sees the tattoo dyes as a foreign substance. The nodules reaction can occur with any colored tattoo inks.

Dubbed the "red reaction", the sensitivity to red tattoo inks may lead to swelling, itching, and inflammation around the tattoo. But the reaction may also lie dormant for many years.

You don't have to have a medical degree to know that, when you allow yourself to be tattooed, you are allowing thousands of miniscule openings to be made in your skin. And you know that with every breach of your skin there is a chance that bacteria will find their way in.

You can minimize the chances of a bacterial invasion, however, by doing a little pre-tattoo safety investigating.

Verify that your tattoo artist uses brand-new sterile needles; that he or she does the equivalent of a brain surgeon's hand scrubbing before getting to work; and that he or she puts those thoroughly clean hands inside some even cleaner gloves. Skin infection is uncomfortable, but blood infections can be deadly.

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If you find yourself in a tattoo parlor where the artist wants to use a deodorant stick to transfer the tattoo design from the paper to your skin, make sure that the deodorant is applied to a fresh piece of paper, and then transferred from the paper to your skin.

Directly sharing a community deodorant stick goes against all the rules of tattoo safety, and is one great way of loading your skin with germs before the tattoo needle gets anywhere near it.

If you are someone with a compromised immune system, for instance, if you're diabetic, you are at greater risk than the general population for infections, and may have an extended healing period following your tattoo.

And while tattoo parties may sound like just the sort of thing wild and crazy people love to do, they are in reality no different from sharing a needle to mainline heroin.

Whatever is on that needle when it makes its way to you is going to be yours to keep. That includes things like the Hepatitis B and C viruses, or even HIV. There is, where tattoo parties are concerned, no such thing as tattoo safety.

Even if you get your tattoo in spotless circumstances, you'll need to take care of it properly during the healing process. The tattoo artist will get you started by applying some a topical anti-bacterial and bandaging it.

So you need to know, and tell the artist, if you are allergic to any particular antibiotics.

Once you get your new tattoo home, just follow common sense tattoo safety precautions in keeping it clean.

Leave the bandage on for about an hour, and when you remove it, wash your tattoo with an antibacterial soap and cool water.

Then cover it with an ointment to prevent your skin from chapping, and repeat the routine every four to six hours for about a week.

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Keep your tattoo out of the sun, keep it from drying out, do not scratch at it, and when you do touch it to clean it, wash your hands with antibacterial soap first.

Don't expose your healing tattoo to any "community" water with a dip in the swimming pool or shared splash in the tub. And, if you want to maintain the strength of its colors, keep it away from chlorinated or salt water.

And even when it looks healed, keep using an alcohol-free moisturizer on it several times a day for another month.

A tattoo, applied according to tattoo safety standards, and allowed to properly heal, is a great way to make you feel special, and maybe just a touch "naughty".

So don't settle for any but the cleanest parlor and most careful artist, and you will be treating yourself to a bit of color which will last the rest of your life!

Choosing the Right Tattoo Design: Beyond the Flash

You're thinking your appearance needs some spicing up, and that you wouldn't mind adding a little color to a secret place.

But you also know that, if you're going to invest your money in a permanent bit of body décor, you need to put some thought into its design.

So you head for your friendly neighborhood tattoo parlor (with the skyrocketing popularity of tattoos you're bound to have one) to look for inspiration.

You know that whatever you select will become a permanent part of your existence. You can cover it up, but you can't escape it. So you will need to choose carefully.

The first thing you may notice when you enter your tattoo parlor is just how many designs there are. It's not unusual for every nearly square inch of a parlor's walls to be covered with posters, nearly every square inch of which is covered with designs.

You are experiencing "flash", and not because all of those designs and colors make your eyes feel like that a flashbulb just nailed them.

Tattooing was a staple of traveling carnivals in the early to mid 20th century, and carnival barkers were notorious for the shelves and shelves of cheesy gaudy prizes which they used to lure players to games completely rigged to relieve them of their money.

Those prizes were known, among the barkers, as "flash", and it may be that the carnival tattoo artists adopted the term for their selection of tattoo designs.

But however they came by the name, those posters covering the walls at your tattoo parlor are called the "flash."

So, if you find yourself overwhelmed by the sheer number and variety of tattoo designs, it might be a good time to step back from the flash and do some self-evaluation.

Decide what you want your tattoo design to say about you, or what you want to say to the rest of the world with your tattoo.

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Tattoos originated as ancient, symbolic art forms, and many of them retain their symbolic meanings today. So you could choose a tattoo based on its meaning.

Or, you could just want a tattoo that commemorates something or someone important to you.

You can start by returning to the flash and seeing if there are any designs which keep catching your eye. Narrow your choice to those that have the most appeal, and then do a little more digging.

Find out if one of those tattoo designs says something about you, and you'll be much closer to getting one you won't eventually regret.

If you are female, you may instinctively be drawn to the butterfly tattoo designs. You wouldn't be alone; butterfly tattoo designs are the most-often requested by women.

And they have an enchanting history; butterflies have, from ancient times, been seen as the perfect symbol for the human struggle to move from the lower to higher realms of existence, like the butterfly emerges from its cocoon. A small butterfly tattoo can make a big statement!

Women are also drawn to floral tattoos. Cherry blossom tattoo designs, although they are generally used just as accents for much larger tattoos, are reminders, in Japanese culture, of the beauty and impermanence of human life.

Peonies, floral tattoo designs even more showy than roses, represent luck and prosperity in Oriental cultures. If you are a male with a risk-taking nature, not afraid to sport a peony tattoo, it would certainly be an appropriate choice; it represents to the Japanese a gambling nature.

And, of course, there's the rose. It's the most popular floral tattoo design and the best-loved flower in Western culture.

The rose has come to represent the epitome of beauty. But roses are not without their thorns, so you can communicate a double message with a rose tattoo.

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Even the color of the rose tattoo design you choose will say something.

Red roses are a symbol of passionate love; white roses are a symbol of purity; and yellow roses are a symbol of friendship. There are even black rose tattoo designs, for those with an antiauthoritarian streak.

Then there are the animals. They can range from a tiny frog to a U.C. Marine Corps Bull Dog, or a psychedelic Dragon. If you have a love for a particular kind of animal, or identify with the traits which we usually assign to different species of animals, you might find the perfect tattoo design in the tattoo flash zoo.

If you see yourself as sleek, independent, and powerful, a panther tattoo design might communicate your self-image to the world.

If you identify with the wild and free American mustang, your tattoo artist can accommodate you. You may be as shy as a deer, smart as a fox, or hor** as a toad. All doable tattoo designs.

If you have the money and the available skin, in fact, you can have an entire menagerie of tattoo designs, providing an animal totem for each of your personality traits.

There are also tattoo designs to appeal to those of a religious or personal nature. One of the most widely known is the Celtic Cross, which has its origins both in the Christian Cross and Celtic fertility symbols.

Other popular Christian tattoo designs are Praying Hands, the Rock of Ages, and, of course, images of Jesus.

If you are into astrology, you are sure to find your Zodiac sign in a tattoo design. And if you believe in Tarot cards as predictors of the future, you will be amazed at the breathtaking Tarot tattoo designs available.

There are twenty-six of them available, one for each card, so you can pick the ones that you think hold the most favorable outcome for you!

Tattoo designs, in other words, are art forms appealing to the artist in each of us. So give your imagination free rein, and it will carry you to the tattoo design that says exactly the right thing, both to, and about, YOU!

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