

Laundry room? These days, it's any room

KIM COOK, Associated Press
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This image provided by MandiCasa shows a modern laundry room. MandiCasa's Drop system includes base, column and hanging cabinets, racks, deep drawers, vanities and other elements. The modular collection, in neutral hues, is made of sustainably-produced wood-grained melamine. (MandiCasa/SharpThink via AP)

Those who have an in-home clothes washer and dryer often take it for granted. But even in larger homes, we haven't had the convenience all that long.

Indoor plumbing and power made electric washers and tumble dryers possible, and by 1937 they appeared on the market. Most people plopped these appliances in rooms that already had plumbing -- usually the kitchen. Soon, the basement became the laundry zone in many homes; the machines were noisy, so better to have them some distance from living spaces.

Larger homes and quieter appliances brought the laundry upstairs again for convenience. And now, with quiet, more compact and stylish machinery, laundries are in rooms throughout the home.

Pinterest recently reported "luxury laundry" as one of its most searched terms. Houzz's 2022 Houzz & Home survey said spending on laundry renovations was up by about a third in 2021 over previous years.

Sustainability concerns are also changing laundry spaces. Energy-saving features on the machinery are standard, and homeowners are asking for simple sinks for hand-washing garments, as well as racks and retractable clotheslines to air dry, designers say.

The spin on what's new in home laundry areas:

SPACE SAVERS

Some major manufacturers now offer a washer/dryer combo unit that does everything in one machine, good news for apartment dwellers and others with limited space.

For separate machines, stackables tend to be more compact.

"In a kitchen, side-by-side (laundry) appliances can be hidden underneath countertops to make use of every inch. In a closet or bath, stacked machines conserve space," says Pasadena, California, designer Jeanne Chung.

Other features might include ventless drying, offered by many brands.

MAKING IT FUN

Laundry rooms no longer need to be hidden.

"They're another area to design and decorate, where people feel comfortable taking a risk with a bright, fun wallpaper," says Abby Gruman of Abby Leigh Designs in New York City.

Hillary Stamm of HMS Interior Design in El Segundo, California, agrees: "This is a space you aren't in for hours (let's hope!) so have some fun. A textured tile or an intricate design with a splash of color can work wonders here."

If your laundry room is in a separate spot that guests rarely see, there's an opportunity to really personalize it. Would you prefer a pristine oasis, with calming hues and accents, or an upbeat space with bright colors and lots of pattern?

"Wallpaper is my go-to," says designer Maritza Capiro in Coral Gables, Florida. "It's cost-effective and creates visual impact. In a laundry room, I'll use a vinyl wallpaper; it's easy to clean, durable and flame-retardant."

Peel-and-stick wallpaper tiles are another DIY-friendly option, perhaps in faux stone, decorative patterns or nature prints.

For one recent project, Capiro tied in materials from other rooms. "We selected marble subway tiles for the walls, as marble is in the bathrooms. Then we chose a durable white quartz countertop, which complements the tiles," she says.

LOCATION, LOCATION

"In most new construction, the laundry is on the master bedroom floor," says Gruman.

"Another big trend is the double-stacked washer and dryer" — two of each, next to each other. "Instead of one, people want two," she says.

Capiro cites a client who is putting laundry rooms on both the first and second floors — one near the bedrooms and the other adjacent to the kitchen, with a big utility sink.

There are also stylish laundries in garages.

"Selecting attractive cabinets, countertops and backsplashes elevates the look of the space," Capiro says.

Natural light is a bonus. But functional lighting fixtures can add design oomph. A hands-free motion-sensor switch also might come in handy for those times when your arms are full of clothes.

STORAGE AND MULTI-TASKING

Laundry rooms now are often multi-use spaces. Have enough shelving, and keep it organized. A junk drawer is recommended.

"Laundry rooms often double as linen and utility closets," says Los Angeles designer Jessica Nicastro. She integrates ironing boards and energy-saving drying racks vertically into cabinetry.

Also on clients' wish lists: plenty of counter space, storage, and zones for washing pets.

"I'm loving a laundry room that can double as a gift-wrapping center, or as a craft space," Stamm says.

Capiro is working on a laundry room that doubles as a workout room. Along with space for a stationary bike, there'll be a TV and storage for holiday decorations.

READY-MADE ROOM

It can be daunting to shop for all the storage elements you'll need if you're DIYing it. Some retailers offer component packages.

To name a few: MandiCasa's Drop system includes base, column and hanging cabinets, racks, deep drawers, vanities and other elements, including some specifically for laundry: drying rods and a drop-down folding table. The modular collection is made of sustainably produced, wood-grained melamine.

The Container Store's White Elfa Laundry Solution includes epoxy-coated steel, ventilated shelves, melamine shelves, closet rod, utility hooks and easy-glide drawers. And Pottery Barn's Aubrey Collection features open cabinetry, closet rails, rack and laundry cart.