

A dirty little secret no more

Laundry rooms are bigger, better and no longer tucked out of sight

BY ARLENE MILES

Daily Herald Correspondent

The smell and feel of newly washed clothes evokes a sense of well-being. What could be better than a load of warm towels fresh from the dryer?

Yet, the laundry is a necessary evil, too. As soon as you've done a load or two, there's another load or two, or three, or even more to do.

Given that the average household spends more than 400 hours per year doing laundry, why not make the space in which you spend so much time a bright and happy locale? Doing the wash is no longer relegated to a dark area of the basement along with spiders and concrete walls. With a little bit of planning, you can turn your laundry area into an inviting space that will make this mundane task a pleasure, even if that locale happens to be in the lowest level of your home.

The centerpieces of the laundry room, of course, are the washer and dryer. Today's stars are front-loading appliances, which are not only more energy efficient, but provide less wear and tear on your clothes.

"Top loading machines use 10 to 15 gallons of water as opposed to 4 to 5 gallons of water for front-loading machines," said Len Szulc, appliance salesman for Abt Electronics in Glenview. "Plus, your clothes will actually spin two times faster and will come out drier, so they spend less time in the dryer itself."

Not only do newer machines use less energy, but today's top-loading washers do not have an agitator. They clean clothes by spinning them, subjecting clothes to less wear and tear, ultimately making them last longer. The drawback to front loaders, however, is that these machines are deeper than top loaders and may not fit in tight spaces.

"They're approximately 1½ to 2½ inches deeper than what was on the market some years ago, and with four to six inches needed for venting, there are areas such as laundry closets with bifold doors where these machines won't fit."

loading designs that are popular with condominium owners. These can be stacked on top of each other to maximum space even further. Interior designer Adele Lampert of Page One Interiors in Barrington has had success suggesting Maytag's Neptune series for clients with limited space.

"These are full capacity machines that you can put in closets. They're some of our favorites," Lampert said.

Although the Maytag machines cited by Lampert retail for less than \$1,000, the drawback of most front-loading machines is that they sell for \$2,000 to \$5,000 each, depending on the features included.

While laundry rooms are built around their appliances, probably the second most important feature is counter space.

"One thing people often don't take into consideration is having room to fold clothes," said Chris Donatelli, owner of Donatelli Builders in Wheaton. "You need to have a clutter-free space for folding and sorting clothes. If you're working with a small, existing space, you need to find some way to make this work."

Interior designer Doreen Schweitzer of Doreen Schweitzer Interiors in Naperville said incorporating counters is particularly important when front-loading machines are part of the design as the height of these appliances often make it impractical to do the folding there. Schweitzer recommended at least four feet of counter space.

Incorporating a place to dry and hang your clothes is another essential.

"It seems like you can never have too many places to hang things, so I like to use a lot of hooks," Schweitzer said.

Consider options such as utility poles, accordion-style racks, and stand-alone clothes racks if you have the room. Tile floors and possibly a drain for any drip-dry runoff are also possibilities.

The utility tub has long been a mainstay of the laundry area. The look of this element, however, is changing. Models in fiberglass are the least expensive, although they stain more easily than other



Featuring an island counter for folding clothes, this laundry room is by Page One Interiors in Barrington.

sink which will provide the utility you need, yet brighten the area at the same time.

"There's a farmhouse sink by Barclay that's 25 inches wide that we absolutely love," Lampert said. "They're so much cuter than using the other sinks."

Storage, of course, is a key element, because not only are laundry items kept in this area, often other household cleaning agents and tools are kept here, too. The size of today's front-loading appliances lend themselves to having cabinetry built around them so the washer and dryer blend into the room.

"I recommend a combination of open and closed storage with places for hampers and baskets down below and shelves above," Donatelli said.

Another trick is to utilize the backsplash area of front-loading



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"They're approximately 1½ to 2½ inches deeper than what was on the market some years ago, and with four to six inches needed for venting, there are areas such as laundry closets with bifold doors where these machines won't fit," Szulc said. "So we always ask our customers if they have any depth issues in their laundry area."

European brands such as Miele and Bosch offer compact front-

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The utility tub has long been a mainstay of the laundry area. The look of this element, however, is changing. Models in fiberglass are the least expensive, although they stain more easily than other materials and are best used with laminate countertops. A single-bowl stainless steel or porcelain model will also work. The most expensive type is a farmhouse



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Olive green cabinets and a sewing desk, left, highlight this laundry room by Doreen Schweitzer Interiors in Naperville. The space also includes a large closet, above, for sorting and hanging clothes.

ally require a new shower stall, or new set of friends

Laundry: A gathering spot

Continued from Page 1

appliances. Lampert indicated she often designs built-in storage areas behind washers and dryers to provide storage for detergents and such in what would otherwise be wasted space.

One way to keep drying laundry out of site, particularly if the room is an area where people will pass through to reach other parts of your home, is to incorporate a drying closet, complete with racks and an exhaust fan to hasten drying time. The closet can also double as an area to hang and store mops, vacuums and the like.

Another laundry room essential is an ironing board. Storing the ironing board can be done in several ways. Boards that are built-in and hinge up into a wall are convenient but can be as much as \$1,000 depending on options. Such a luxury may not be cost effective. It may make more sense to store it inside a utility closet.

"When I built a new home several years ago I decided it wasn't worth the expense. The built-in ironing board is also smaller. If you sew, particularly if you work on larger items, a standard ironing board may be better," Schweitzer said.

Incorporating related activities such as sewing, crafts or other hobbies into laundry rooms is becoming increasingly popular.

"Laundry rooms have become multipurpose rooms as well — they are becoming the hub of the house," Donatelli said. "These rooms can be anything people want, but they have to have functionality to work."

If your laundry room is large, installing a center island for staging projects, writing

bills, or doing homework is an option. It's also ideal for a sewing desk. Make sure to put a grommet in the island countertop for a foot pedal cord and electrical plug.

With laundry rooms becoming such gathering places, it's no wonder than they're coming up out of basements and turning into essential areas in the main part of homes. Not only has this occurred, but another trend is to install multiple laundry areas in a home. Generally, these are smaller operations, often placed in closets, master bedrooms, near outdoor pools, and the like.

"You don't have to have a sink with these," Lampert said. "Second laundry rooms just have to be backed up to someplace with a water supply, such as a powder room."

Wherever you decide to do your laundry and/or crafts, make sure to shed some light on your subjects. Task lighting is essential for areas underneath cabinetry, inside closets and anywhere you perform tasks associated with wash day.

Organization can ease

Even if your laundry space is ultra small — let's say a washer and dryer tucked behind bifold doors, or a tiny walk-through mudroom — you can still make your laundry area a fun and inviting place. The key to small-space laundry rooms is organization.

Counter space in a small laundry area will most likely be at a premium or even nonexistent. Thus a few organizational tricks will go a long way in helping to make wash day a pleasure.

"With any space, you want to clean house and evaluate what you have," said Olescia Hanson, public relations director for The Container Store. "You want to find a way to help you sort your laundry, with areas for whites, brights, colors, and even dark colors separated."

Look for laundry baskets and hampers that have at least three compartments so you can sort your washables as soon as you take off your clothes. Another option in a small space is to hang small bags over your washer and dryer in which you can sort laundry. Don't forget

to get the kids involved, too. Asking them to sort their washables, whether in their rooms or in a central location, will save time in the long run.

Another timesaving trick is to make sure you have room to hang drip-dry clothes. You may accomplish this by incorporating a closet rod or a free-standing rack, depending on how much space you have in your laundry area.

"The trick is to get your clothes on hangers as quickly as possible after washing to avoid wrinkles," Hanson said.

Maximizing storage is also essential. Organizational tools such as Elfa's slim drawers, which can be tucked in tight spaces on the floor next to washers and dryers, can store laundry detergent and other

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