

## Today's Laundry Room

By Carol Lamkins, CMKBD, CID

The laundry room is one of the most used areas of a home and yet, is usually one of the most poorly designed. As an afterthought, it is tucked away in a garage or combined with other areas that do not work well together. But today's laundry rooms have undergone a transformation that makes them one of the most popular remodels in the home.

Locating the laundry room near the rooms generating the majority of clothes, linens, etc. makes sense and is reinforced by surveys by the National Association of Home Builders. Traditionally the laundry room was adjacent to the kitchen or in the garage. That might have been sensible for people who did not work outside of the home. But current work and lifestyles have changed the way we live in our homes.

According to a National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) consumer preference survey, 95 percent of new homeowners request a separate laundry room and, 61 percent of laundry rooms are being built on upper levels rather than first floors. The NAHB survey shows that homeowners want an expanded, multi-functional work area in the laundry room. Built-in ironing boards and solid-surface counter spaces for folding and sewing are popular, as are built-in storage cabinets or closets used to store detergent and other cleaning supplies as well as to conceal appliances.

Whether the laundry is simply a closeted space off a hallway or a large multi-functioning room, good design and efficient organization saves time and effort. Size is secondary as minimum steps leads to maximum efficiency.



Courtesy of Southern Living

A laundry space can be as simple as a closet conversion using a stacked washer/dryer. Well-organized design and a little construction turned this long hallway into a full-service laundry zone. Adjacent base cabinet doors pull open to reveal plastic-coated wire hampers. The open-sided bins allow soiled clothes and damp towels to breathe, which prevents mildew between wash loads.

The primary tasks in a laundry room include:

- Sorting clothes
- Washing
- Drying
- Folding or hanging

Efficiency starts by organizing the space using laundry baskets. Lower open shelving can be designed to hold open baskets for on-going sorting of soiled clothes, linens, etc. Designation using different shapes or colors of baskets allow for presorting – whites, colors, delicate, etc. Dry cleaning should go into its own basket. This makes loading the washer a synch.

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If space permits, a laundry sink is a logical asset. Pretreatment and rinsing/soaking of clothing is a frequent solution to stubborn stains. Also a sink area lends itself to wiping down laundry equipment and countertops. Storage needs for detergent, bleach, stain removers, softening agents, sewing kit, and other supplies should be located in cabinetry around the sink and laundry machines. Storage for toxic products should be secure so that young children cannot have access. Also for top loader washing machines, install wall cabinets or shelves to allow at least six inches of clearance beyond the top of the open washing machine lid and the bottom of the cabinet.



Courtesy of Vicki Ingham

The mud room in conjunction with the laundry room is a high traffic area and is often used for many different functions such as:

- Laundry
- Hang keys
- Charge cell phones
- Briefcase, backpack or purse drop-off area
- Shoe storage
- Pet accessories (leash, grooming supplies, etc.)
- Mail drop-off



Courtesy of Southern Living



Courtesy of Southern Living

Larger laundry rooms can also provide space for other needs such as sewing, crafts, flower arranging, hobbies, gift wrapping or even a home office area. High humidity is always a concern and good mechanical ventilation must be integrated.

By balancing tall, base and wall cabinetry these functions can be addressed as well as

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those of a basic laundry room. The “fitted” furniture of the laundry room not only looks good but provides functional surfaces and storage.



Courtesy of Samsung

Washing machines need to be level with the floor so that they do not “walk” during spin cycles. The newer washer and dryer machines with drawer pedestals upon which the washer and dryer are mounted are a good solution for ground floor laundry rooms. However due to washing machine vibration, non-drawer, solid construction pedestals should be used on other levels rather than the ground floor. Also the pedestals raise the laundry machine heights restricting their use as a worktop.

Another consideration is the location of the water valves for the washing machine. The manual wall valves should be accessible for the shut-off of water.

Some additional considerations would be adding a floor drain. This is also great protection for the rest of the house in the event a washer hose breaks or the washer overflows. An automatic shutoff valve is a wonderful addition to the laundry. It senses the electrical current draw from the washer and only opens the water supply when the machine is in use.

Cycle time or speed is important in our busy schedules. While front-loaders can take 2 hours to wash a load, the fastest top-loaders finish the job in 35 minutes, which means less overall disturbance.

Front loading machines should provide 48 inches of clearance in front of each appliance to provide room to walk around open doors.

Some front-loading washers can accommodate a dryer perched on top, which is useful when retrofitting a small space such as a closet as shown in the beginning of this article. Also consider laundry centers, which combine a washer and dryer into a single tall unit or combine the functions in a single machine.

The dryer should be located adjacent to the washer or within a convenient transfer distance. Correct door swings eliminate interference in clothing transfer. Clean laundry basket(s) should be stored near the dryer or hung above the space. An ample clean counter or the top of the dryer can be used to fold clean clothes. Also install some type of clothing



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rod with hangers that can directly receive clothing to minimize wrinkles or air dry. One clever way to accomplish this is to use a clothing rod as the bottom shelf in upper wall cabinets. The cabinet door closes over the rod when not in use. Hangers can be loaded on perpendicular pegs above the rod in order to close the cabinet door. Or simpler versions are the ones shown where the hanging rod is exposed.



The drying cabinet is a relatively new concept to the U.S. This high-end product is an alternative to a conventional clothes dryer, and is simply a different way to dry laundry.



Courtesy of Whirlpool

It operates like an accelerated clothesline, circulating air throughout the cabinet. Hanging clothes can be dried simultaneously with flat items or shoes. There is less wear and tear on clothing because of no tumbling. You can put anything in it at the same time (winter boots and heavy jackets), and use it for delicate items as shrinkage is reduced at the maximum temperature of 150° F. The drying cabinet uses a 1,200 W heating element, using just 2.8 kWh for a standard load. The lower temperature increases life expectancy of clothing. In comparison, the traditional tumble dryers commonly use a 4,000 W heating element.

Features include programmed and timed drying cycles, multiple temperature adjustments and dryness levels, delayed start and end of program signals. The

cabinets are programmed with LED display windows, multiple-option buttons or dials. The doors are reversible and there are lock-out systems for child safety.

The life expectancy for the drying cabinet is around 15 years, and there is very little maintenance if it is ever required. Drying cabinets are a common way to dry laundry in Scandinavian countries, and they are used in addition to traditional tumble dryers.



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Outdoor clotheslines are not as common as they once were, they are actually forbidden in some neighborhoods. But installing a retractable outdoor clothes line in the laundry room gives a perfect place to dry some delicates that should not be dried in the dryer. The beauty is that the line is retractable and can disappear when not in use.



Some more hints to save energy are:

- Set the washer to a rapid spin cycle to reduce drying time by wringing excess water from your clothing
- Most washing machines expend 90% of their energy on hot-water cycles and washing clothes in cold water can shave more than \$60 per year from your power bill (Use a cold-water detergent for cleansing effectiveness without hot water)
- Wash and dry clothing on low-heat settings when it's practical
- Keep dryer lint filters clean, and check exhaust vents to make sure they are free of blockages
- In nice weather, use a clothesline



**Courtesy of Sunline Parallel Aluminum Clothes Dryer**

With the advancements in front end loaders and their energy efficient qualities, these washers and dryers have become very popular. And with the top suddenly free it is perfect for sliding under a countertop, suddenly creating loads of counter top space.



**Courtesy of Southern Living**



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Enclosing laundry machines into cabinetry can be aesthetically pleasing, but the machines must remain easily removed for servicing. Note that base board molding must be removable for that reason.

When building laundry machines into cabinetry or using pedestals, be careful to keep the wall valves accessible for turning the water on and off to the washing machine. It is common practice to recess those valves into the wall versus mounting the valves directly on wall surface. This also allows the machines to position closer to the wall.

If room permits, an ironing board could be built-into the wall, attached on the wall, incorporated in a drawer or simply stored in a tall cabinet near the dryer. An alternative or addition would be a clothing steamer for quick touch-ups.

Pleasant work space requires good natural and artificial light as laundry rooms do not have a routine time for use. Lighting up the laundry area is critical for seeing and treating stains. Good task lighting brings a dramatic difference to the space. Operable windows through which light and air can flow help to keep the air fresh and release humidity generated by the washer and dryer.



Adding extra insulation to the walls and floor of the laundry room will help reduce noise pollution in other areas of the home. Sound insulation for walls is very important especially if the plumbing wall is shared by a bedroom. In general, front-loaders operate more quietly than top-loaders, though some produce a high-frequency whirl akin to an airplane engine revving up as they accelerate into the final spin. Some machines have an end-of-cycle signal that can be turned off (or down) for noise control.

There is a growing trend for multiple washers and dryers in the home. The most elaborate laundry rooms now feature more than one washer and more than one dryer. Though not quite as elaborate as a Laundromat, a couple of washers and dryers can make the chore go that much more quickly. Multiple laundry rooms are also a popular trend, especially if there are bedrooms on more than one floor of the home.

Adding the second laundry by adapting an existing space or adding a space with new construction begins with referencing the building codes for the area. Those in condominium/townhouse complexes must also consult their association for any limitations.

If all approvals are in place, then a structural engineer can help determine whether your home, or house plan, can accommodate a second-floor laundry. Space-planning

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issues, particularly in an existing home, are best addressed by an interior designer or an architect who can also incorporate necessary mechanical or structural changes into the design.

“Consumer Reports” summarize building considerations for laundry rooms to include:

- **Framing**  
Floor joists must be sturdy enough to support the extra weight and vibrations of a washer and dryer. Older framing might need to be beefed up with additional blocking. A clear path must also be established through which to run plumbing, venting, and electrical and, possibly, gas lines.
- **Noise**  
Walls and ceilings made from two layers of 1/2-inch or 5/8-inch gypsum wallboard are better than a single layer at dampening vibrations generated by a washer or dryer. Wall and joist spaces should be filled with fiberglass batts, rigid foam, or spray-in insulation to prevent sound from traveling to adjoining rooms, including those above and below.
- **Waterproofing**  
The best way to prevent a leak from flooding the rest of the house is to build a curb across the laundry room's threshold, waterproof the floor area, and install a floor drain. Because the drain will normally be dry, it will require a trap primer, which diverts a dribble of water from the supply line to the drain to keep the trap full and prevent sewer gas from wafting into the living space. Additional safeguards include washing-machine drip pans and electronic shutoff valves that automatically stop the flow of water when they sense a leak.
- **Utilities**  
Running new service lines with minimal demolition and disruption is usually the most challenging and time-consuming part of having a laundry room on an upper floor. It's also often the costliest step because building codes require that licensed professionals do much of the work.
- **Water**  
Besides running new supply lines, a licensed plumber will need to add an adequately sized drain line to whisk washing-machine waste water away; otherwise, the force created by the washer's discharge pump might overwhelm existing drain lines and overflow toilets, tubs, and showers downstream with water or soap suds. Also important, and often required by code, is a plumbing vent, which allows air to escape from the system.
- **Electricity and gas**  
A licensed electrician will need to pull dedicated lines for both the washer and dryer, including a 240-volt line if your dryer is electric. Gas-fueled dryers require only standard 120-volt electrical service. Many building codes require a plumber to install the gas piping between the municipal natural-gas supply or an on-site propane storage tank and your dryer. Most dryer models are available in electric and gas versions. Never use an extension cord.
- **Venting**  
Running dryer venting is often relatively simple because ducts can be run straight up through the attic and roof. It is important to plan dryer placement to keep the

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vent hose as straight and short as possible. Drying will be quicker and safer by reducing the lint accumulation.

Aesthetic trends affect color and flooring. Yellow has been a staple color for laundry rooms for ages and it's still a very popular choice. But laundry rooms are getting more risqué and using bolder colors, mainly because colored appliances are becoming very popular. Today's modern laundries feature a lot of color.

In the past the laundry room floor was typically vinyl sheet or ceramic tile. Today, comfort is a bigger concern in laundry rooms and people are standing in them more, so a resilient floor is a priority. Cork flooring is the biggest trend in laundry rooms today because of its durability, its low impact on joints and its beauty.

Creating or updating the laundry room is essentially about more efficient space, keeping it light, open and clean and infusing bursts of color throughout. But most importantly a laundry room remodel should focus on modern conveniences. In the end, the laundry room should be a well-planned, light-filled space where function is disguised with style.

### Resources:

- <http://www.nahb.org/page.aspx/landing/sectionID=113>
- <http://www.bhg.com/home-improvement/remodeling/gallery/laundry-room-design-basics/>
- <http://www.myhomeideas.com/decorating/design-ideas/love-your-laundry-room-10000001055139/>
- <http://www.home-designing.com/2009/06/laundry-room-storage-organization-and-inspiration>
- [http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/appliances/laundry-and-cleaning/laundry-rooms-7-06/overview/0607\\_laundry\\_rooms\\_ov.htm](http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/appliances/laundry-and-cleaning/laundry-rooms-7-06/overview/0607_laundry_rooms_ov.htm)
- <http://www.suite101.com/content/new-trends-in-laundry-rooms-a283284#ixzz14zdSHpqc>
- <http://laundry.about.com/od/laundryroom/a/laundrymspecs.htm>
- <http://www.staber.com/dryingcabinet>
- [http://www.cribcandy.com/laundry/bc2277aa4bc2041da84c3173aa7a9f33&page\\_offset=0](http://www.cribcandy.com/laundry/bc2277aa4bc2041da84c3173aa7a9f33&page_offset=0)
- [http://www.homeappliancecenter.com/category\\_name\\_Drying-Cabinets\\_path\\_2492-11613.html](http://www.homeappliancecenter.com/category_name_Drying-Cabinets_path_2492-11613.html)
- <http://www.luxuryhousingtrends.com/archive/2005/05/drying-cabinets/>