

LAUNDRY ROOMS ARE MOVING UP IN THE WORLD

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This summer, in Cincinnati, I had the chance to see something for the very first time: a washer and dryer in a luxurious master walk-in closet on a home's second floor. The house I was in was newly built, cost several million dollars, and was part of Homearama — an annual competition put on by the Home Builders Association of Greater Cincinnati that's like the Academy Awards, but for million-dollar homes.

It got me thinking about laundry rooms, where they should be located, and what they should — or could — look like.

"Having a laundry zone on an upper floor with the bedrooms and clothes hampers is practical, but having it on the main floor offers the possibility of multi-tasking, like doing laundry while preparing meals," said Lucie Pitt of Versa Style Design. "A laundry zone in the basement is more discreet, but requires many more trips up and down the stairs."

The laundry room, it seems, has finally come into its own. No longer relegated just to the dark and dingy basement of yore, it's gone from being a simply functional room to a more decorative one — as demonstrated by the stylish laundry room interior designer Stéphanie Fortier of Stéphanie Fortier Design, recently completed.

Fortier and her clients, one of whom is an artist, decided on a farmhouse style for the room, to blend in with the rest of the house.

To create the look, she furnished the space with black, Shaker-style cabinets, a large white apron sink, natural wood custom detailing and an eye-catching graphic-patterned floor tile.

"The tile was a challenge for them because it's an intense pattern and they wondered about getting tired of it, so I gave them two weeks to think about it with a mood board and as much vision as possible," said Fortier, who specifically chose the extra large sink so her client could wash her paintbrushes in it.

"They decided to go for it and absolutely don't regret it; in fact, they think it's the best room in the house now."

Mosaic tiles, wallpaper, cement and quartz countertops are all great ways to add style — and even a touch of glamour — to a laundry room, according to Katie C. Bridgman of Katie Charlotte Design, who also recommends using striking lighting as well as artwork.

"I love to design laundry rooms with tiled floors — something fun, practical and stylish. Mosaic tiles look beautiful and are very durable and easy to clean," said the interior designer.

"For cabinetry, there are certain materials to stay away from due to humidity from the washer and dryer, but I love the look and function of glossy lacquered, contemporary cabinetry."

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

Laundry rooms, like kitchens and bathrooms, require special consideration due to the significant amounts of heat and moisture they generate. Installing proper ventilation and using non-porous materials such as ceramic flooring and tiles can help alleviate those concerns, while still maintaining a sense of style.

"Don't forget to use epoxy tile grout for the floor tiles and install backsplash tiles behind the washer and dryer for total protection and easy maintenance," Pitt said.

"Glossy paint, currently the rage, also multiplies the existent light and provides a low-maintenance and washable surface."

The backsplash Fortier used incorporated simple, white subway tiles with a darker-than-usual grout, adding another interesting detail to the space.

"Selecting black cabinets is not usually what you do in a laundry room, but I wanted a pop of colour that would be in contrast to the tile," said the designer, who used a combination of inexpensive Ikea cabinetry and hardware, with a custom-made floating wood shelf and appliance enclosure by TD Renovations (her go-to contractor) that doubled as a countertop to keep the renovation on budget.

"The second element I used to give that country feel was a darker grout on the backsplash; it had quite a dramatic effect," she said. "Stopping the subway tiles below the shelf also contributed to making the space look more interesting."

In terms of storage, Fortier recommends using a combination of closed cabinets and open shelves, as well as clear jars and baskets. "Using a basket — in either wood, mesh or wicker — to store rolled towels is great for people who don't have a lot of built-in storage or shelving," she said.

Bridgman, who favours neutral tones like white and grey in laundry rooms, said: "I personally like to use organization systems to keep everything in order. Trays, boxes, wall-mounts — whatever it takes for things to be 'homed' and stay neat and tidy."

To offset the neutral tones, "mint green and light blue really can bring a lot of harmony to the space, and keep the room feeling clean and modern," she said.



Black Shaker-style cabinets complement the striking graphic look of the patterned tile flooring in this stylish laundry room. PHOTOS: BODOUM PHOTOGRAPHIE, COURTESY OF STÉPHANIE FORTIER DESIGN



A large white apron sink, natural wood custom detailing, and a white subway-tile backsplash adds to the clean, modern look of this laundry room.



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