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Hangin' in the Mudroom

LAURA ORTIZ; FREE PRESS SPECIAL WRITER

Hangin' in the mudroom once seen as a place to keep dirt from tracking through the house, specialty rooms now have closets, organizer bins, cupboards - even decorative molding and floor heating

Nancy Smith of Bloomfield Hills sometimes shut her eyes to the mess as she passed through the long hallway that connected her garage to her kitchen. It was there that the items of daily activities piled up - golf and tennis shoes, racquets, jackets, baseball mitts and backpacks.

To cleanse the clutter, Smith recently renovated the space into a mudroom - an upgrade that more new homes feature and one that can add value to existing residences.

"We wanted something so the kids could come in the back door and plop their stuff down rather than drag it through the rest of the house," Smith said.

In their latest incarnation, these spaces have gone from a bench in a garage or a dark corner in the laundry room to stylish rooms with attractive closets, cabinets, cubbies and flooring.

"It used to be that you would walk into this so-called mudroom that was only a narrow space with a washer, dryer and sink," said Fred Capaldi, partner of the family-owned Capaldi Building Co. of Birmingham. "Now it's more of a specialty room. The laundry room is in a separate location or hidden behind a couple of doors."

Capaldi said clients are investing \$5,000 to \$7,500 to add closets, cubbies, hooks, specialty crown molding and, sometimes, heated flooring to make their mudrooms user-friendly and attractive.

Size, of course, will determine just how much storage space can be created, he said, adding that the typical mudroom is about 6 by 12 feet. But, he said, he has seen some that are large enough to serve as a computer station or craft room.

"These rooms have become more of a fashion statement, not just a place to dump and run," Capaldi said. "Some are trimmed out with decorative crown molding and include wall space to hang family photos."

Capaldi said among the more popular features is what he refers to as the "Costco closet," a place to store all the extras people buy in bulk at food warehouses. Other features include countertops for keys and briefcases, hooks for backpacks, and benches for putting on and taking off shoes and snow boots.

"The kids really like the lockers that look just like the lockers they have in school," he said. And, for those homeowners who don't like cold feet, Capaldi said, radiant flooring is also available.

Smith said her renovated 5 1/2-by-12-foot mudroom includes easy maintenance, dark ceramic tile flooring, and a varnished wood seat along the back wall with matching open cubbies - one for each of her three children and each with its own hooks, shelving, closet and long cupboard.

"In our other house, we didn't have a mudroom," she said. "We were always pulling our hair out trying to find things. Now we know where everything is."

The best location for a mudroom is off a home's back entrance, said Gerry Brody, president of Brody Homes in Birmingham, adding that in new construction, mudrooms are part of the design. Brody is among the many new residential developers who see mudrooms as a necessary part of a home.



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In smaller homes such as the 1,317- to-1,706-square-foot condominiums at Ashby Preserve in Harrison Township that Brody Homes has developed, homebuyers are happy to have a separate laundry room with cabinets above, a sink and a back hall closet for hanging and storage, Brody said.

“Mudrooms have become very much a necessary part of homes,” said Jim Deutchman, partner of Golf Ridge Properties LLC of Livonia. “Homeowners want closets with hooks to hang their coats, cubbies and shelving for books, grocery bags and purses and extra space for household appliances such as electric brooms.”

The new home builders’ comments are supported by a National Association of Home Builders 2006 survey of architects that showed mudrooms are becoming increasingly more popular, especially since laundry rooms are being moved to the second floor. In the past three years, upscale homes in particular have included so-called transition rooms, a term that has replaced mudrooms.

NAHB officials said they expect it won’t be long before average-price homes follow suit.

Deutchman said all of the 118 detached condominiums at Golf Ridge Villa Homes in Livonia have mudrooms. With spaces that range from 2,131 to 2,654 square feet, he said there are many options to create mudrooms that fit particular lifestyles.

Mudroom setup

Determine your storage needs for this area

- What do you want to have available when you run out the door?
- Do you have seasonal items that would be better suited for the attic?
- Do your children have a lot of sports equipment?
- Where will you put mittens, scarves and hats?

Assess your space

It might help to clear out the present clutter in order to determine what kind of furniture can be tucked in a corner, and what type of wall space you have for mirrors, hooks and cubbies.

Make it pretty

Do you want your space to look like a locker room, an office or a complement to adjacent rooms?

Organizing solutions

Consider these elements when planning storage and surfaces for a mudroom:

1. Cabinets for seasonal clothes and sports equipment.
2. Cubbies and shelves for each member of the family.
3. Hooks to hang coats, backpacks and sporting equipment.
4. Designated shelves or hooks for keys.
5. If you are building a new house, consider installing a small heating vent in the mudroom area to help dry wet coats and boots.
6. Flooring and shelf surfaces should stand up to mud and water.

The design options from floor to ceiling are endless. Check out IKEA, California Closets and easy-maintenance laminate flooring manufacturers such as Quick-Step.