

# It's a Wash

Luxury meets laundry

Stainless steel appliances and polished granite countertops offer a crisp contrast to the warm, pine cabinets and antique butcher-block table that serves as a central work area. Colorful glass tiles create a sparkling backsplash for the farm-style sink.

Sound like an upscale kitchen? Guess again. This is the face of the new laundry room, fast becoming an integral part of today's custom homes. Washers and



dryers come in a plethora of styles, sizes and colors with an array of amenities. Laundry areas have become hyphenated rooms (laundry-mudroom, laundry-craft room) and, with expanded visibility, garner the same attention to design and décor as the rest of the house.

In short, the tiny, utilitarian laundry space once relegated to the unfinished recesses of the basement is moving up. Literally.

## Moving Topside

Most laundry rooms—about 55 percent—are now located on the main floor, according to research by Whirlpool Corporation. Generally, they are located off the kitchen or near a garage entry.

RIGHT: White cabinetry with green glass knobs provides ample storage for linens and other items. Beside the sink, botanical wall prints identify the custom-made, zinc-topped English potting table with under-counter shelving for pots and a wall-mounted tool bar as the area for potting plants.

ABOVE: Honey-toned cabinetry makes room for storage and a built-in desk area.



Hampton Design, photo by Eric Striffler

often in high-traffic areas visible to both family and guests.

Along with their move upstairs, laundry rooms are increasingly becoming multi-purpose spaces. Laundry rooms can produce lint, humidity, noise, fumes from cleaning solutions and piles of dirty clothes. But with careful planning (especially for ventilation, adequate storage and judicious placement of electronics) they are doubling as sewing areas, recycling hubs, mudrooms, pantries, home offices, sports equipment centers, even a place to wash the dog.

Susanne Kelley, with Hampton Design in New York, designed a laundry room for the 2006 Hamptons Cottages and Gardens Idea House in Water Mill, New York, that



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included a gift wrapping center and a space dedicated to potting plants, and then added a center-of-the-room picnic table and stools for doing crafts. "We're making laundry rooms more attractive and easy to use, a more enjoyable place where can you watch TV or have the kids draw at a table," Susanne says.

About 12 percent of laundry rooms are on the second floor, says Whirlpool spokesperson Audrey Reed-Granger. She cautions that although new washers and dryers are relatively quiet, placing them on the second floor, where floor joists often are not reinforced, may create noise from vibrations. (To address this issue, Whirlpool offers a shock absorber/suspension system for many of its front-loading models.) And while high-efficiency washing machines such as front loaders have effectively eliminated concerns about leaks and overflows, local building codes may require drains or water trays for washers on a second level.

Second-floor laundry rooms are often smaller and more utilitarian than those on the main level, notes Jennifer Richardson, owner of Jxo Interiors in Toronto. Jennifer, whose own laundry is near her second-



ABOVE: In Susanne's "dream" laundry room, a front-loading washer and two dryers (for active families), made by Ariston in stainless steel, slip under the marble countertop to offer sorting and folding space. A picnic-style table creates a center island.

LEFT: A built-in hanging bar over the counter is perfect for air-drying clothes.

RIGHT: In this laundry space at one end of an open kitchen, vintage accessories add a homey feel.



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floor bedrooms, says, "I just go from the dryer to the drawers. There's no need for laundry baskets, or for counters to fold—I do it on top of the dryer."

For the one-third of households still using a basement laundry, the digs are getting nicer, as basements in new or renovated homes are often finished with tall ceilings. Laundry chutes continue to be popular.

The best location for your laundry room is primarily a personal choice.

While the need for dryer venting once dictated they be placed near outside walls, newer dryers safely can be vented through long runs of ductwork beneath floor joists—from a standard of about 75 feet with one bend, to 200 feet for dryers with high-efficiency blowers. Some manufacturers, such as Bosch and LG, offer

ventless, condensing dryers.

### Sizing up the Options

A laundry room can range from the size of a closet to that of a bedroom. "There is no optimal laundry room size because there are so many options for appliances, including stackables," Audrey says. Jennifer agrees. "Layout is more important than square footage. It's good to have a couple of long walls, one for the washer, dryer and folding area, and maybe a bench for the other," she suggests. As a rule of thumb, a minimum of 48 inches is needed to clear the doors of front-loading appliances.

Some families are opting for multiple laundry rooms, placing a primary laundry on the main level, and a smaller one near upstairs family bedrooms or close to guest bedrooms. Susanne notes that some homes, such as beach getaways, have one laundry room with two dryers: No more waiting for beach towels to dry.

### Adding the Amenities

"An emphasis on laundry rooms is one

of the biggest trends in home décor and design in the past five to eight years," Audrey maintains. "In terms of color, innovation... they are unifying more with the rest of the home's décor."

Leading the way are front-loading washers and dryers, now comprising about one third of washers and dryers sold, Audrey says. They come in numerous colors, styles and capacities, and are more energy-efficient than top loaders. They also can be installed under a countertop or covered with a portable work surface such as Whirlpools five-foot-wide, heat-, water- and stain-resistant work surface that covers a pair of front loaders. Another popular extra is color-coordinated pedestals that provide storage and raise the machines to a height comfortable for transferring clothes from washer to dryer.

With laundry rooms becoming more visible, homeowners seek new ways to eliminate unsightly clutter. Cabinets (some with mildew-resistant finishes), drawers, benches with under-seat storage, shelving and hooks all help keep order. Under-



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counter canvas laundry hampers on wheels and laundry baskets color-coded for each family member are in demand. Whirlpool sells a color-coordinated laundry storage tower that installs between a washer and dryer and includes deep drawers for bulk detergents and a retractable rod for hanging clothes. Stacks and Stacks offers an inexpensive, three-shelf laundry butler that also fits between the machines.

Space for air-drying is an asset; whether it is a custom closet, a wall-mounted, foldable drying rack or just a swivel bar above a sink. Susanne suggests also including a built-in ironing center such as those from Iron-A-Way, which can be recessed or surface-mounted and include a fold-down, height-adjustable ironing board; electrical outlet; storage for a hot iron; garment bar; and even a spotlight for task lighting. Good general lighting also is important in the laundry room.

Laundry room flooring and countertops should be durable and water-resistant. Materials can run the gamut from granite to laminate. "If the laundry room is visible to rest of house, keep that in mind and finish it in the same type of design," Jennifer suggests. That could mean choosing

marble instead of vinyl in order to complement a luxurious kitchen—at a significant cost. "A laundry room can be as expensive as a kitchen," Susanne says, noting that, "on the lower end," a laundry room could cost \$8,000 to \$20,000.

In the room she created for the 2006 Hamptons Cottages and Gardens Idea House, Susanne included a fold-away ironing center. She also included space for wrapping gifts, complete with storage for tape, scissors and note cards, and a ribbon holder. A marble countertop makes wrapping—and folding clothes—a snap.

### Finishing Touches

Laundry rooms are increasingly becoming personalized. Homeowners are choosing wall colors that coordinate with colored appliances instead of relying on neutrals, and adding artwork, bulletin boards and other personal touches.

For a recent Canadian National Homeshow, Jennifer created a "retro chic" laundry room with black-and-white checkered tile flooring, white cabinets and appliances, and a stainless-steel sink and work area. Orange and blue accents added a playful air.

"Make your laundry room fresh and fun," Jennifer urges. "It may not make you like doing laundry, but it's a step." **THI**

#### Resources:

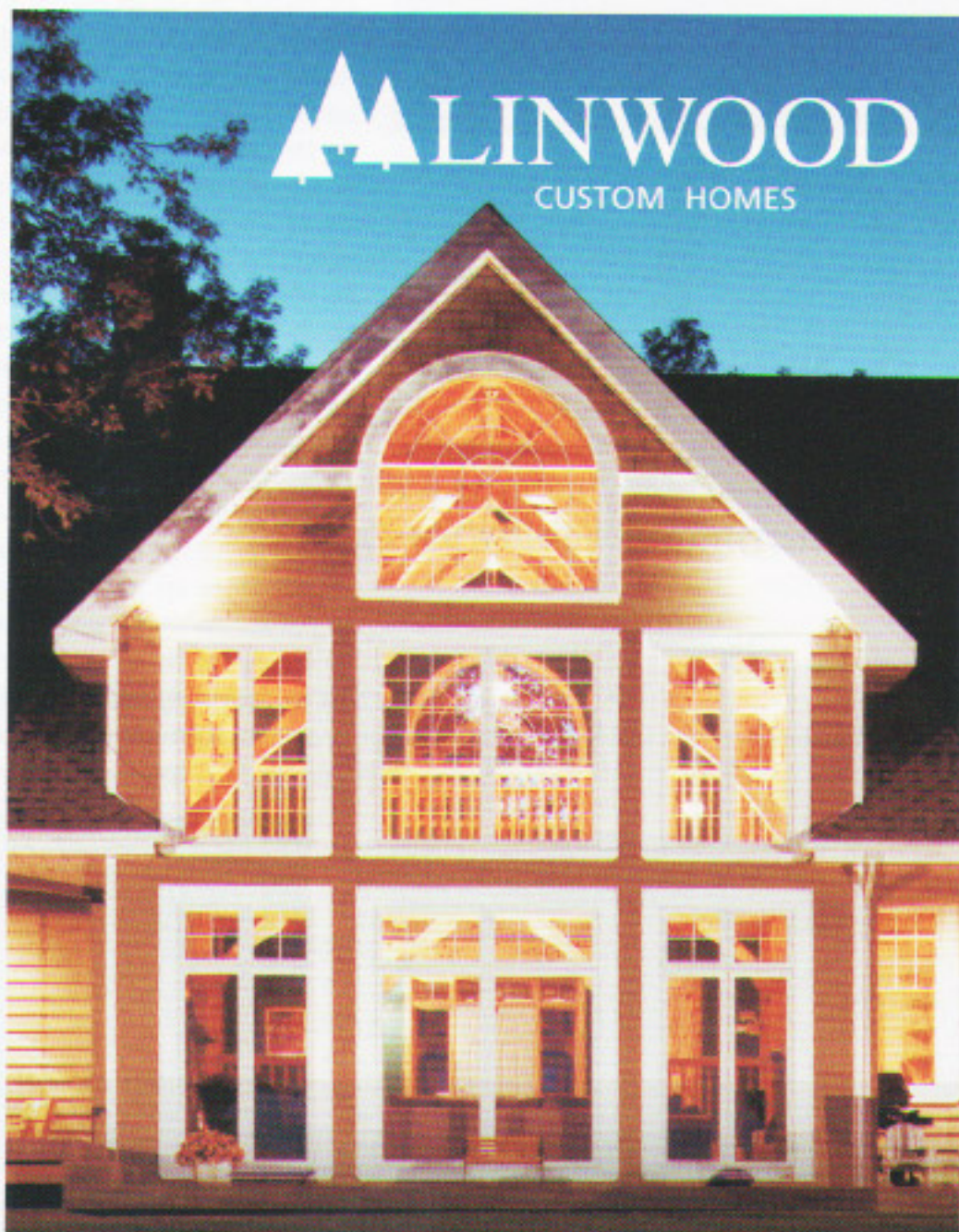
**Hampton Design Kitchen and Bath**, (831) 329-8644, [www.hamptondesign.com](http://www.hamptondesign.com)

**Iron-A-Way**, (800) 536-9495, [www.ironaway.com](http://www.ironaway.com)

**Jxo Interiors**, (416) 301-3514, [www.jxo.ca](http://www.jxo.ca)

**Stacks and Stacks**, (800) 761-5222, [www.stacksandstacks.com](http://www.stacksandstacks.com)

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