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Mastering the Mudroom

First impressions of form and function

Author: Justine Lorelle LoMonaco | Published: Saturday, March 22, 2014



The front door is taking a backseat in many modern homes. Photos courtesy of California Closets.

Winter has faded into spring and the time to refresh and revive living quarters is causing homeowners to think about their spaces differently. Formal living rooms are being reimagined as multipurpose entertaining areas and small closets are being transformed into hideaway offices—space is at a premium, leaving no room unused. And after one of the wettest, messiest winters the Island has seen in over a decade, all eyes are turning toward the one room tasked with containing life's disorder: The mudroom, born of utility, is getting an upgrade.

Homeowners want their entryways to contribute form and function to their home's existing layout. Kerith Flynn, co-owner and designer at Margali+Flynn designs in Williston Park, called the mudroom (or whichever entrance is closest to where cars are parked) the home's new front door. "The mudroom should be a reflection of the rest of your home," she said. "As a second entrance, it sets the tone for what you will see when you enter the main part of the home."

The trick to a masterful mudroom is creating an entry that addresses each resident's needs. Flynn's co-owner and co-designer Christine Ranieri said, "You want to figure out how you will use the room—how people are coming into the house—and use it as a central location to keep the mess out of the rest of the house. Not everyone has a knack for organization, but when there's a space designated for their stuff, they tend to be more mindful of where things belong."

Start With Storage

Built-ins are an ideal way to create an organizational command center in any space. If that's not in the budget, creatively styled accessories can do the trick. Southampton-based architect Pamela Glazer said the majority of her clients use a back or garage door as the primary entrance to their homes. She believes extra emphasis must be placed on that area's functionality for maximum efficiency. "So many of us are coming home from the beach with wet towels and gear we need to hang. Or from running errands and we need to put down groceries right away," she said. "Adding locker-style cabinets with bins and baskets for each kid, a bench with storage underneath, some kind of tabletop and a bunch of hooks for hanging wet things creates a place to come in and drop your stuff. And it leaves your front entrance looking pretty."

For a truly personalized look, wood built-ins are the best option. Get the most out of the budget by using every inch of space efficiently. "Whether you need to create a space for kids to disrobe after they come inside or a space to store laundry and shoes, have a place for each need so it stays organized," Glazer said. "Designate one side for laundry, or create a pantry for overflow storage. If your kids typically whip their backpacks onto the floor, add a bench for a soft place to land." For homeowners near the beach, Glazer recommends creating a storage system with plenty of ventilation for wet items. A sink for rinsing off sandy beach toys and sandals also helps contain messes.



Mudroom: Margali and Flynn

Define Your Décor

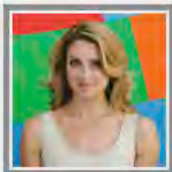
Modern mudrooms embrace a bolder, style-focused look. "Young people don't want their mother's homes," Ranieri said. "These homeowners are willing to play with color a little bit more." Ranieri is seeing more clients select earthy colors like gray greens or slate for the walls. For cabinets, bright white is a popular choice because it makes everything displayed on the shelves really pop. Ranieri also sees a lot of homeowners paying more attention to the details of each piece by wallpapering or texturizing the backs of shelves or adding a mosaic backsplash above laundry room sinks.

Even utilitarian details are getting a stylish update: Glazer habitually shops flea markets and garage sales for chic, vintage hooks that create storage without sacrificing taste. Ranieri recommended turning a blank wall into a budget-friendly dressing station by adding a large mirror and small tabletop for accessories if the homeowner typically gets ready to leave the house in the mudroom.

Durable Details

Above all else, the space needs to work—and so does the décor. "These rooms are going to get hard use," Ranieri said. "We use a lot of wainscoting in mudrooms because it's easy to paint wood again, so it lasts longer even if it gets scuffed." Glazer also emphasized the importance of durable flooring, such as stone, porcelain or a material that mimics an outdoor patio. And because these rooms typically get so much use, energy-efficient LED lighting is a smart choice. "These lights are going to be on a lot," Glazer said. The room should also have at least one outlet for vacuums, irons and other appliances.

The mudroom will also be the primary corral for messy outerwear and should be properly outfitted for the season. An umbrella stand, boot tray and sturdy indoor/outdoor mats and rugs create practical stations for all bad weather accessories. There are also a variety of accessories that can enhance a laundry area, like a hang bar for drying wet items, a storage tower for baskets of dirty clothes and a fold-down ironing board to save space. Hanging baskets near the door can also be useful for sorting mail or storing grab-and-go items like sunglasses or keys. No matter the room's layout, both Glazer and Ranieri agreed that the best mudrooms include a tabletop for setting things down right inside the door, some form of seating (preferably with storage) and hooks or a rack for hanging coats. These details can change one of the most heavily tasked rooms into a marvel of convenience and organization.



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Born in California and raised in the Midwest, Justine Lorelle LoMonaco spent the last four years indulging her East Coast side on Long Island and in NYC. She has contributed to a variety of lifestyle magazines and websites and maintains a blog, StopMelfYouveHeardThisOne.com. In her spare time, she loves reading, running and eating in her Astoria neighborhood.