

Who says separating your whites from your darks has to be boring?
As YAM discovers, laundry rooms are emerging from neglected
basements and backrooms into luxurious, bright spaces
where you won't mind spending your time.

By David Lennam



DESIGN BY KRISTI SPOUSE/KRISTIN NOELLE DESIGN.COM
INSET: INTHEFUNLAME.COM

LAUNDRY ROOMS GET LUXURIOUS

The dark days of descending into the damp gloom of an unfinished basement laundry are vanishing as quickly as top-loading washers and ironing boards that screech in metallic pain when unfolded.

From its historic relegation to the lower levels, the latest trend is to glam up the laundry room and move it upstairs, where even those who loathe the drudgery of the act can feel as warm and cozy as a pile of freshly laundered and folded clothes.

Checking in with Victoria interior designers, the word is that the luxe laundry room may soon be luring homebuyers with as much attention-grabbing zing as stainless-steel appliances, granite countertops, and built-in cabinets.

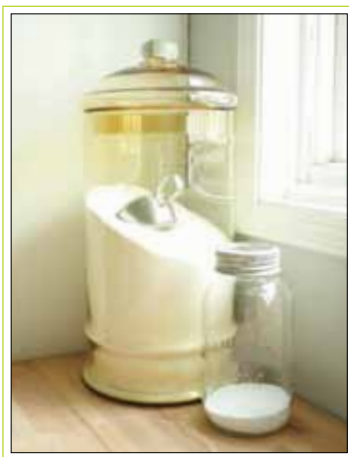
"I think this will start to become one of the next selling features," says Landeca co-owner/planner/designer Jennifer Kay. Maybe not up there with kitchens and bathrooms, she admits, but nonetheless standing out on a seller's hot sheet.

No longer an afterthought, high-end laundry rooms were perhaps introduced by a 2004 campaign from appliance manufacturer Whirlpool suggesting lavish laundry rooms become the new "family rooms," even going so far as to feature the addition of televisions, computers stations, even art.

Ivan Meade of Meade Design Group says the trend is still a fresh one for Victoria. "I think the first one I did was in 2008. Before that, I was never doing laundry rooms. I'm designing three of them right now."

Deluxe laundries are the continuation of our search for comfortable nesting, says Gillian Ley of Ley Art & Interiors Ltd.

"We're down to the last rooms in the



house that haven't been done yet. The laundry room is in the house now; it's part of the house."

One of Ley's clients has four children and needed a laundry upgrade. A 2010 addition to their home included a 13- by eight-foot space full of fine details like granite countertops, black-glass tiling, custom cabinetry, full-capacity washer/dryer units, an extra deep sink, and a sizable mudroom lined with

padded benches, cubby

holes for shoes, and rows of coat hooks. Clients, Ley says, are asking for ease, comfort, and simplicity. "Make my life work in a more efficient manner."

MOVIN' ON UP

Moving the washer and dryer up a floor (or two) brings them closer to where the dirty laundry originates: bedrooms and bathrooms.

A laundry on the bedroom level lets you avoid having to carry clothes, sheets, and towels from where you make them dirty to where you make them clean ... and back again.

"Clients say they want it on the main floor or the upper floor," says Kay — and that means moving them into the proximity of the bedroom zone.

With that sort of heart-of-the living-space location, the proper level of finishing is essential. The laundry should have the feel of an extension to the master suite.

Ley has done work for a professional couple "who have an almost zen experience with their full-capacity washer/dryer in Aspen blue and put their feet up and read the *New York Times* right where they do laundry."

It's not unusual to encounter durable but gorgeous countertops of granite, quartz, marble, or poured concrete in today's



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laundry rooms. With a location often adjacent to the kitchen, there's a need to tie the finishing details into that room.

"You can't have plastic laminate countertops if there are quartz countertops in the kitchen," cautions Ley. "I want to make that transition from room to room seamless."

Cork is emerging as a new, easy-care, easy-on-the-feet flooring for laundry rooms. It's resilient, comes in a multitude of patterns, has excellent insulating properties, and is warm on the feet.

"God forbid your tootsies get cold when you're fumbling for that lost sock," says Ley.

If not cork, consider water-repellent tiles with an in-floor heating system.

Storage issues are resolved with unique components from manufacturers like Richelieu Hardware, who make custom cabinets where everything is built-in and put away. There's no open box of Tide left on the counter. No dirty underwear piled on the floor in the corner. Instead, there are fabric baskets that tilt out of a wall unit. A place to hang the iron for easy access. Clean linens have their own shelves right next to the dryer. Everything slides in and out, or folds away: hampers, clothes racks, ironing boards, cleaning supplies.

"The whole idea is to have that visual clutter out of sight," says Ley.



Multi-purpose laundry rooms expand a home's functional space with built-in benches, a computer work station, and plenty of storage.

CASE DESIGN/REMODELING, INC.

Or, as Meade notes, if you have to leave the detergent out where it can be seen, at least put it in a nice glass container. "You can fancy it up, like the kitchen."

These über-laundries are more common in new construction than in renovations,

especially in older homes where there just isn't the right amount of necessary space. There's also the cost to think about: repurposing even a small room in an existing home is going to cost if you have to knock down a wall, move or upgrade



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the plumbing and electrical, or even add venting, puts the price tag up in the bathroom reno range (\$30,000+). Planning it into a new build is more cost-efficient.

ROOM WITH A PURPOSE (OR TWO OR THREE)

But there are ways to think about laundry rooms that make sense, money-wise. Give the laundry a multi-purpose ability. Add a worktable and make it a place for hobbies and crafts, potting, sewing, working on the computer, flower arranging, or dog grooming. A jetted sink turns the room into a pet spa, while the same sink is ideal for gentle hand-washing of lingerie. Some people are even combining the laundry with a guest suite that includes a sofa bed, TV, and ensuite.

"You can do so much with it," says Stefanie Farness of Stefanie Paige Designs.

While it may seem like a lot, the average family might actually spend as many as six hours a week in the laundry room. In an era where time is money, convenience is worth a great deal.

Farness has an 11-year-old and confesses to spending that kind of time with the laundry.

"I do laundry, if not every day, every second day. My son goes through more

clothes than me. My sister has two kids and does laundry every day."

FAREWELL OLD, WHITE WASHER

Those rattling washers and dryers that pounded the basement concrete have been replaced by sleek, quiet behemoths that demand centre stage, or at least a room of their own on the main floor. Think about it: would you hide a Sub-Zero fridge behind packing crates in the basement? Not likely.

You'll find fewer top-loading machines in the new crop of high-tech designs. They've gone all Euro with front-loading action that increases not only how much laundry you can stuff in, but how quickly it gets washed, and how energy efficient the process is. Most are pre-programmable with cycles to remove soil, go sensitive on delicates, and function as well with cold water as with hot.

Dismissed, too, is that colour palette of white or, uh, off-white. Wild cherry red, titanium, champagne, Pacific blue, Tuscan chestnut, and black diamond are the new, show-'em-off choices.

"Once upon a time in sales," explains Reade Smith of Trail Appliances, "price and availability used to far outweigh aesthetics."

With a bounty of styles on the market, Smith says customers are getting as fussy



Not just pretty: These washers look beautiful and use new technologies to get clothes clean. **In champagne:** the LG Ultra-Large Capacity SteamWasher with colour LCD display and allergen-fighting cycle. **In red:** the Whirlpool Duet front load washer with technology that analyzes the load and automatically adjusts for the perfect wash.



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about the look of a washer and dryer as much as what they can do.

"It's surprising to hear people say, 'I just don't like the look of it,' says Smith. 'You wouldn't think that would be a consideration. But now the laundry room is more about aesthetic concerns.'"

It's noticeable how big these new toys can get, too, which means fewer loads to worry about. Samsung's next-gen Purple Pair washer and dry feature an extra-large 17 kg capacity for washing and 10 kg for drying. The machines many of us grew up with ran five to seven kg.

The incorporation of faster spin cycles (1,300 RPM as compared to the 650 RPM of

the past) also mean clothes come out of the washer much dryer than with older machines. And that adds up to less time in the dryer and a smaller hydro bill.

All this power and polish doesn't come with the worry of waking the neighbours, let alone your baby sleeping in the room next door. The whisper wash/dry of front-loaders run quietly, with reduced vibrations.

Another breed entirely, the high-efficiency washer uses 40 per cent less water than a regular machine for an energy savings estimated at between 50 and 60 per cent each load. Clothes are cleaned using a tumbling action instead of the traditional agitation motion. Gravity versus getting beaten up.

THE HIGH-EFFICIENCY CENTRE

Several manufacturers offer washer/dryer sets that utilize steam — gentle on fabrics (no wrinkles!) and energy efficient. LG's model even comes with an "Allergiene" cycle to sanitize away dust mites and pet dander to help ease the suffering of those with asthma.

However, cleaner, quieter, and energy conscious comes with a price tag. Look to pay from \$2,000 up to \$4,500 for a top-end set by LG or Miele.

Smith says customers are willing to pay a premium if the machines get the job done.

"If you look in your closet and see thousands of dollars worth of clothing, and you can buy a machine for \$1,000 more than what you thought you'd pay, then it makes sense. A good machine will extend the life of your clothes."

If you're willing to go high-end with your major appliances, think about a supporting cast that can get the job done. A German-made Rowenta iron — which Meade says "throws steam like mad. You can iron a shirt in a few minutes instead of 15 minutes" — goes well with a Brabantia ironing board wide enough to fit the entire back of your shirt at once.

A further step would be eliminating the hand iron entirely and opting for a Miele rotary iron with a 30-inch wide intake. It's a great idea if you've got the high-octane laundry requirements of the old woman who lives in the shoe or, say, Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*.

One client of Jenny Martin Designs has a rotary iron and the entire laundry room is being designed around it. Another has installed a full-height steam chest that you hang clothes in to sanitize and remove wrinkles. Couple that with a \$3,750 BreezeDry passive energy drying cupboard (that uses wind and sunlight to dry clothes), and you can almost start charging for your service.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

While high-tech is *de rigueur* with washers and dryers, those *au courant* with what's new realize that tradition is on a comeback with laundry trends that wouldn't surprise grandma. Hidden ironing boards that fold out of a wall cupboard or pop from a drawer (but swivel for easier use), laundry chutes (one of Meade's clients is asking for two: one for whites, another for colours), pull-out indoor clothes lines, and drying racks for air-drying clothes, are all making a return to fashion. With more natural fibres making it into the wash these days, hang-drying is preferential.

"But the rack has to be beautiful," stresses Ley, like the solid pine beadboard

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Drying delicates never looked so good as with the fold-out pine drying rack from Ballard Designs.

drying rack from Ballard Designs (pictured above).

"They thought of a few things back then that we've moved away from and are getting back to," says Martin.

This nostalgic renaissance is driven by green thinking. Eco-friendly options save electricity, time, and money. Remember to add a ducted fan to draw out humidity, just like in the bathroom.

With the environmental angle covered, don't ignore ergonomics. All that bending and kneeling while you're trying to shove a heavy armful of clothes through the door of a dryer 20 centimetres off the floor won't do your back any good. Consider adding 40 centimetres of height with a pedestal. Some even come with built-in drawers for storage.

Proper lighting cannot be overlooked. Where possible, streams of natural light are invaluable (as is an opening window for ventilation). But task lighting, like recessed under-cabinet illumination, is essential for spotting those hard-to-find stains. Light your laundry in much the same way as you would your kitchen.

And, just as your kitchen features accessories that finish the detail, the laundry room, too, can have fabulous glass knobs, tiled backsplashes, a farmhouse sink, even a Dornbracht eMote hands-free faucet.

"It's a space that deserves consideration," says Kay. "Let's have [laundry rooms] contained in a space that is well thought out and designed."

Ultimately, the focus of the 21st-century laundry room is beauty with a purpose. Functional, organized, but head-turning. ::

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