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Magnificent Mudrooms

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The word "mudroom" may evoke images of dirt-covered floors, slushy boots and muck-smears walls, but in today's top designs, the moniker refers to the exact opposite. Clean, orderly, welcoming places, mudrooms are becoming increasingly popular in both home remodels and new construction.

"The word 'mudroom' is really a misnomer in today's parlance, since it performs many more duties than limiting the tracking in of dirt from the outside," said Gregory Wiedemann, AIA, principal of Wiedemann Architects in Bethesda, MD. "It is frequently the entrance the family uses most often and is one of the most important spaces in a well-designed home."

Often attached to the garage, driveway, or side entry to a home, the mudroom becomes the repository of everything associated with the daily comings and goings of the family, a place to keep the clutter in check. "In designing the mudroom, we ask our clients about the activities that take place upon arrival and departure, and tailor the space to their needs," said Wiedemann. "The goal is to organize what is often the most active area of the home in a manner that makes life easier through thoughtful design."

ORGANIZED STORAGE

Typical storage in a mudroom includes cubbies or lockers for backpacks, pegs or hooks for coats, drawers for mittens and hats, and shelves or benches for shoes. "The storage of these items for young families often involves a double row of hooks, one for adults and one lower down for children," noted Wiedemann. "Convenience is the key; so we often create a space for each child, so the backpacks never leave the room, unless they're on the way to school."

A mudroom should include a mix of open and closed storage, says Wiedemann. "We decide what will be what in the initial conversation with the client," he said. "Sometimes the act of opening a door discourages use, like in a shoe cubby. But if you size the space for the use, open storage won't look cluttered." Custom-built storage is usually the answer, but closet systems can work well behind closet doors. This is ideal for storing larger items such as sports equipment, keeping it convenient but out of sight. "Again, flexible cubbies, hooks for lacrosse sticks and adjustable open shelving are useful for the sports gear, as well as hanging space for clothing," added Wiedemann.



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In addition to being a repository for shoes, coats and bags, the mudroom is a great place to deal with all the mail that comes through the door. "We try to provide a useful counter or desk area to sort the mail, with a paper shredder and a pull-out recycling bin handy for the unwanted junk mail," said Wiedemann. "We often design cubbies for organizing the mail, and a white board or bulletin board for keeping notices posted in view. The mudroom often becomes 'command center' and the message board plays a vital role."

Wiedemann and his team also often custom-design a charging station for cell phones, PDAs and iPods because these items are often dropped near the mudroom door. "We like to build it so you don't see the wires," he said. "It's convenient and looks organized." Hooks for house keys are also a must. "A work area, either at bar height or at a desk with a chair, is occasionally incorporated into the mudroom with room for a computer and file storage," added Wiedemann.



SPECIAL EXTRAS

Depending on a family's specific needs, a mudroom can serve even more functions. "We have designed mudrooms with a laundry room or laundry chute directly adjacent, so the muddy clothes from the soccer game can go directly into the washer," said Wiedemann. A place for the broom, vacuum, and mop should be close at hand in all mudrooms, and a utility sink can come in handy if the laundry room is more distant.

"For families with pets, we have provided a low-mounted faucet and pet shower, which can handle dog washing and boot rinsing," said Wiedemann. Features include a dedicated spot for the pet bowls and generous storage for pet food. "Something as simple as hooks on the wall for the dog leash can make life much easier," he added. In houses where the mudroom leads to an outdoor play space, a small refrigerator and pantry area for drinks and snacks can keep dirty kids from coming further into the house when hungry.

BEAUTIFUL DESIGN

Front doors are practically becoming vestigial structures in today's homes—families, friends, guests...almost all enter the home through the side door. If the mudroom will be the primary entry to your home, you want it to be a welcoming place. "We always provide wall space for family photos and other personal displays," said Wiedemann. "The mudroom should also have generous space to greet guests and hang up their coats and still have an orderly appearance."

The floor is one of the top design considerations. Not only should it be attractive, but it should hide dirt, be easily maintained and be impervious to spills. Wiedemann says he has extended materials from the outside in, such as blue stone or flagstone, or used a material that flows with the home's interior, such as ceramic or other stone tile.

While Wiedemann says he has used more earth tones, grays and taupes in his mudroom designs, that color scheme isn't necessary. "Although it could get dirtier, it is more important that it feel integrated into the rest of the house," he explained. Because the room does take active use, Wiedemann says he sometimes uses wainscoting on lower walls to protect them.

In the end, however, a mudroom's biggest beauty asset may be in its storage. "A

large part of [a mudroom's pleasing appearance] has to do with if it looks orderly," said Wiedemann. "At one moment it needs to function in many different ways."

Photos: Two of the mudrooms recently designed by Wiedemann Architects show how a pleasing color scheme, plenty of storage and a "command center" create a space that contradicts its "dirty" moniker. (Credit: Anice Hoachlander)

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