

Fresh *and* Clean

Let your creative flair for healthy materials shine in the laundry room—which isn't just for cleaning clothes anymore.



Grace singing softly as she ironed Grandpa's shirts, even the floor was warm in that room where she smoothed out wrinkles to the hiss of steam the smell of starch the beat of the turquoise dryer
—from "Moments of Grace," by Joyanna Laughlin



Photos by J. Curtis

J O Y A N N A L A U G H L I N

Most of us have fond memories associated with doing laundry—playing on the floor of the laundry room as a child, the fresh smell of clothes dried on a clothesline, or the warmth of a towel just out of the dryer. It's not surprising that we take comfort in this chore that humans have known for thousands of years. Some historians attribute the invention of laundry soap to the Phoenicians, while others credit the ancient Egyptians, according to Irene Rawlings and Andrea Van Steenhouse in their book, *The Clothesline* (Gibbs Smith, 2002).

Comfort, in more than one sense of the word, may be the reason that we are now more interested in our laundry rooms than ever. A recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) says that laundry rooms and dining rooms are widely considered to be essential in new homes. When asked to specify extra rooms for convenience and luxury, 92 percent of respondents wanted a laundry room. Van Steenhouse thinks there is another reason. "We long for a simpler time when people were more connected to one another—by extended family, by neighborhoods, by communities, and by the simple tasks that sustained life and gave it continuity," she writes.

The nurturing laundry room

Not just for cleaning clothes anymore, laundry rooms are now being used as multipurpose rooms for everything from gardening and crafts to storage and pet care. This reflects the changing role of women in the home, according to Lucinda Bailey, owner of Lucinda Bailey Interior Design, a green interior design firm based in Pasadena, California. Bailey, who also teaches courses on sustainable design at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles, says that because women now watch children, keep house, and run businesses from home, "they have a newfound authority to demand proper work spaces in the home."

While some homeowners opt for glitzy laundry rooms with high-end wood cabinetry, slate flooring, and multiple dryers, others want laundry rooms that are healthy, environmentally friendly, and nurturing. To begin, Rawlings and Van Steenhouse suggest asking yourself a few questions: Do you want to locate the laundry room in the basement, on the first floor where it can also serve as a mudroom, or on the second floor if that's where most of the laundry is generated? Do you want a big room for sorting, pretreating, and folding clothes? Do you want a room with large windows that offers a pleasant environment for sewing or doing crafts?

The Bad Green Stuff

One important thing to consider when remodeling your laundry room is how to discourage the kind of green that you *don't* want: mold, mildew, and fungus. Mary Cordaro, president and co-founder of Los Angeles-area-based H3Environmental, a company that specializes in resources for diagnosing "sick building syndrome" and education, offers the following mold-busting advice.

- Never carpet a laundry room; carpet holds onto moisture and breeds mold.
- Replace rubber washing machine hoses with Teflon aluminum-braided lines to prevent leaks and hoses bursting; turn off the water at the point where it enters the washing machine supply line when you go on vacation to prevent leaks or floods; and periodically move the washing machine away from the wall and check for leaks that can cause mold inside the wall or under the floor.
- If you use a dryer, make sure a duct vents hot dryer air directly outdoors.
- Natural ventilation—a good, old-fashioned open window—is the best way to vent additional moist air from the washer and dryer to the outside.



Photo by J. Curtis