

REAL ESTATE



Conundrums in connectivity

Some sleuthing may be necessary to determine Internet access at your prospective new home. [8](#)

WHERE WE LIVE: WESLEY HEIGHTS IN NORTHWEST

This leafy neighborhood is the birthplace of the city's leafblower ban. [2](#)

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

The \$9M Potomac home is an aerophile's dream. [4](#)

3.55%
30-year unchanged. [14](#)

How to create a stylish mudroom near your front door

Residents and visitors can use functional space to store coats and shoes

BY MICHELE LERNER

While mudrooms, family entrances, family foyers and drop zones are typically informal spaces adjacent to the garage or at the back of the house, some architects are seeing more of an interest in moving these practical rooms closer to the front door.

For example, Tom Reineberg, an architect with InSite Builders & Remodeling in Bethesda, recently converted a front porch to a mudroom for clients who weren't using the porch and wanted usable interior space. He kept a covered roof area for deliveries and was able to design a room that had natural light and was functional and aesthetically pleasing to the owners.

We asked three specialists for advice about this trend: Reineberg; Melissa Cooley, a senior designer-interiors specialist with Case Architects & Remodelers in Bethesda; and Jessica Parker Wachtel, a senior associate with GMT Architects in Bethesda. All three responded via email, and their comments were edited for brevity.

What should homeowners consider when they want to convert a front space such as a porch or an interior room to a mudroom?

Reineberg: In converting a front space such as a porch (outside) to a mudroom (inside), it is important to be thoughtful about the overall design. The goal is to improve the aesthetic of the exterior while creating a sense of cohesiveness within the home. There should be a comfortable feeling upon entering, like you have walked into a new foyer or room, vs. the feeling of entering a space that was bumped out for extra storage. The strategic use of windows generates an abundance of natural light and prevents cubbies from looking like a wall of shelves.

Cooley: If you live in a home where your entry door is directly connected to your living room, which leaves very little flexibility for a drop zone for everyday essentials, consider using a nearby closet in your entryway or creating cubbies in your garage or below your entry staircase. Consider these spaces as they sometimes hold square footage that may go unused. If converting a closet that is directly off the main entrance, consider incorporating a similar



ANGELA NEWTON ROY

When converting an area to a mudroom, there should be a comfortable feeling upon entering, as if you have walked into a new foyer or room, vs. entering a space that was bumped out for extra storage.

style that blends with the rest of your home. Include elements that add visual interest, style and comfort. Make it interesting by adding personalized baskets, color or even wallpaper, but also think of ways that may encourage your family to keep it tidy and organized. Create a space that is tailored for your household's needs.

Wachtel: In a new custom home, I would recommend utilizing closed storage cabinets so the space does not feel cluttered. If possible, consider designing custom cabinets to blend in with adjacent wall finishes, such as paneling, paint colors, etc. To utilize an existing front space, such as a front porch, this could be as

simple as installing a few hooks on the wall above a bench. Shoes can be stored in bins below the bench.

What are some pros and cons of a front mudroom?

Cooley: Having a mudroom or perhaps a drop zone at the foyer area may pose some pros and cons. If a mudroom located at the immediate entry of a home is unorganized, it may encourage household members to create several drop zones in the home, causing clutter and dysfunction. If it is not properly designed with thoughtfully designated areas, it may be a dumping zone for all types of things. If kept organized with a calendar, to-do list, areas

for keys, charging station, dedicated shoe and coat storage, this area can be one of the most essential and effectively working areas in the home.

Wachtel: Pros: If the front door is your main point of entry, this would be the ideal space to drop shoes and coats, to avoid walking through the house to a separate mudroom. When guests come over, you can easily hang their jackets and offer a place to leave shoes.

Cons: Mudroom spaces can get messy, so try to focus on closed storage options. A mudroom should also primarily be for in-season jackets and shoes that are currently in use. Out-of-season

jackets and extra gear can be stored in a closet to avoid overcrowding the space.

What materials work best for a front mudroom?

Reineberg: Luxury vinyl plank (LVP) is attractive and practical for a mudroom. It gives a warm appearance and insulates the floor. LVP is highly durable, retains its appearance despite a lot of abuse and foot traffic and is effective in areas with wet shoes, boots and umbrellas. If something is dropped on LVP flooring, there is a good chance that the object will not break.

Cooley: Any floor tile, such as porcelain, ceramic, cement or travertine tile with a matte finish is suitable for a mudroom area, or even a luxury plank vinyl flooring, as they all are durable materials. Refrain from installing tile with a polished finish as it is slippery and may cause a hazard. You can also use hardwood floors in a mudroom; however, consider area rugs on hardwood floors as moisture and liquid from outdoor clothing may eventually cause discoloring on the floor. Consider shelves that are in close reach to avoid items tipping over and falling.

Wachtel: Tile flooring is great in a mudroom space for easy cleanup from wet or muddy shoes. Wainscoting or other paneling installed behind wall hooks will be more durable for hanging jackets than drywall. Make sure to include a bench or chair in the space so people have somewhere to sit down when putting shoes on and taking them off.

Does this kind of project require a design/build firm or an architect? Or could a handyman take on a space conversion like this?

Cooley: Depending on the scale and organization needed for your mudroom project, consider calling on the help of a handyman service, if the project is on the smaller side. You may also find it helpful to consider a design build firm if the project is on the larger side and involves remodeling of other areas in the home.

Reineberg: It depends on what you are hoping to achieve. If the desire is to create a new space with an aesthetic appeal that is made to look and function consistently with the original house, a design/build firm is the best route. If, however, the space is entirely utilitarian, an experienced handyman could be used for the project. Knowledge of the permitting process and new materials and products is also important.

realestate@washpost.com