

# READ THIS

BY LAURA FISHER KAISER

# BEFORE YOU REMODEL YOUR LAUNDRY ROOM

The laundry room has finally come into its own as a bright and organized cleanup command center, whether in a tidy corner of the basement or a nook next to the kitchen.

For help updating yours, check out our expert advice on everything from energy-wise machines and thrifty flooring options to the best labor-saving layout and how to safeguard the house from a potential flood or fire.



## WHERE TO PUT IT

For lots of us, the basement is just fine. But many homeowners who can spare the space and expense prefer to have the laundry closer to bedrooms or the kitchen. Here's what to factor in before making a move.



### On an upper floor

**PROS:** Proximity to where dirty clothes are shed lessens schlepping distance with hampers. Can tap into existing plumbing lines if in or near a bathroom.  
**CONS:** Noise and vibration require extra insulation and a motion-arresting pad. Leaks can damage first-floor rooms. Closet installation requires a vented door and additional space around stacked machines to dissipate dryer heat.

### On the first floor

**PROS:** Near where most other house-keeping chores take place. May be able to share kitchen or powder-room plumbing lines.  
**CONS:** Laundry can pile up in cooking, eating, and foot-traffic areas. Need to carry hampers upstairs. Machines hidden in cabinets require vented doors and clearance space for proper ventilation.



## ALL THE EXTRAS

There are dozens of ways to upgrade your laundry room, but which of the bells and whistles are really worth the extra money?



### WORTH THE SPLURGE

#### > Replacing an old washer.

Switching out one that's more than 10 years old for an Energy Star model can save you \$35 a year in energy bills because they are 30 percent more efficient and use 50 percent less water. Plus, you may qualify for rebates and tax credits.

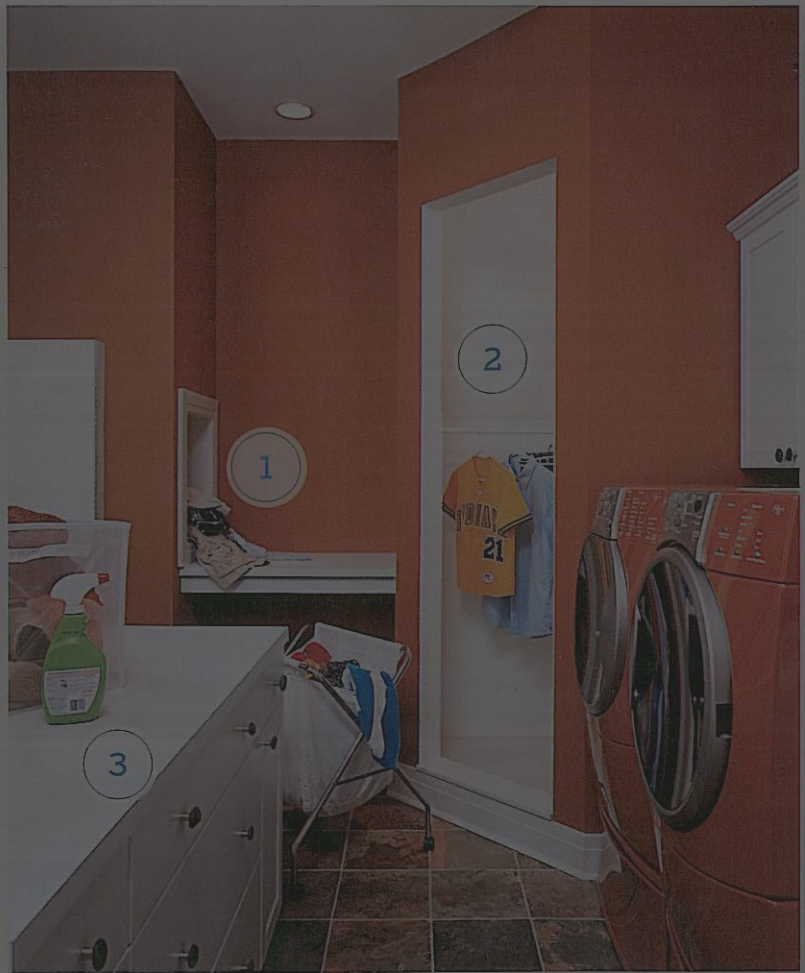
> **Stainless-steel washer tubs and dryer drums.** They last longer than plastic or porcelain-coated steel and won't chip, crack, scratch, or leave rust stains on clothes.

> **Laundry chute (1).** If you've got a clear path between floors—no wiring, plumbing, or ductwork to contend with—eliminating those tiring trips down the stairs with arms full of dirties can be easier than you may think. Old-house owners may even be able to convert a decommissioned dumbwaiter.

> **Simple shower stall (2).** Use it to bathe the dog, rinse off muddy outdoor gear, and hang clothes as they drip-dry.

> **Movable or built-in island (3).** Not just for kitchens, these workhorses can serve as a folding table or a homework station with stool seating, and provide extra storage for cleaning products, the toolbox, even craft and gift-wrapping supplies.

> **Television (4).** It'll keep you entertained during long periods of folding and ironing.



### NOT WORTH THE SPLURGE

> **Natural stone finishes,** such as marble, for counters and floors. They require sealing to prevent staining and don't absorb sound. With exceptions for high-visibility laundries, such as one that adjoins a kitchen where you want materials to match, they're rarely worth the expense and upkeep.

> **Drying cabinet.** This armoire-like machine air-dries your clothes with gentle heat and uses 90 percent less energy than conventional dryers, but at \$4,000, you'll never recoup the cost.

> **Jetted sinks** with timers for hand washables. Most washing machines these days have extra-gentle cycles for delicates.

> **Steam settings,** which add some cleaning power to a washer but not enough to justify a couple hundred dollars more on the price tag.

> **Interactive LCD displays on washers** to track the progress of a load and get stain-removal tips.

> **Built-in clothes bins.** They hide dirties but tend to trap moisture and get smelly. Better to tuck bins into open cubbies where air can circulate around them.



## DECODING ENERGY STAR LABELS

Most HE (high-efficiency) washers are also rated by MEF and WF. Here's what the new acronyms mean:

**MEF:** Modified Energy Factor is a measure of the energy used to run the washer and

heat the water. The higher the MEF, the more energy-efficient the washer.

**WF:** Water Factor is based on the number of gallons of water consumed per cubic foot of capacity. The lower the WF, the more miserly the washer.