

Utility Rooms

Sam Bheda looks at the things to consider when designing a utility room

A good utility room has to be experienced to be appreciated. It is a separate area in a home where laundry can be washed, dried and ironed and where household equipment and materials can be stored. As a practical room, it is where essential, sometimes messy jobs can be carried out, as well as more pleasurable tasks such as cutting and arranging flowers or repotting houseplants.

LOCATION

If you are thinking about incorporating a utility room, one of the first considerations is the space you have available, followed by the practicalities of locating a utility room within that space. The most common place for a utility room is generally near a kitchen on the ground floor, but let your personal requirements guide its location. For example if the room will only be used for washing clothes, would it be better located in an unused space upstairs nearer to bedrooms? If you have space, the utility room could operate as an extension to your kitchen housing electrical appliances and even a large freezer. In terms of practical considerations, you should know the location of the services - water supply, waste-water outlet, heating and electrics - and whether these will need to be altered. I would always recommend consulting a plumber and electrician early on to determine what is possible and to get an idea of the costs involved.

THINK ABOUT YOUR REQUIREMENTS AND HOW YOU WILL USE THE ROOM

It is important to invest time to think about your needs and how you intend to use the room. This planning will help ensure your utility room works for you. To be effective a utility room needs to be large enough to accommodate a washing machine and tumble dryer, plus have storage space for laundry essentials. An ideal utility room will also have space for a sink, hanging and managing laundry as well as plenty of storage.

ALLOCATE ADEQUATE STORAGE SPACE

It is useful to allocate dedicated space for specific items, for example laundry detergents and stain removers in a cupboard close to the washing machine, household cleaning materials in a separate cupboard, shoe cleaning equipment and so on. Remember to keep materials such as bleach or cleaning products out of reach of children though. When thinking about cabinetry, tall cupboards are useful for ironing boards, mops, buckets and brooms, whereas wall mounted cupboards are useful for tubs, jars and cleaning products. You could opt for open shelves and use woven baskets to store items.

VENTILATION AND DRYING RACKS

Ventilation is an important point to consider when you're at the planning stages. Heat and moisture need to be able to escape to avoid damp so it's a good idea to install a humidity controlled extractor fan - your electrician should be able to provide some guidance. For clothes that cannot be



placed in the tumble dryer, it's useful to have drying racks that fold away into cupboards. Rails built into cupboards are also very useful for drying shirts or dresses. Allow plenty of worktop space to sort and organise finished laundry and have plenty of versatile temporary storage options. You should also provide for an adequate number of sockets so that you don't have lots of trailing wires. Good ambient lighting is also essential and if you can, aim to include some task lighting, particularly around the areas where you'll be performing specific tasks.

BOOT ROOM FACILITIES

If your utility room is going to be linked to an exterior door and space allows, you can double it up as a boot room - a transitional space where damp coats can be hung and muddy footwear taken off. A boot room should have plenty of hooks for coats and bags close to the entrance and ideally cupboard storage for footwear. In a similar way to defining your storage requirements for the utility area, think about what you'll need to store there (e.g. hats, gloves) and make sure each item has a specific place. It is also helpful to have a bench which makes it more comfortable when you're putting on and removing footwear.

QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE

Given the various functions a utility room will perform, the type and quality of materials you choose should be able to withstand wear and tear so keep in mind durability and ease of maintenance, for example floors that are easy to clean and a worktop that's non-porous. Finally, while this is a very functional space, it's important to remember that it still needs to be a nice environment to work in. If the room is next to the kitchen, you can extend the same cabinetry from the kitchen to the utility room, which will help provide visual cohesiveness. If it benefits from natural light, add some houseplants to make it more comfortable and healthy!

■ Sam Bheda is an Suffolk-based interior designer. He designs beautiful homes for private clients which embrace their individuality and works with commercial clients to deliver interiors that help unlock value. Find out more by visiting www.sambheda.com