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Article by: LYNN UNDERWOOD , Star Tribune Updated: October 20, 2012 - 9:37 AM

Thoughtfully designed, hardworking mudrooms make life easier and more organized.

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The once-lowlow mudroom has earned a place among the big three of remodeling projects.

A space to ease the transition from outside to inside, to organize boots, mittens and scarves, and to keep grunge at bay is the most requested home improvement, after kitchens and bathrooms, say Twin Cities designers and contractors.

"Our clients tell us they love their home and neighborhood but they can't stand the mess of coats and backpacks and want help," said Ron Sonnek of Sicora Home Design in St. Louis Park.

But modern mudrooms are much more than a couple of coat hooks and a storage cabinet. To be efficient, organized spaces, mudrooms are getting bigger and offering multiple functions: a "drop zone" for keys and groceries; storage for coats, boots and sports equipment; built-in benches to make taking shoes on and off easier; even stations to charge electronics. Many have heated floors and are designed to match the architectural style of the home.

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Michael Rosenman recently put in a highly detailed, Arts and Crafts-inspired mudroom in his Minneapolis home. While he appreciates the look of the room, it's all about the function.

"No matter how you design the look and finishes," he said, "Think of how you use it every day -- that's what matters."

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FAMILY STYLE

Starting point: Because Paul and Yuko Goodwin's 1990s home in Golden Valley was dark and dated, they planned an extensive renovation. While the walk-out home had a big closet near the garage, and two main-floor powder rooms, there was no mudroom.

Design/build team: Rocky and Gigi DiGiacomo of DiGiacomo Homes and Renovation, Minneapolis, www.designbuildmn.com.

What they did: "It was silly to have two powder rooms on the main floor," said DiGiacomo. "So we demolished one of them and used the space for a new mudroom." They designed built-in storage on two walls that includes open lockers, with shoe cubbies beneath. The other wall is the designated drop zone with a desk. DiGiacomo wrapped the built-ins around the existing powder room window.

Musical mudroom: The Goodwins encourage friends to pop their iPods in a dock on the desk and play music through the home audio system.

Multi-use lockers: "We put in big and small hooks for soccer bags and jackets, so there's no excuse for kids to not put their stuff away," said DiGiacomo.

Back savers: The cubbies have roll-out trays for shoes. "We had a roll-out drawer in our kitchen for pots and pans, so why not for shoes?" said Paul.

Let there be white: They chose white enameled wood cabinets and a cherry wood bench and desk top to keep the room bright and cheerful.

Best part: "I'm a forgetful person," said Paul. "Now I have a system and I know where my keys and phone are."

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