

# Ready to launch

MUDROOMS AREN'T JUST FOR MUDDY SHOES – THEY'RE STAGING AREAS FOR THE WHOLE HOME'S ACTIVITIES

STORY BY **SAM BOYKIN**  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF **BENHAM BUILDERS**

The house Jim Benham grew up in, like many others, had a back door that opened into the kitchen. So when Benham would come home from playing sports or working in the yard, he'd just drop off all his stuff in the garage. "And then dad would complain he couldn't park the car," Benham recalls. "It was a pretty nonsensical layout."



BENHAM

Today, as president of Benham Builders in Charlotte, he helps his clients avoid this kind of messy inconvenience by including a mudroom in nearly all his home designs. "They're just so critical," he says. "Especially when you have kids."

But mudrooms have changed a lot over the years. Benham, who started his company over 25 years ago, would know. No longer are they just closet-sized spaces where you toss your muddy shoes, sports equipment, briefcase or coat. They're a far more integral part of a home's overall design than in years past. While they're still designed as a high-traffic area where you can put away messy clutter and gear, they also serve as an entry point for guests. Some designers even refer to them as "launch zones."



Jim Benham of Benham Builders includes a mudroom in nearly all his home designs. Mudrooms feature storage areas for the entire family.







Laundry area of a mudroom.



Mudrooms feature ample storage for the whole family.

"It's a transitional area from the outside to the inside of the house," says Benham. "And it can serve a number of different purposes for the modern family."

The mudrooms Benham designs and builds are more than just utilitarian storage spaces. He often includes features like benches, lockers, cabinets and shelves, as well as attractive wall coverings such as beadboard. This material is easy to maintain and also helps protect the walls from rambunctious kids loaded down with clunky gear. "The materials you use in a mudroom need to be able to take abuse," Benham says.

Many families also want the mudroom to flow seamlessly into other parts of the home. A few years ago, Benham designed and built a mudroom for a family with six kids. The space was about 300 square feet, and included lockers and benches. Right next to the mudroom he also built a study space, with six desktop areas. "The mudroom and study area were between the garage and kitchen, and provided the perfect transition area from the outside," Benham says. "It's all about planning and designing the right space to satisfy your family's lifestyle."

Brett Taylor, owner of Hopedale Builders in Charlotte, says that for many of his clients, the mudroom is one of their favorite parts of the house. "And they're not skimping on them either," he says. "It used to be if you wanted to save money it would be in the mudroom. But now mudrooms are getting as much attention as other areas such as the kitchen and master bedroom."

During one remodeling project for a family with three kids, he

converted part of a kitchen into a mudroom, and installed floor-to-ceiling cabinets with doors. "It really helped the kids keep things organized and tidy rather than scattering their stuff all over the house."

Terri Saint, a design consultant with Classica Homes, has helped design some of Charlotte's nicest homes, including several featured last year at HomeArama, a well-known upscale home tour, in Robbins Park in Cornelius. Like Benham and Taylor, Saint says that mudrooms have gotten much nicer over the years, with more emphasis being placed on having them as part of the home's overall design.

"It's no longer just a utilitarian afterthought," she says. "It's a critical element to consider when coming up with a home plan."

In fact, to Saint, "mudroom" is really an outdated term, and instead she refers to the space as a "launch zone." "It helps you start and end your day and keeps you organized," she says. "And they're now located in areas where they're much more visible."

For HomeArama 2010, Saint designed launch zones in two homes. One was geared towards a busy young family with a dog. It included a pair of colorful orange lockers, a functional bench with three storage areas, and a mounted chalkboard to help a busy family keep track of its schedule. "It's very kid-friendly, colorful, organized and fun," says Saint.

The space also included hooks above the chalkboard for coats, a basket for recycling, and a dog bed and food bowl in the corner. "This launch keeps everything organized and easy to find," she says.

The second space she designed was for an empty nester family, making use of available space just off the kitchen. It's small but functional and well laid out, with an upholstered bench with a hinged top for storage, along with baskets and hooks for coats, hats and grocery recyclable bags.

"Each launch zone differs with how the homeowner uses it," says Saint. "The way people are living today, with functionality being such an imperative, having the right space for everything you need is really an essential element to incorporate into your home."

#### ► More information

**Benham Builders:**  
benhambuilders.com.

**Hopedale Builders:**  
hopedalebuilders.com.

**Classica Homes:**  
classicahomes.com.



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