

# Utility epiphany

Why moving the washing machine upstairs changed one family's life. By *Victoria Brzezinski*



Bianca Hall, 49, moved her washing machine from her kitchen up to the first floor of her home, and rejigged the entire level in the process  
VICKI COUCHMAN

Where do you keep your washing machine? In Germany you're much more likely to find it in the bathroom. Sicilians might put theirs on a balcony. Americans often stick one in a utility room. Keeping a washer in the kitchen is, by and large, a curiously British phenomenon — often one that's a result of limited space.

One of the people bucking the British status quo is Bianca Hall, 49, who lives in Stoke Newington, in northeast London. Hall recently banished her washing machine from her kitchen, moving it up to the first floor and rejigging that entire level of her home in the process.

She has sacrificed a bedroom and made way for a stylish XL bathroom, a "tiny but life-changing" utility room (housing the washer and separate dryer) and a storage cupboard, which she admits "tragically has been an absolute game-changer".

A former television producer, Hall goes by @frenchforpineapple on Instagram, where she shares her continuing renovations with 43,000 followers. She and her husband, Ed, 47, bought their Victorian terrace in 2008. This most recent round of reconfigurations has been the biggest since a loft conversion almost a decade ago. That conversion added

two extra bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor, for the benefit of their two children, Edie, 17, and Baxter, 10. It also left Hall pondering a more efficient use of the property, which at that stage had a superfluous five bedrooms and a dinky main bathroom.

Her current kitchen, typical of an English terrace, is long and thin, with cupboard space at a premium. It used to house the washer but there wasn't enough space for a tumble dryer, which had to be exiled to the "deathtrap" cellar. Meanwhile one of the children's old first-floor bedrooms had become a dumping ground for clutter. "I had been over every possible configuration, floor plan-wise," she says.

The old bathroom was carved up — about a third of it was turned into a generous storage cupboard, with new access created via the hallway. The remaining two thirds is now the utility room. Hall says having the washing machine right next to the dryer is "the ultimate luxury".

"Having a first-floor utility room is the most brilliant thing ever," she adds. "It's closer to the bedrooms where all your dirty washing comes from. So we've got no need for it to go all the way downstairs and then come all the way back up again. It all happens where it needs to happen."

Instead of cabinets, curtains hanging from an iron rod conceal the washer and dryer.

“We didn’t have the space for any doors and also from a budget point of view it was much cheaper. I bought a pine unit off Etsy for the baby butler sink and I got the builders to construct a support along the back wall and the side walls for the worktop to sit on.

“You push the curtain right across; there’s nothing hindering your access to the washing machine and dryer at all. Stacking [the appliances] would probably have been a more practical use of space but I thought it would have felt overbearing as it’s such a small room.”

The other first-floor bedroom has now become the family’s cosy TV room. It’s one of the smallest rooms in the house, although the one they use the most. “When Ed’s dad, who’s getting older, comes to visit, our TV room doubles as our guest room, so it was important that I kept a loo in what is now the utility room,” she says. “The reason that we did this reconfiguration was just because that’s what works best for us, but there was always going to be compromise. In the utility room I couldn’t physically fit in the sink that I wanted in between the washing machine and dryer.”

Hall also converted a spare bedroom into their new — dreamy pink marble — main bathroom. “It feels like an ensuite as it’s right next to our bedroom and there are no other doors off that particular



Hall’s large new bathroom  
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The family’s discreetly stored washer and dryer

landing,” she says. The ceiling and walls in this room were so wonky they had to come down. The builders installed the “non-negotiable” niche for the shower soaps and shampoos, and a recessed arch beside the bath. The alabaster wall lights came from America — designed by Aerin Lauder for Visual Comfort — and the mirrored vanity units are recessed into the walls. “I used a furniture designer called Jay Achilles for the floating double vanity unit,” she adds.

Building work started at the start of last September and the bulk of the work was done within six weeks, with the final tweaks carried out over the past six months.

“I’m always in a constant state of renovation,” Hall says. “We’ve never had the funds available to do the whole shebang at once.”

Did Hall worry that losing a bedroom would negatively affect the property’s value? An estate agent she spoke to advised her that it wouldn’t. “Technically we are still a full four-bedroom house,” she says. “We have admittedly lost the second largest one, but I just think you’ve got to do what works for you and the way you live. Maybe on paper it sounds a bit mad, but actually in practice it works brilliantly. I would defy anyone to say that we’ve done the wrong thing.” ■