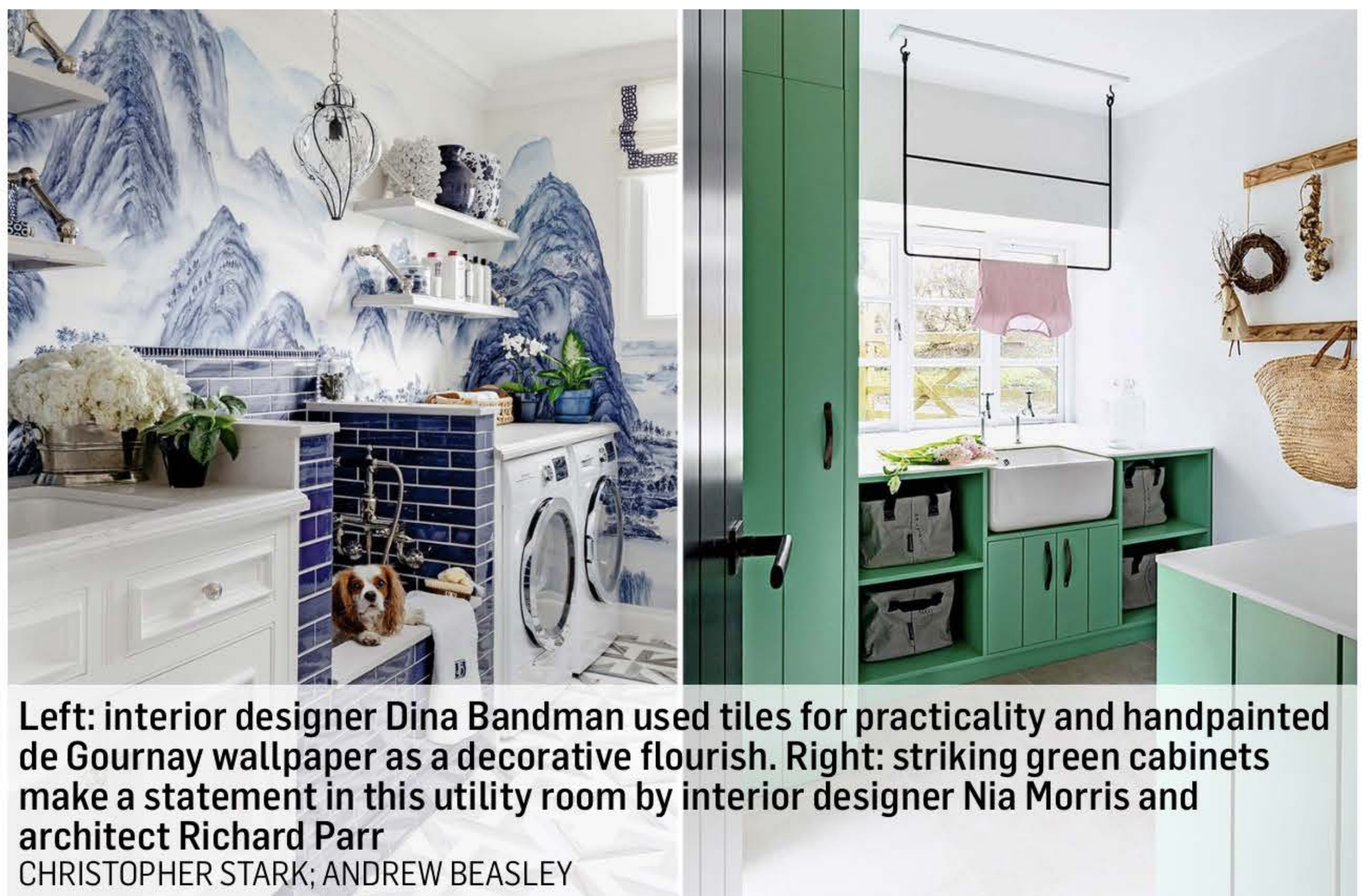


Interiors

Helyn Denton

The new home status symbol? The utility room, of course!

Practical, functional and a thing of ‘true beauty’ – a utility room has become the most unlikely interiors must-have of the year



Left: interior designer Dina Bandman used tiles for practicality and handpainted de Gournay wallpaper as a decorative flourish. Right: striking green cabinets make a statement in this utility room by interior designer Nia Morris and architect Richard Parr
CHRISTOPHER STARK; ANDREW BEASLEY

Blame Sarah Beeny. Thanks to her cavalier Noughties attitude to knocking down walls on Property Ladder while house prices went through the roof, the past 15 years in design have been about open-plan living. But then we all suddenly had to sit at home all day, carving out little corners for conference calls, and so broken-plan living – the art of screens, partitions and the building of stud walls – became the look of 2020. Now it has gone one step further, and with the realisation that looking after your home can sometimes be a joyful pursuit in itself comes the unlikely re-emergence of the utility room, where jobs get done – and their tools get hidden – out of sight.

“I like to daydream about them,” says Linda Boronkay,

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interior designer and former design director of Soho House. “I wish I had one as a place to store my things. All my clients are asking for them, they’ve become a must.” The designer Minnie Kemp of the Firmdale Hotels group agrees. “Utility rooms are the engine room of a house, the beating heart,” she says. “A place for all the bits for chore-related activity that would otherwise clutter your life, when the rest of the house is strictly fun. A ‘clear out of the way and deal with it later’ kind of space.”



DeVol's Sebastian Cox kitchen units are perfect for a utility room

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Boronkay and Kemp's passion is shared online. Pinterest has seen a 35 per cent year-on-year increase in searches for utility rooms (particularly popular are those with dog showers), while lifestyle brand Neptune reports an annual increase of 21 per cent in sales of laundry-room cabinets and 61 per cent in boot-room benches. "The best utility rooms are Bond-like in that everything pulls or folds out, and has several uses," Boronkay says. "Skinny drawers become ironing boards, rails slide out to hang clothes off and everything is tucked away out of view."

Decor-wise, this is also the perfect place to experiment. "There are almost no consequences of being brave in this space that not many visitors see," Boronkay adds. "Be bold with colour or pattern." The interior designer Nicola Harding suggests that gloss paint is ideal. "Wipe-clean is better for a space that deals with muddy boots and dirty clothes," she says. "Farrow & Ball's Modern Emulsion or Little Greene's Intelligent Emulsion have a higher sheen than normal matt paint and are more practical for walls."

Part of the utility room's appeal is that anyone can have one, or the essence of one, at least. While the interior designer Charu Gandhi of Elicyon says her upmarket clients in Dubai and west London are now installing multiple utility rooms on multiple floors ("one for the laundry, one for cleaning equipment, one for storage"), Kemp has a more democratic solution. "I have installed a washing machine and dryer with stacking shelves above in a cupboard under the stairs," she says. "Antique mirror cladding makes this area almost invisible and nobody would guess what is hidden away like magic."

Harding takes this one step further and suggests any bit of storage can have a utility vibe. "I design all my cupboards so the shelves are the right height to fit Really Useful Boxes in between each one," she says. "Fill them with things by genre — lightbulbs and fuses in one, tools in another — and unlike cardboard they won't fall apart so they are easy to cart around."

Gandhi sums it up best. "A home is only beautiful if it functions how you need it to," she says. "And a good utility room is a thing of true beauty."

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A butler's sink, plenty of shelves and cupboards and a hanging laundry airer, as seen here by DeVol, are on the utility room wish list

The new utility must-haves

The linen room

“The best utility room I have ever seen is at the Chelsea Textiles’ founder Mona Perlhagen’s house in France,” says Kemp. “There is floor-to-ceiling shelving on a partition wall facing you as you enter, each shelf filled with neatly pressed and folded linens and sheets, beautifully colour co-ordinated and clean as a whistle. Hidden behind are three large industrial washing machines and driers, built-in bins for unwashed items and a large oak centre

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table you will usually find Oscar the Airedale snoring underneath. A large butler's sink with joinery underneath sits in the back, perfect for cutting flowers and, of course, an extendable shower spray set into the work top for dog washing. Underfoot is a heated stone floor. Heaven.”

The multi-utility rooms

“Clients don't want their staff dragging cleaning equipment up and down the halls, scuffing paintwork,” says Gandhi. “So station a utility cupboard on each floor. Make sure they're well lit, well ventilated and soundproof, with more shelves than you think you'll ever need.”

The dog bath

Tiles are a must on the floor and most of the walls. But don't let dog spray put you off those decorative flourishes — the interiors designer Dina Bandman covered the top half of one utility room in handpainted de Gournay wallpaper. Brave.



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Fit for purpose

1. Travel steamer, £110, Steamery; selfridges.com
2. Glass jar, £5; shabbystore.co.uk
3. Reusable kitchen roll, £25 each; wearthlondon.com
4. Wooden wall hook, £13; thehairpinlegcompany.co.uk
5. Pashley bicycle with a basin, £2,169; burlingtonbathrooms.com
6. Hanging fake succulent, £18, ASA Selection; amara.com



7. Hanger rack, £39; arket.com
8. Dog wash, £24, Bondi Wash; alittlefind.com
9. Bamboo pegs, £5; wildandstone.com
10. Le Labo Rose 31 scented detergent, £44, The Laundress; libertylondon.com
11. Reed storage basket, £14; bohemiadesign.co.uk
12. Ostrich feather duster, £37; oxfordbrushcompany.com