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LOGISTICAL MAGIC

KRISTINA CRESTIN TURNS A FAMILY'S UNUSED OFFICE INTO A MULTIFUNCTIONAL, BRILLIANTLY ORGANIZED MUDROOM.

By **Mary Grauerholz**

Photographs by **Jared Kuzia**

IN THE REALM OF TYPICAL INTERIOR DESIGN, THE mudroom is what an unadorned clay pot is to the silky flower it holds: all substance, no style. But when interior designer Kristina Crestin began the first-floor interior design of an Essex home, the mudroom became the project's brilliant star.

The homeowner and her four children previously had used a back hall to stash all the items that New Englanders typically carry in and out of the house:

backpacks, coats, boots, and sports equipment. The area was, well, a mess.

"Everyone needs a dumping zone, but the general function wasn't working well," says Crestin, the owner of Kristina Crestin Design in Manchester-by-the-Sea.

For the family, especially the children, accessibility was a problem. Today, the homeowner says with relief, "you no longer walk in my front door and see piles of stuff. Now, it has purpose. There's a space for everything."

The mudroom also has beautiful style rooted in a stunning shade of blue, visually exciting materials, and details packed with interest. All of it was pulled off, the homeowner says, thanks to Crestin and the third crucial member of the team, general contractor Covenant LLC in Essex.

Crestin's first order of business, she says, was to assess what she was working with. Studying the overall first-floor space, the architectural interior designer spied a large, mostly unused office, positioned to the left as guests enter the front door. The office was also where one of the family's two beloved Labrador retrievers slept in a roomy crate. Crestin right away en-

Anchoring the room is an island that accommodates the dog crate, in perfect fit underneath the island top.



visioned the office as the new mudroom. She realized that the switch would require some logistical magic: moving the garage door, adding another interior door to create flow between the family room and basement stair area, and fitting in a large dog crate. The homeowner loved the concept.

Crestin admits it was a bold move to set the mudroom so squarely into the scheme of the home's public rooms. But once she and the homeowner decided, as Crestin says, "to go with it," they nailed down two non-negotiables: First, the mudroom had to have eye appeal. The second was that they had to go full bore and celebrate what is usually a mundane space.

Today the multifunction room is a brilliantly organized beauty, with everything perfectly in place. Anchoring the room is an island that accommodates the dog crate, in perfect fit underneath the island top. Crestin designed the top and other major pieces in the room, including the half barn door that disguises storage space and the rail with hooks.

The island top, the room's centerpiece, was created from chunky three-inch pieces of reclaimed wood by Old House Parts Co. in Kennebunk, Maine, where woodworkers hand-sanded it to retain the wood's unique texture and applied furniture-grade wax for a stunning effect. "They treated it more like a piece of furniture," Crestin says. (Covenant custom-built the base.)

Crestin and the homeowner agreed that lockers with baskets would be perfect for storing small items. But coats and gym bags called for a different solution—a technique that would be handy but visually

appealing. Crestin utilized an antique extra-tall rail, now lined with antique wood hooks, which she found at a Brimfield Antique Flea Market and set against the wall's beadboard paneling.

Another major element of the room is a niche that houses the homeowner's desk. Next to it, behind a rustic half barn door, is more storage space. Crestin designed the space to make it just deep enough to accommodate a desk surface and a stylish chair by Sikka Design. "It's an unsexy little detail," the designer says of carefully choosing the closet's depth, "but it works."

Color, as usual, plays a major role in the mudroom's success. The original plan was for it to be white, Crestin says. "Everyone loves blue, but this shade was pretty risky here. If it was white, we thought it would look pedestrian." Crestin carried the color into the family room with blue accents. The interior doors and window sashes are charcoal gray. "We wanted to be sure the charcoal gray and blue worked together," she adds, so Covenant workers painted various swatches on the walls until Crestin and the homeowner knew they had found the right shades: dove gray on the walls and the eye-catching blue, Andes Summit by Benjamin Moore, for the paneling and trim, sparking even more interest against the slate floor.

For the children, it is a welcoming space when they arrive home. The homeowner's pleasure is in the deft combination of style and purpose. "When my kids come home, there's a space for everything," she says. "And it's warm. It adds so much to the house." ■

For contact information, see Resources on page 122.

Left, An antique extra-tall rail is lined with antique wood hooks and set against the wall's beadboard paneling. Right, Lockers and baskets are perfect for storing small items.