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Stretch your laundry room with space-saving device

By James and Morris Carey
Associated Press

Brother Morris' wife, Carol, recently noticed a magazine ad for a stamp-formed metal device that looked a lot like a dishpan with a large round hole in one end. What she had spotted was a space-saving device that would change forever the way she would think about the laundry room.

Carol has been designing kitchens, baths, laundries and other remodels and custom homes for nearly two decades. She couldn't wait to pass her discovery on to us. "Hey, guys," she said, "This is one your readers should know about." It's a device that allows a dryer to be installed against the wall--no kidding. It lets you gain space in a tight laundry room.

In the past, we have always designed a laundry to include a 3-foot deep space for the dryer. Thirty-six inches might sound like overkill since most clothes dryers are between 24 inches and 27 inches. However, as longtime remodelers, we have found that most of the difference between the space provided and the dryer itself gets eaten up by the flex duct that connects the dryer exhaust to the wall outlet.

For decades we have watched appliance manufacturers, ventilation contractors, architects, builders and remodelers struggle to come up with a solution to the age-old problem of what to do with the dryer ducting and how to save the space it typically wastes. We have seen many twists on dryer installation.

One solution is to connect the duct to the side of the dryer. It gets the dryer up against the back wall all right, but space to either side can be equally important. What difference does it make where the space is wasted? Once we were involved with an architect who concluded that the exhaust port in the wall had to exactly align with the outlet port in the back of the dryer. He handed us the specifications and told us that if the two ports were exactly aligned, the dryer could be fitted directly into the wall outlet and no space would be wasted. We assured him that we would position

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One dryer manufacturer offers an outlet port underneath their unit. Obviously, it is designed to accommodate some kind of floor connection. We are still waiting to see what kind of crane this manufacturer recommends to accomplish the installation.

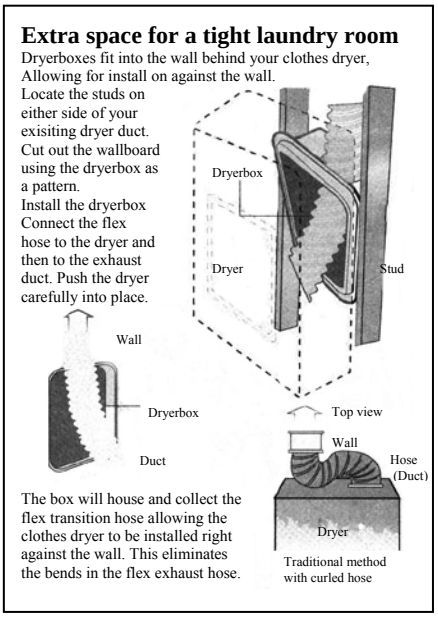
Enough of the pitfalls of dryer installation. What Carol discovered was an ad for a wall-mount recess-kit called "The Dryerbox" (www.dryerbox.com; 888-443-7937). It is a simple metal box that is designed to use the space in the wall cavity as a "recessed" collection point for your dryer's flex connection. Remember when they came out with the recessed wall box for the faucets and drain for a clothes washer? This is a similar kind of contraption, only it's used with a dryer. Even with the best of inventions, there often are drawbacks. In our opinion, the shortcomings of The Dryerbox include:

▪ It is designed to work only with dryer ducts that travel upward. Since many dryer connections are placed beneath the floor, this one might not be for you. Of course, this doesn't mean that you can't install a new in-wall duct that exhausts upward. It's a lot of work, but if space in your laundry is critical, the extra cost might be worth it.

▪ The existing dryer outlet and the stud cavity in which it resides must be situated so that The Dryerbox can be aligned with the dryer's exhaust port. Since a flexible duct is the standard of installation, dryers rarely align perfectly with wall connections. This could require expensive framing modifications.

Something we noticed: Crimping, and other types of ductwork gridlock, can occur when the flex pipe is too long or not carefully managed as the dryer is pushed into position. Our advice here is to take it a little at a time.

Even with the minor obstacles we've mentioned, we believe The Dryerbox to be an innovative space saver. Carol was right; the Dryerbox does look like a dishpan. It is rectangular (12 1/4 inches wide by 21 1/2 inches high) and mounted vertically into a single-stud bay. The exhaust duct in the wall enters the box through the top by way of a precut opening.



A knockout is provided for a gas line.

Here's how to install one:

▪ Locate the studs on either side of your existing dryer duct. Since The Dryerbox is narrower than a typical stud bay, there is some latitude for side-to-side placement.

▪ Cut out the wallboard using The Dryerbox as a pattern so that it can be mounted onto one of the studs. At this point, additional blocking or backing can be added to the opposite side of the opening so that the unit can be solidly attached on both sides.

Cut the existing exhaust duct so that it will end up protruding 2 to 3 inches into The Dryerbox.

▪ Install The Dryerbox using three to six screws.

▪ Connect the flex hose to the dryer and then to the exhaust duct.

▪ Push the dryer carefully into place. As you push the dryer slowly toward the flex duct, it will gently drop into the recess and should end up closer to the wall than before.

Again, keep in mind that The Dryerbox works only when the exhaust port on the dryer aligns with the exhaust duct in the wall (plus or minus an inch or two). If it doesn't, you will need to relocate your dryer or the duct (along with The Dryerbox) so that they do.

For more home improvement tips and information, visit the Carey brothers' Web site at www.onthehouse.com.