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In this kitchen in Hinsdale, a large pantry is visible in the back. When its doors close, it's hidden. Bottom right: a butler's pantry in Highland Park. Bottom left: a pantry in a Chicago condo.

PANTRIES GET SUPERSIZED

As both storage space and workplace, they serve as a shortstop for the clutter that ends up in kitchens BY ANNE MOORE

When Caren and Peter Skarzynski moved from Wilmette to Lake Forest last summer, the first room they remodeled was just inside the back door. From a small laundry room, they opened up the space to house a sink, microwave, cabinets, countertops, file drawers for a home office, a washer and dryer, and a bench for taking off boots and shoes. A stone floor was laid for easy cleaning.

Their "super pantry" is the most functional space in their five-bedroom home, say the couple, who are both in their early 50s. It's a storage and work

place that serves as a shortstop for the clutter that ends up in kitchens: mail and paperwork, platters and serving pieces, a coffee urn, and their six children's backpacks, coats and hockey gear. "It's nice not tripping over things in my kitchen," Caren Skarzynski says.

Peter Skarzynski is an innovation guru and managing partner at consulting firm ITC Business Group in Chicago. But Caren, a homemaker, gets the credit for putting a ton of function in the narrow space between the kitchen and the back door.

See PANTRIES on Page 27



RENÉE LILLIE, WHI



SUPPLIED BY DESIGN CONSTRUCTION CONCEPTS AND NUBAUS

Super pantries serve many purposes—and hide lots of clutter

PANTRIES from Page 25

Architects and designers in the Chicago area say the No. 1 “want” these days from not-first-time buyers in the city and suburbs is a dedicated space separate from the kitchen where they can do messy chores like repotting a plant, as well as store wine, barware, wrapping paper, a printer, dog food, everyday gear and oversized items.

These extra spaces can be as small as a large closet or as spacious as the kitchen. Closed off from public areas of the house, these workrooms can cost less than the same space within a kitchen because less expensive cabinetry, including open shelves, may be used. The Skarzyskis outfitted their expanded pantry with off-the-rack cabinetry and countertops. But many super pantries are just as glamorous as the kitchen they’re beside, with stone counters, custom cabinetry, high-end appliances.

“It’s a newer ‘ask,’” says Elissa Morgante, president of Morgante-Wilson Architects in Evanston. “We’ve always done nice pantries; these are a second space tucked away, to do prep work and shut the door.” Components differ by client need and budget, she says, but all offer a lot of storage and a work counter.

For Cindy and Mike Bonds, an airline executive, a newly built home in Winnetka will have a second space “to hold the mess of the kitchen,” says Cindy Bonds, 53, a homemaker. “It’s for cleanup. There’s a disposal and dishwasher and a lot of counter space.” Empty nesters, they both like to entertain and neither likes clutter, so everyday appliances, like the coffeemaker, will be housed in the super pantry. “Everything will have a place.”

Suburban houses have more wiggle room to carve out a super pantry. Creating one in a city home or apartment often means giving up a bedroom or a study. And that’s what experienced buyers are doing, says Gail Drury, president and creative director of Drury Design in Glen Ellyn. An Astor Street client swapped a den for a super pantry that houses a wine bar and cooler, space for a printer and paper, file drawers, a second refrigerator and



MICHAEL ROBINSON



ERIC HAUSMAN PHOTOGRAPHY



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Top left: Morgante-Wilson designed this pantry in Glencoe. Top right: a Drury Design pantry in a Chicago midrise hides a printer. Bottom: In this Highland Park kitchen, a coffee bar is hidden, back right.

open shelves for easy access to oversized and rarely used items.

Many clients want that second space for a specific task, Drury says. For a family that keeps separate kosher kitchens for dairy and meat, she designed a workspace beside the kitchen. For a baker, she designed a super pantry with a

marble-top workspace and storage for mixers, bowls and cutters.

In Highland Park, architect Tom Wynn of Lichten Craig Architecture & Interiors in Chicago created a dog pantry beside the butler’s pantry. It holds storage bins for the dog’s food and a sink. The dog’s bowls are tucked

underneath the sink instead of being underfoot in the kitchen.

In a Michigan beach house, Chicago-based NuHaus co-founder and designer Doug Durbin created an overflow workspace behind the wall of a kitchen for a couple who cooks and entertains often. It holds open shelves, appliances and heavy-duty cookware. The space doubles as the wife’s home office. “It’s a sanctuary, but she has a very specific use for the space,” Durbin says. “It holds all the overflow.”

Redfin real estate agent Mary Helen Cutler, who’s based in the North Shore, is seeing “a total reuse of space” in North Shore homes, typically the laundry space off the kitchen. “They’re saying, ‘This is a lot of space—there could be so much more function.’” Mostly, homebuyers are trying to keep everyday kid clutter and paperwork from the kitchen, she says. “You don’t want a bill to get lost under the pizza box.”

Not every client is looking for that combined super space. Northwest suburban physician Archana Shrestha, 36, and her husband are looking for a new home in Barrington or Inverness for their family, which includes two young daughters. At their current house in Palatine, the mud room and the pantry are separate, well-used spaces. One is by the back door and is lined with hooks and cubbies. The pantry is beside the kitchen, closed off by a door that locks. “If I didn’t lock it,” she says, “the girls would be eating Gummi Bears all day.” She wants the same setup in their next home.

For others, super-pantry space is a must, especially in new city condo construction, says Kathleen Malone at Related Realty in Chicago. Instead of a third bedroom, buyers expect a large, separate space that can be used for storage, laundry, wine and chores. “As much as people say they want the urban lifestyle, they still want to make that Costco trip, they want to entertain luxuriously, they want a place where no one sees all the mess that goes on.”

They use the space to store glassware, vases, candlesticks, a built-in espresso maker, a second dishwasher, a wine tasting room, she says. “As long as the space is there, they can specify.”