



Payton Bartos, 6, finds a perch in the family storage area. Her parents had the clutter-control space built when they renovated the house.

PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSTADT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# Backpack Central

*Assigned Locker Space Works as Well At Home as It Does at School*

By ELIZA R. L. MCGRAW  
Special to The Washington Post

**I**n most schools, lockers are the time-honored storage solution, the place where students stow jackets, lunch boxes, red-inked English papers and bulky sports gear. Some families are taking that smart lesson home, setting up locker-like spaces, often right inside the door where kids charge into the house and drop their backpacks.

Although you can sometimes find the real thing — either vintage or brand-new — home lockers usually are not the satisfyingly slammable metal variety found in school hallways. But tall, open, built-in wooden cabinets, complete with hooks, cubbies, drawers and movable shelves, do the job just as well.

When John and Mila Bartos renovated their house in Northwest, they asked architect Chris Snowber and builder Mauck Zantinger to include such clutter-control space. Now each of the three children — Payton, 6, Cade, 4, and even 2-year-old Winn — has a designated locker. Their parents share a fourth. The built-ins, says Mila Bartos, are “all about storage and functionality for children.”

The Bartos children enter the house through a side door that leads directly to their lockers. The area is a bit wider than a hallway, strategically

**Payton gives brother Cade, 4, a boost to the hat rack. The three Bartos children have individual storage areas.**



placed between the combination kitchen/dining room and a smaller television room. On the wall across from the lockers, a row of pegs holds the jackets and hats that used to overstuff the front hall closet.

Two tall storage spaces are built on either side of a wooden bench, which has a hinged seat to hold more. These days, shelves hold swimming goggles, small shoes, picture books. Payton, the oldest, already is involved in plenty of activities, evidenced by a Girl Scouts bag and ballet tote.

As children grow, their gear tends to get bigger and bulkier, going from swim fins and crayons to heavy backpacks and bike helmets. With this in mind, the builder installed removable shelves. "When they get older, they can store their lacrosse sticks and so on in there," says Mila Bartos.

The designated spaces have made it easier to keep the house tidy, says Bartos. "Even the baby knows where his stuff is. They are responsible for putting their stuff in their cubbies. They just used to dump it wherever they felt like it."

Bartos says now she could use just one more organizing feature: a bulletin board. Right now, field trip permission slips and health forms go in a top shelf of the lockers, along with stray toys and library books to return.

The family sacrificed some kitchen and dining room space for the lockers, and Bartos estimates the project added about \$7,000 to \$10,000 to the renovation. But she considers it money and square footage well spent.

"This was the main built-in, but we knew this would be the one we'd get the most use out of," she says, adding: "I just didn't want to be one of those moms who was stressed about the mess on the floor."

In Potomac, Steve and Mimi Kirstein's three children, ages 7, 9, and 11, used to come home and dump all their gear in the front foyer of their Georgian home. Steve Kirstein says his wife was so weary of the mess she refused to consider decorating their new house until they had solved the organization problem.

"Our kids do a lot of different activities, and the stuff was piling up," says Kirstein, the principal of BOWA builders in McLean, who designed a space with four lockers — three for the children, and one for himself. (Mimi doesn't need one, her husband says, because "she's neat.")

The children's lockers, located in a mudroom directly off the garage, corral lacrosse, golf and horseback riding gear as well as jackets and tote bags. Kirstein says the lockers' open front is key, because kids are less likely to put stuff away if a door is in the way. A bench at one end of the room provides drawers and a place for the children to put on riding boots or soccer cleats. Drawers are more efficient than cabinets in a low spot, says Kirstein. "When doors are tucked under a bench, no one gets down, whereas if you've got a drawer you can pull it out and look into it."

The kids' shoes go in a separate cubby space, adjacent to a bathroom across the mudroom from the lockers. The shoe shelves, formerly a "Price Club pantry" for wholesale sizes of food and paper goods, now house winter boots, sports shoes and flip-flops on a double row of shelving cubbies.

Ready-made storage cabinets cost less, Kirstein says, but built-ins can use every inch of space, so there are no awkward leftover spaces. Because he is in the

## Looking for Lockers

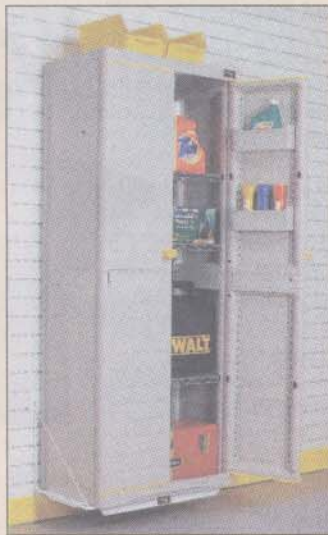
**F**or locker space without the high price of built-ins, check out storage units that stand (or hang) alone.

A sampling:

**Gladiator Garage-Works**, by Whirlpool, makes a product called the Tall GearBox Locker, a metal stand-alone locker with a middle partition. It features four adjustable half-width shelves, so schoolkids can store hockey sticks, baseball equipment and other tall things. Another product, the Tall Gear-Box, comes with three adjustable shelves. Both sit on casters. Gladiator products are sold at Sears and Lowe's. See [www.gladiatorgw.com](http://www.gladiatorgw.com) for other local sources.

**GarageTek's Tall Cabinet** (starting at about \$250) is made from TekPanel, a heavy-duty thermoplastic. It mounts off the ground, and comes with three movable shelves and a door bin. Extra shelves and bins are sold separately. A smaller, wall-mounted Kid'z Sports Locker is also available. Check [www.garagetek.com](http://www.garagetek.com) or call 866-664-2724 for local sources.

**Buyusedlockers.com**, on the Web, has a large supply of new and used lockers. Descriptions and photographs are displayed online, with prices available by request.



Tall Cabinet from GarageTek.

building business and benefited from discounted labor and materials, Kirstein says he couldn't really estimate how much his built-ins cost.

Like Bartos, Kirstein plans to add a message center where family members can leave notes for each other. Overall, however, Kirstein is pleased with the organization the lockers have given the family. "We wanted something very functional but something attractive, as well," he says. "And I'm just as proud to bring someone into this room as into the foyer."

Teenagers can benefit from locker space even more than younger children. Just inside the side door of their modern Bethesda home, Richard and Janice Newman have four lockers for their kids, who are 20, 17 and 13.

"We're kind of neat freaks, so we needed a place to put the kids' stuff," says Richard Newman. The doorway to the kitchen — Newman describes the room as the center of their house — faces the lockers.

Builder Mark Scott of Mark IV builders renovated the house four years ago with plenty of input from the Newmans. "We had a clear idea of what we wanted, having lived with these monsters as long as we have," Newman says.

The children chimed in with their own ideas about storage needs. All three play musical instruments that require bulky cases.

The lockers were a relatively minor part of the renovation, but Scott estimates that a setup like the Newmans' is in the \$4,500 range.

Newman says the storage has been crucial to family peace, and even helped the process of applying to colleges.

"The top shelf is the right depth for a folder," Newman says, so the applicants created a folder for each school and stored them in their lockers. "The volume of stuff you get from the school is huge. This way, it doesn't have to take over their rooms."