

MECHANICAL ROOM RUNDOWN

The kitchen may be the heart of the home, but the mechanical room is where the action really is. Here's what to consider when planning yours. **TEXT NANCY WON**



1 FURNACE

Requirements for the venting and clearance of your furnace vary depending on the type of furnace you have, and the fuel it uses.

Mid-efficiency furnaces vent out through the chimney, but newer high-efficiency furnaces are vented directly through the wall.

High-efficiency furnaces have built-in combustion air intakes that bring fresh air in to the burners, but medium- and low-efficiency furnaces require a supply of air from the room to function properly. So if the room is to be closed off from the rest of the basement, a louver installed in the door or wall between the mechanical room and the living area will allow air to circulate into the room to keep your furnace working properly.



2 WATER HEATER

Water heaters should be placed on a level surface to ensure efficient water and gas flow. Most manufacturers recommend installing it near a power source so that the wiring is as short as possible. The water heater should also be placed near a floor drain so that if it ever springs a leak, water will go down the drain instead of spoiling your basement.

A gas water heater should be installed in an open space or you must provide adequate ventilation. To make sure it's ventilating properly, check that the size and length of the venting runs follow the manufacturer's recommendations. "Try to place your water heater so that maintenance and routine inspections can be performed without difficulty, and with easy access to all panels," says John Osborne of Osborne Contracting Inc. in Toronto.



MIKE SAYS

"Create a utility room that has everything: the plumbing manifold, the hot-water system, the furnace and the electrical breaker box. Organize it so that it's well-set-up, and leave it unfinished so that in the future you can add in anything else you might need."



3 ELECTRICAL

Also located in your mechanical room is your home's electrical system. While there is no specific requirement for the location for the electrical panel, you must ensure that it has at least one metre of working clearance—meaning no furniture shoved up against it. "And be sure to properly insulate piping and protect wires so that any water that comes in won't short out your electrical system," advises Osborne.

Any modifications to the electrical panel should be performed by a licensed professional, otherwise your homeowners insurance may become void.



ALEX SCHULTZ; GETTY IMAGES (ROOM)



SERVICE CALL Your mechanical room and doors should be adequately sized to allow for inspections, service or replacement of any of the units, such as the furnace or hot water heater.



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