

It's very easy to go green

Expert Advice

STEVE MAXWELL

You can tell a lot about a society by the quality of indoor clothes drying racks it sells.

When you've got a population seriously committed to household conservation and efficiency, you'll find excellent drying racks in stores everywhere. But when you've got a society that's largely ignorant of the hidden costs of running every wet article of clothing through a power-gobbling dryer, you'll find stores littered with \$1.98 drying racks that bend, break and collapse. Sadly, over the last three or four decades, Canada has become a cheap-drying-rack-kind-of-place, though I think this is beginning to change.

No other appliance in your home uses more electricity per hour of operation than a dryer. You can run a 40-watt light bulb for more than 65 hours on the electricity consumed during just one 45-minute dryer cycle. Over-consumption of electricity is not only financially expensive for each of us as individuals, but it's also driving our governments to consider devil's-bargain options for boosting electric generation capacity.

But if availability of high-quality drying racks is any indication, perhaps our home-grown addiction to dryer over-use may finally be breaking. I'm pinning my hopes on a new-to-Canada line of Swiss-made drying racks that have been quietly refined and perfected in the land of the Alps for the last 55 years. They're impressive, effective and promise to bring a whole new level of legitimacy to the practice of indoor clothes drying.

The brand is called Stewi (1-888-763-5928, www.stenicproducts.com), and you'll find these drying racks in hotels, homes and institutions all across Eu-



STEVE MAXWELL PHOTO

The Combi Maxi is one of Stewi's high-quality indoor clothes drying racks.

rope. Stewis are undisputedly the very best drying racks in the world, and when you properly consider what they deliver, the prices are surprisingly good, too.

All this is good news to me, because over the last twenty years I've been searching in vain for good clothes drying racks. And I've always come up short, at least until now.

Observant visitors to my house would no-doubt have noticed two decrepit indoor clothes-drying racks bandaged with every conceivable method of repair. Broken rungs have been welded, tie-wrapped, taped and replaced with pieces of 5/16-inch dowel. The way I figure it, what's the point in buying a new piece of junk for \$50 (destined to break in a week anyway) when I can fix the old junk for free?

Thankfully, our junk racks are in the recycling system now, replaced with a couple of cool Stewis that make me feel great just looking at them. We certainly use our outdoor clothesline whenever weather permits, but when it's cold and

wet outside, these indoor racks take up the slack quite nicely.

The model we use for bathroom towels is similar in shape to the scissor-legged basket-case we tolerated for years, except that the Swiss model is infinitely stronger and the rack area expands and contracts in length, depending on how much hanging room you need. This particular design is called the Combi Maxi (about \$150), and the biggest difference between our old rack and this one is the design of the hanging rungs themselves. Instead of flimsy, breakage-prone, spot-welded steel rods, the Combi Maxi uses rigid, corrosion-proof rungs anchored directly into tubular aluminum cross members. One quick look and you've got to ask yourself if there's anything that the Swiss don't take seriously.

It's not just durability that continues to impress me about Stewis, it's also design. Case in point: two elegant, space-saving, ceiling-mounted racks. My favourite is called the Lift (about \$90). Simply release a cord and the drying frame drops down. Clip your wet clothes on the rack, then pull the cord again and the whole thing rises to ceiling height, keeping the floor area clear.

When I think about how a good drying rack makes it so much easier to minimize dryer use, I'm reminded that many of our environmentally expensive habits would be easier to kick if we just had elegant, frugal (and preferably cool) alternatives. And while indoor drying racks aren't going to completely neutralize the greenhouse gas threat, or eliminate the need to reconfigure our electrical system to handle a growing population, isn't it still true that every little bit helps?

Steve Maxwell is technical editor of Canadian Home Workshop magazine. Send questions to steve@stevemaxwell.ca. Letter volume may prevent individual response.