

DESIGN & DECORATING

Room To Grow

Want a child's room with staying power? Avoid these mistakes.

By NINA MOLINA

CHILDREN'S rooms confront decorators with competing demands. You must acknowledge the child's interest in, say, hideous insects, without overdoing it on themed décor; you must hunt down furnishings that suit small people but will endure as they mature; and you must secure your wee client's aesthetic buy-in without turning the space into a cartoonish nightmare that sets elders' teeth on edge. Here, design pros share strategies for striking a just-right balance between playful and polished.

Theme Fever

Overindulging your fledgling ballerina's or baseball fan's enthusiasms can get cloying. "Do not make every element theme related," said Lindsey Jamison, a lead interior designer at Rumor Designs in Steamboat Springs, Colo. "I'm here to tell you that you don't need to paint the room team colors."

Instead Aim for subtlety. For sports fans, Ms. Jamison likes to work team hues into an upholstered headboard or throw pillows, "so it's special but not overdone." Allison Babcock, a designer in Sag Harbor, N.Y., scratched a girl's surfing itch by hanging a local artist's small square paintings of wave riders in a gallery-wall grid.

To cultivate a budding naturalist, Meta Coleman, a designer in Provo, Utah, installed sage green wallpaper that is block-printed with foliage, squirrels and birds—while confining the rest of the room to a "sophisticated" palette of sunflower yellow and blond wood.

Unconsulted Kiddos

Type A parents—wary of empowering their kids to weigh in on design choices—can end up with a bedroom too adult for even the most precocious child. "I see so many people creating children's rooms that might look ap-



pealing, but it's hard to determine whether a child actually lives there," said designer Rudy Saunders of Dorothy Draper & Company in New York City.

Instead "Children appreciate being treated with the same respect as adults," said designer Adam Hunter of Los Angeles. He suggests this less control-freakish strategy: When it comes to wallpaper, bedding or other design elements, winnow down options to exclude anything you find unacceptable—then help your kid "feel included" by letting her choose freely from whatever remains.

Time Flies

Steer clear of buying sets for children's rooms, said Rowayton, Conn., designer Chauncey Boothby. When kids inevitably outgrow the look, "you're stuck with a whole room full of furniture." And note that kids can be mercurial when it comes to

"favorite" colors. "People tend to give up on baby pinks quickly," said Ms. Babcock. **Instead** Stick to hand-me-downs or classics like simple wooden bookshelves. "Built-ins for toys can become

bookshelves when they are in school," said New York City architect and designer Barry Goralnick.

Mark and Mikal Eckstrom, designers in Omaha, Neb., steered a youngster who

wanted her room Pepto-Bismol pink toward a more cosmopolitan shade. For a low-commitment compromise, Ms. Babcock suggests adding accessories in the child's color of the month (or,

GRRRREEN For a fan of 'The Incredible Hulk,' designer Chauncey Boothby played with 'monster' hues.

hopefully, year).

Cheap Frills

"I see so many generic pieces of artwork—be it animals or planes and trains or inspirational quotes," beams Mr. Saunders. West Hartford, Conn., designer Kate Hunt avoids prints at all costs. "Parents often go for cheap art, thinking that a child won't appreciate or take care of original works." But such prints just look "cheap and unoriginal."

Instead "Frame photos of them and your family. Frame their artwork to dis-

'I'm here to tell you: Don't paint the room team colors.'

play. Have an artist do a portrait of the child. There are so many great ways let them know this is their room in a unique way," said Mr. Saunders, whose childhood bedroom wall "had a wonderful mural that my father painted."

No Play Room

"We often see rooms that don't take into account what the child needs," said New York City designer Gideon Mendelson. In other words: say yes to Lego, globes and crayons—and no to file cabinets and abstract art.

Instead New York interior designer Tina Ramchandani always gives children ample floor space for play. "I always try to place beds out of the way so kids [can] be kids!" Mr. Saunders always prescribes a desk—but, he cautions, make creative space a priority, too. "Add a chalkboard or bulletin board to let them visually dream."

BIG BOO BOOS / SOME MEMORABLE GOOF-UPS

"Putting a glass cabinet in a nursery was a disaster. All my twins' toys would end up [being thrown] toward it...making me freak out about the glass breaking and seriously hurting and/or scarring their beautiful little faces."

—Dwayne Bergmann, interior designer, Ft. Myers and Naples, Fla.

▼ "Don't buy a bed that looks like a race car or football helmet."

—Lindsey Jamison, interior designer, Rumor Designs, Steamboat Springs, Colo.

"A designer (not us!) purchased a very expensive desk chair for a child's room that was not adjustable. That desk

chair quickly became very useless."

—Gideon Mendelson, interior designer, New York City

"The worst kids' rooms I've seen recently are the cliché all-pink or all-blue rooms. I think we've moved beyond gender-specific colors for good now."

—Kati Curtis, interior designer, New York City and Los Angeles

"Sometimes we encounter odd-sized or shaped windows that people end up taping plastic bags or paper over when nap time goes south—never a good look."

—Erin Gates, interior designer, Boston.



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