

## KATRINA BURROUGHS / INTERIORS



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# Child's play

Your little darlings want floor-to-ceiling pink or blue. You want something more tasteful. What to do? Follow our lead for unisex style that will keep them sweet



From £35

Here are this season's shades of muted blue and yellow in Little Greene paints, all certified under British Standard Toy Paint Regulations. Walls in Bone China Blue; chalkboard in Hicks' Blue; desk in Bone China Blue and chair in Trumpet. The price is for 2.5 litres. [littlegreene.com](http://littlegreene.com)

## T

his may appear to be an article about children's rooms, but it's really about power and money. More precisely, it's about the decor wars that are gently, often unconsciously waged between adults and their offspring – and between adults and the purveyors of pink or blue designs – and how the bill papers can triumph, creating child-friendly yet stylish interiors that satisfy all parties. No Princess Aurora wall stickers, no Gormiti Loris driver covers and little Lego chic-just clean, calm, harmonious design.

To parents of a certain demographic, the most feared conflict is over the pink issue. What if your little girl, to whom you tell bedtime stories about Maria Curie and Stephanie Flanders, yearns to live in a pink palace? Gender-specific decorating, to an aspirational parent, is on a par with carrying concealed weapons into Humble Ho.

My Friends – university lecturer and artist, public sector and PC to the bone – have a bright, bonny daughter. Asking after her health at age three, I see a shadow pass over her parents' collective brow. The problem? "She loves pink," says Chris, who preferred his surname to be withheld.

They should have consulted Tania

Urban. The founder of Ella & Otto is Swedish, a graphic designer, a mother of four, and as likely as Lindeh Salander to indulge a pink phase. Urban describes her printed wares for baby and toddler as "gender-neutral, simple and clean, minimalist and functional".

"I love prints that are graphic and work well for boys and girls," she says. "Some colours are good for both sexes. At the moment, they tend to be pulled from the midcentury colour scheme: mustard, grey, chartreuse, pillar box red and turquoise." Urban says that her unisex look, though hard to find on the high street, is typical of an increasing number of independent brands.

Geraldine Tan, a consultant physician about design as Little Big Bell, with her daughter, Joss, 13, Tan is an impressive woman, the clinical lead for a service called Treat (Triage Rapid Elderly Assessment Team) based in the A&E department at the Royal Free Hospital, in north London. Her taste is understated, chic, design-savvy – good luck getting her to admit a novelty driver into her house.

"I have always tried to decorate my children's rooms stylishly," Tan says. "However, I try to do this collaboratively. Duvet covers really define a room, and we pick them together. I've not had any Thomas the Tank Engine duvet covers that far. The last referral I did on my son's room, we decided on

£52.50

This apple-motif bed linen in 100% cotton was designed in 1971 by Grazia Piretti, and reinterpreted for the next generation under the byGrazieta label. The price is for a pillow case and a duvet cover. [bygrazieta.com](http://bygrazieta.com)

£545

Loaf's hand-finished Letter Head chest (115cm x 48cm x 138cm) is made from solid reclaimed fir, it has robust latches and four drawers. [loaf.com](http://loaf.com)

From £12.50

Geraldine Tan, of Little Big Bell, styled this corner of her son's bedroom. Bone-china Fox plate, £22, and squared basket, £15.25, [donawilson.com](http://donawilson.com). Design Letters, papercraft alphabet case, £12.50, [skandivis.co.uk](http://skandivis.co.uk)

£50

Who doesn't love a puffin? This cute hand-stitched cushion from the eco-aware children's label Lettice Belle measures 30cm x 40cm and is made from organic cotton, fox and leather. [letticebelle.com](http://letticebelle.com)

These bird- and transport-inspired patterns for children's bed linen in soft 100% thread-count cotton are called Tweeter and Blue Hiver (after love case E10, dove from £41, trend show E20, Penguin with love £34 and Chilly with love £35) and headtop from £26.

From £10

for.com

→ a monochrome palette and motif from them. Michael, who's seven, loves Lego, so you can imagine the floor. I got into the large Lego storage boxes in varied colours – something he likes that adds splashy pops of colour to the room.

"Character bedding and furnishings are used with care to create forbidden," says Louise Gerrard, a design PA and mother of Lily, 10, and Arthur, 4. "At the end of the day, I have the final say but involve them in the process. I let them decide on certain aspects, though I do give them a shortlist."

Louise doesn't say how long the shortlists are. One suspects very short indeed. Under her watchful eye, Lily has selected Faded Concrete wallpaper by Mowlem for her bedroom.

But then she knew that Hello Kitty wallpaper was never going to be an option. "Although cartoon characters are a red line, talk is in progress about an Olly Murs poster."

Rather than a one-off project, decoration for kids' rooms is a constantly unfolding story: their needs and tastes change, which can be costly. The interior designer Ursula Wessinghoff of Rooms to Rooms is sceptical about the perks of decorating for princesses' requests. Though she isn't a slave to pink – or blue – she won't see the harm in gendered colours and themes.

"There is just one important reason for neutral decor – practicality," she says. "A neutral room is easier and cheaper to adjust. It's as simple as that. We decorate our spaces to suit our individual tastes, needs and personalities – and, like the big brands in her experience, does she find that these girls really love pink?" "I do," she says. And she turned out fine.



From £399

The Stalbury White wardrobe (E549) and three-drawer chest (E299), from the bedroom specialist Feather & Black, are made from white-painted poplar and MDF, with white wood or zinc handles.

featherandblack.com

£38 a roll

isaak's Penguin wallpaper in Walnut Green comes with one of the designer's London Satchels' tall hats. The pattern was created in memory of great-granddad David, who once stole a penguin from a zoo to make great-grandma his best friend.

isaak.co.uk



£70 a roll

Mibou Home specialises in "beautiful children's wallpaper and fabric for beautiful homes" – pleasing designers and tall-toppers alike. The Dactus Cowboy wallpaper features wild horses in a muted palette of denim and dusty green.

mibouhome.com

£700/sq metre

Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby's designs for the Rug Company include Beetle, Butterfly, Fishes and Owl. The duo are better known for their architectural industrial designs, including the London 2012 Olympic torch.

thefrugcompany.com



From £15

Laura Ashley recently launched a kids' window blind paint range. The shade on the bed of the bed, Chalkboard room E12 for £250, and Blue Bedroom William duvet cover and pillowcase set E20. Acoustic rolling shade, E40. Finely check rug, E35.

laurashley.com



From £90

If you want to travel curtains or blinds open during the day, films on the lower part of the window can make a difference without being too dark. The Kids Film is from The Window Film Company at windowfilm.co.uk.

£790

This solid oak High Bed, from Bobo Kids (L200cm x D104cm x H127cm), is available in 16 colours, all of which are subtle, tasteful and decidedly grown-up. The mattresses and ladder are optional extras, a side-out shelf and a desk are also available.

bobokids.co.uk



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CAMERICH  
www.camerich.co.uk

## Growing pains

The four key stages in the development of your child's bedroom:

Age 3-4

Children at this age will start to ask for things in their room, but generally follow their parents' lead and are still relatively easy to influence. Young children tend to like their rooms being fused over – this sign's nurseries, and being careful for and protected.

Age 5-6

This age is all about moving to primary school and making the transition to a "big kid's" room. They will start to want to choose colours and other elements of decor themselves, creating a bedroom that reflects this new stage in their lives.

Age 8-9

At this age, it's all about exploring who they are and trying to express their style. Kids will have strong ideas about what they want them to look like (style) or what stuff they want to have in their boys'. This is when parents will have to negotiate borders.

Age 11-12

They are moving to secondary school and into their teens, so they are seeking independence in many ways – one of which is how they style their room. It is best to allow them the freedom to explore their own tastes and style – this will help them to become more confident people. room-to-bloom.com

£25

These stickers can be applied to walls and furniture, and the manufacturer promises that they're easy to unstick and reposition. Based on Disney's *A Small World* ride, they're available from a cool new online boutique. Designed in London, there's also a set with characters only (E22).

designedinlondon.com

