

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

Why should the kids not have the most beautiful room in the house? asks **Lydia Gard**

Fostering the imagination with magnetic, dry-wipe wallpaper. sianzeng.com



while working for a big architectural practice. That revelation (and the fact that it was huge fun) sparked her to set up Room to Bloom (room-to-bloom.com), interior design exclusively for children. 'I wanted to change the attitude and approach to the design of children's spaces in the UK. I find there is a general lack of care and effort that goes into it – typified by unimaginative gender-led design (blue for boys, pink for girls), too many primary colours and oversimplified shapes and patterns.'

Some of that has to do with the limitations of what's on offer. Go to most of the bigger retailers and everything labelled 'children's' – from the curtains and wallpapers to the bedding and accessories – will be more or less the same boring shapes and neutral colours overlaid with cartoon characters, or ditsy florals for girls and, typically, robots or boats for boys. 'I was just so disappointed with the lack of good design available that it became a mission to improve it. Children deserve better, and this is not dependent on budget, it's all about attention to detail,' says Ursula.

When you start digging, there is an extraordinary amount of cool and stylish kids' stuff out there. From custom-built bunks to hand-painted wallpaper, stylish seating and clever storage. But where do you start when designing a space for children?

According to Ursula, if the child is old enough, ask them. Their personality is far more important than their gender for the approach to the design. Find out what they like and you might get the perfect brief. While most high street shops tend to 'theme' their offerings, it's best to have a loose concept. 'Wannabe pirates might want a bunk with

a hammock underneath and a parrot perched on top – it can also be a treasure island, it encourages imaginative play but doesn't overwhelm the space,' says Ursula. And it's worth bearing in mind that the kids' rooms are just one part of a whole house. If your home is all vintage, very minimal or stuffed with antiques, then touches of the overall décor will help to connect the rooms. A playroom, particularly, should have a comfy space for them to create and play as well as lounge about, and you can blur the lines between your space and theirs by hanging graphic art, rolling out a rug and making



sure there is plenty of storage. (I find wagons make great vessels for toys and books as they can be wheeled around and tucked away.)

Depending on the children's ages, it's also sensible to pick a scheme that they won't grow out of too quickly. That can mean curtains and bedding stay pretty neutral and the accessories and cushions do the talking since they are far easier (and less costly) to replace or update. Unless of course, budget is no issue, in which case you might as well give in to the hand-painted jungle mural with vines dangling from the ceiling. But please, no pet monkey. ■



ere's a question. At what point do we develop our aesthetic sensibilities? I'm not opening the whole nature vs. nurture debate, I'm simply concerned about what possible

damage I may have sustained being brought up in the 80s, when orange velour curtains and formica surfaces formed the backdrop to every playdate.

Back then, 'designing' a children's room meant pasting up a border of Peter Rabbit against a sea of Sanderson floral. These days, the only thing that limits the design of children's rooms and playrooms is imagination (and, occasionally, budget). That said, when I recently moved house, I couldn't believe how hard it was to source good design for my children's rooms. It's out there, that's for sure, but it's tucked away on cool little blogs and in independent stores in Amsterdam and Denmark. What you find on the high street and in big department stores is more or less predictable and dull.

This is what interior designer Ursula Wesselingh found when she was tasked to design a child's room

1 Avoid over-decorating with too many colours and too much stuff on display. It's important to reach a balance between stimulation and rest. **2** Plan your storage well and don't skimp. Think about what you need to store now and in the future, make it easily accessible so things don't get lost and are easy to clear away. **3** A simple, neutral palette is a calming backdrop to children's colourful possessions. **4** Factor in enough comfortable seating to hang out together. **5** Create 'corners' for specific types of play – especially if kids of different ages use the room. A little doll's/playing house corner, a crafting corner, or an active corner for building dens.

URSULA'S TOP TIPS

PLAYFUL TOUCHES

Kitsch paraphernalia and cool cushions. psikhouwanjou.com



PRIMING MINDS

CREATIVE KIDS WILL LOVE ANORAK MAGAZINE, £6. thekidwho.eu

KIDS' DESIGN SOURCEBOOK

by *Lydia Gard*



PRINTED PRESS
Cool catchphrases and custom prints, from £12.50. hectorandhaddock.com



CLOUD WATCHING

On trend accessories like this nimbus light, £38.50. littlefashiongallery.com

SAVVY STORAGE
Mathy By Bols Tree Bookcase, £1,330. butterflyoccasions.co.uk



ECO CHIC
Awesome baby basket from Berlin. nestasnest.com



ISLAND HIDEAWAY
Architect-designed beds and bedding. rafa-kids.com



NORDI-COOL
BLANKETS AND THROWS BY LUCKY BOY SUNDAY. thekidwho.eu



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