

SMART CLEVER DECORATING

There are some smart investments you can consider and clever decorating tips to ensure your children's bedrooms grow with your kids. By Serena Fokschaner

Over my years of talking to leading interior designers I've learnt a few home truths. And one of them is this. When it comes to creating inspiring rooms for children it's not just cash that counts. Instead it is about combining wise buys with a dash of thrifty creativity. And there is, of course, nothing new in that: the great Edwardian architect Edwin Lutyens delighted in using brown paper as wallpaper and even society decorators excel at turning junk into jewels.

You could think of it as the decorating equivalent of savvy-separates dressing: like mixing a high-street skirt with a conversation-stealing, investment top chosen to transcend trends. It's a high-low approach favoured by Corina Papadopoulou of kids' boutique Kidsen: 'Now that my eldest daughter is 10, I'm splashing out on a classic desk by Vitra, but as she's still a child I'll include a cosy reading nook with cushions and a candy-coloured rug by Sebra. I like inexpensive spice racks for displaying books to get toddlers interested in reading and painting cheap frames in bright colours for children's art. For older boys, you can create a raw, urban feel by using old skateboards as shelves against a graphic wallpaper.' (Try Molly-Meg for ready-made skateboard shelves; at Mr Perswall or Galerie Wallcoverings street-savvy papers include a giant robot and graffiti-covered cityscape.)

Fellow children's boutique owner, Ashlyn Gibson, of Olive Loves Alfie, trawled Europe to find inspirational children's spaces for her book, *Creative Family Home*. Her hero product is the Ikea picture ledge: 'It's easy to install and you can use it to display books or toys and dress it up with stickers. For artwork I like the old-fashioned clipboard because it's not permanent – you can just sling it on a nail. Colourful washi tape (try Papermash or Quill London) is also great for spelling out large words on neutral walls.'

For interior designer Liz Moloney of Amber Design Group, 'flexibility' is key. 'Now that people are not moving as much, they're taking a longer-term approach. We see less requests for cutesy baby nurseries; instead, parents want rooms that will grow with the child as they move from cot to beds. Don't overlook plain units by Aspace for storage; you can inject colour by papering the wall behind and adding baskets to encourage tidying up.' (try Danish style-setters



Long term style: Woody desk and Hollybase wall units from £250 at Nubie



For larger budgets, this dramatic tent bed is £1100 at Bobo Kids

Rice, Zebra, Hay, House Doctor for aesthetic storage). Liz's other tips include framing wallpaper as artworks: Baines & Fricker, Abigail Edwards or Lizzie Allan are favourites. You can also layer less expensive rugs from West Elm (or try Mahout Lifestyle for colourful dhurries) over larger sisal rugs for dash and texture.

Think ahead when choosing beds too. The hand-crafted bateau lit, which enchanted at six may not have the same appeal to a street-aware 11-year old. If space is tight, the clean-lined bunks from Rafa Kids (at Olive Loves Alfie) neatly accommodate two children sharing one room. At Nubie, owner Amanda Short nominates bestselling brands Oliver and Nidi for multi-tasking furniture 'which doesn't scream children'. For the budget-strapped, Maison Du Monde's Noisette trundle bed (£201.25) is made from recycled wood. For desks, innovative British company IO Kids Design has a reversible design; one side is a tray for Lego building, the other flat surface for homework while the compact design will sit well in any room. At the newly revitalised Habitat, the Elder bureau desk with storage in modish pastels is equally practical; for decorative wall storage add a peg board by newbie Nikki Kreis whose ply wares have an appealingly mid-Century feel.

When it comes to accessories, the vibrant, graphic feel of



Canine wallpaper £95/roll from Baines & Fricker; Fox and Staggs both by Lisa Bliss; Peter Pan by Bodie & Fou £84.99



Screen-printed Dotty Bird shade £55 Laura Felicity Design

Liz Moloney of Amber Design Group opts for a timeless feel mixing prints (these ones from Not on the High Street) with classic 20th-century design (West Elm rug) to create a bedroom that will last.



Use masking tape to create a geometric mountainscape using Little Greene's Bone China Blue 107 for the mountains and the lighter Gauze 106 for the sky.

Screen-printed lampshade by Martha Loves, from £49



Habitat's Elder bookcase (£395) would sit well in a nursery or teenager's room.



contemporary homewares suits children and adults alike, so look beyond the obvious kids' emporia for decorative finds. Liz Moloney scouts out prints on Etsy (a favourite is Mrs Eliot); or try Hidden Art's e-shop where Amy Aardvark's magical limited-edition prints will captivate all ages. The Graduate Collection showcases vibrant wallpaper by rising stars like Lisa Bliss; and there is heaps of cushion talent at Ohh Dear or Luku Home, where parrot prints mix with chevron stripes. For lampshades with artistry, Molly Mahon, Martha Loves or Laura Felicity have timeless designs. Underfoot, the painterly 'Crochet' or 'Aster' rugs by Wendy Morrison will sing out in any room; for budget-friendly, washable designs head for Dash & Albert or Lorena Canals.

And remember to take your time. Like that clever outfit, inspiring kids' spaces should, as Ashlyn Gibson, says: 'be organic and meaningful'.



10 Designs multi-tasking desk (from £295) flips over to become a tray for Lego and creative play.

London Skyline by Laura Bohan, Airfix London by Victoria Eggs both at Graduate Collection, £125 per roll.

Paint effects

Deploy your paint brush to bring style to children's spaces. The professionals tell us how: For creative upcycling Sarah Cole of Farrow & Ball says: 'Try painting a chest of drawers in graduating colours: from soft Wevet through Purbeck Stone to Mole's Breath for stylish effect.' For polished neutrals, 'Great White has pink undertones which are highlighted when alongside All White. You can use Cabbage White, which has blue undertones, or James White, with green undertones, in a similar way.'

'Stencils are back, says Cathryn Helsby of Earthborn eco paints: Try one wall in St John grey with a stencilled motif (try the Stencil Library) in a darker grey like Trilby. For bold combinations a chair painted in Fruit Salad orange against The Lido blue looks vibrant.'

Or 'Try a simple mountainscape,' says children's interior designer Ursula Wesselingh. 'Define peaks with masking paper and try Little Greene's Bone China Blue 107 for the mountains and the lighter Gauze 106 for the sky above. For that 'pulled-together look', Ursula continues, 'Pick out a colour in the wallpaper that you've used on a single wall and use it to paint the other walls.' For inspired combinations, David Mottershead of Little Greene suggests: 'Try a soft pastel colour like Bone China Blue, Pale 182, for the walls and then paint a chest of drawers in Marigold 209. Alternatively, zone areas of a bedroom using paint: vivid colours for play, like Mischief 13 and Orange Aurora 21, and cooler colours for rest like Welcome 109 and Cupboard Green 201.'

Online auctions

From an Edwardian armchair to a 1960s' child's desk, I've snaffled up great bargains at online auctions. Try the saleroom.org and auctionmystuff.com. You can request more pictures and ask key questions about condition before placing a maximum bid online or via email. You'll have to pay the auctioneer's fee and organise collection. Anyvan lets you post your job and receive quotes from couriers. (The cheaper the quote longer the wait until delivery)

Reading material

Ashlyn Gibson's Creative Family Home (published by Ryland Peters & Small) is available for the special price of £13.99 including postage & packaging (rrp £19.99). Call Macmillan Direct on 01256 302 699 and quote the reference GLR 8TH.