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Yes, It's Possible: How to Make Family-Friendly Décor Look Insanely Chic

by GABRIELLE SAVOIE

When you live with small children, it's all too easy to put off decorating until the kids are older—arguing that if you decorate sooner, they will probably mess up your new sofa or brand-new rug. But there is something to be said about having an elegant grown-up home that's also kid-friendly so your children can learn to live around nicer objects and understand the value of a well-decorated home, all the while learning to respect personal belongings.

"I have always noticed that children absolutely love beautiful spaces, color, accessorizing, and the impact of a finished space," says interior designer Uma Stewart. "They get it at such a basic level. Well-decorated spaces teach people how to treat them, so if you keep rooms half-finished for fear that they will get ruined, you are almost inviting them to be used roughly. If you finish them out with attention to kid-friendly materials, they will be loved and cared for."

So how do you make your home feel grown-up and chic while still keeping it child-proof and easy to clean? We spoke to four interior designers who are also moms about their experience with designing family-friendly spaces. As interior designer Courtney Thomas puts it, "Waiting to design your house with adult furniture until the kids grow up is like waiting to remodel your master bathroom until just before you sell the house. You're putting off your personal enjoyment for someone else's benefit. The right design and finishes can withstand kids' abuse and will help you feel like the grown-up you'd like to be even when your kids are depriving you of sleep and rational thought." Don't put off decorating any longer. Take note from these moms who know a thing or two about decorating kid-friendly rooms.

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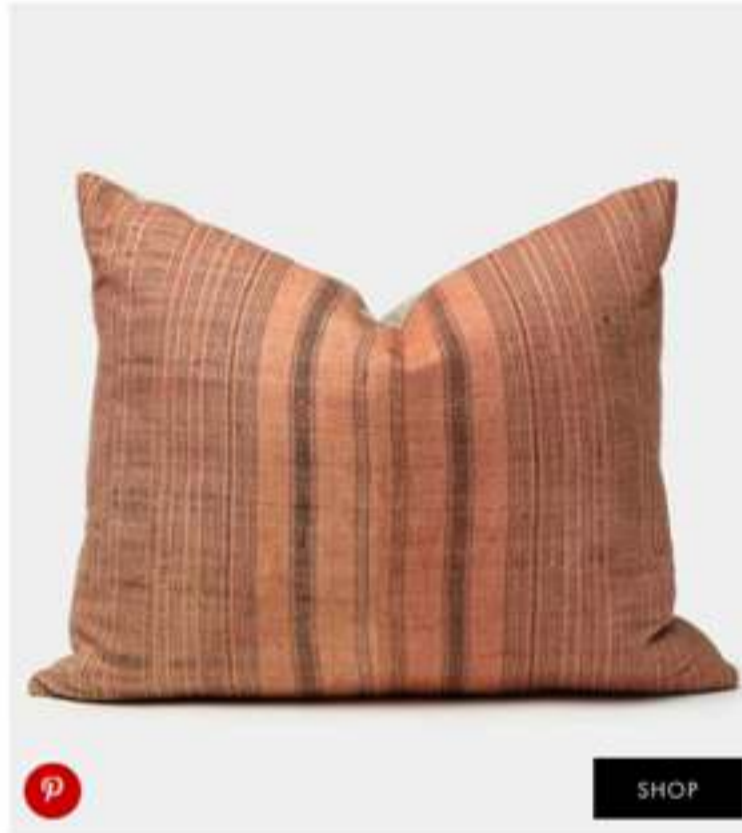
Ask the Children's Opinion



"For playrooms or kids' bedrooms, I like to interview the kids," says Thomas. "Kids are dreamers and they aren't afraid to share. I use that vision for overall room design, and then I make sure to add the functional elements like layout, storage, and stain-resistant fabrics that give parents peace of mind."

While interior designer [Christie Leu](#) agrees, she also warns against using color themes. "As the mother of five children, including a set of triplets, you may be surprised to hear that I firmly believe 'themed' rooms are to be avoided," she warns. "*Childhood is fleeting* is a cliché that has teeth. In a minute your child will have strong feelings about their favorite color, animal, and sport. The name of the game is flexibility!"

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Choose a Neutral Color Base



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Speaking of flexibility, Leu recommends starting each room with a neutral base and adding color in smaller accents or accessories. "Once the function of a room is decided, I recommend starting with washable neutral walls and floors (the hard finishes) and pair them with fun artwork that can either be your child's own (in frames) or other favorites in your collection," she explains. "I aim for colorful accents that can be changed out if soiled or tired: carpets, window treatments, pillows, etc."

Mom of two and interior designer Breegan Jane agrees: "This may surprise many people, but there is a fabric I love to recommend: white canvas," she says. "People with kids and pets tend to shy away from anything white because of a fear of stains. But unlike a darker toned or patterned piece, white canvas can be cleaned with most stain removing agents without ruining the aesthetic of the upholstered item." In other words, by keeping a neutral, easily washable base, you're able to bring in color through smaller accessories that can easily be washed or replaced, or through colorful artwork that won't get dirty. The goal: to have a low-maintenance home at all costs.



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Pick Your Fabrics Wisely



Speaking of fabrics, designers have strong feelings about which fabrics to use and which to avoid in a kid-friendly space. For instance, Thomas gravitates toward machine-washable coverlets for bedding. "I feel like we are always cleaning bedding. I often pick neutral colors for sheets and main bedding to avoid fading and to bleach if needed," she says.

Stewart also swears by synthetic fibers and wipeable leather for seating upholstery, high-end vinyl for kitchen banquettes, and dark-colored wool carpets. "Most carpets can handle quite a lot if you do darker colors and some pattern. Wool is naturally stain-resistant," she says. "Printed linen fabrics have a relaxed feel and are durable. You can't abuse, it but, in our experience, it holds up well for family use with some spot cleaning. Furnishings are meant to get used, worn in, and replaced or reupholstered every 10 years or so in heavy use areas. Relax and use your furniture."

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TRNK Vintage Berber Rug \$985

Always Add Storage



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"When a baby is born it seems that you'll never escape from the clutter of paraphernalia that seems to proliferate when you leave the room," says Leu. "Storage is my ultimate starting point for family-friendly rooms, but I still aim to strategize for the long game. First, you'll want a drop zone for the diaper bag and endless travel activities that will easily morph into the designated area for backpacks, homework, and shoes for all seasons. Built-ins are the foundation of parental sanity and great executive functioning training for your children."

If you are renting or can't afford built-ins, spacious freestanding bookcases come in equally handy: "I like bookcases that display the children's favorite items and lots of smart storage like play tables with cubbies and toy bins, chests with different depth drawers, or adjustable height clothing rods to accommodate growing clothing sizes." Jane also agrees that baskets are a parent's best tool to keep clutter at bay: "You can find them in all sizes and colors, and they add a wonderful, homey feel. The true beauty of using baskets is that they allow parents to hide a multitude of disorganized sins without a ton of work!"



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CB2 Stairway Black Wall Mounted Bookcase \$399

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Avoid Table Lamps



While we love to sing the praises of various lighting sources, Leu warns that it may not be the best solution for families with small children. "Overhead lighting is critical and especially helpful with young toddlers to avoid the cords of lamps," she explains. "These can be on dimmers for adult gatherings after bedtime. I like to add floor and table lamps as the kids get older to create reading and task lighting." Another great way to add multiple layers of lighting without having to worry about wires is to install wall sconces at the height where a table or floor lamp might be.

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Serge Mouille Three-Arm Rotating Ceiling Lamp \$6759

Don't Over-Accessorize



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Stewart also warns against decorating with too many accessories that may be breakable or dangerous for toddlers. "In homes with small children, we skip tabletop accessories and focus more on wall art or styling shelves and mantles where kids can't reach," she explains.

Decorating with art doesn't have to be expensive, either, as Thomas points out: "I love displaying kids' artwork and recent creative projects. Nothing tickles them more than seeing their work displayed. It doesn't have to be a large gallery wall of their latest water-color pieces. It can be a rotating display area: a corkboard, a single shelf on a bookcase, a changeable art frame or clothespins on a piece of twine that hangs art over a desk in their room."



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Chairish Mentawai Island Wood Bowl \$546

Create a Reading Nook



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One thing that Thomas always tries to incorporate in family-friendly homes: reading nooks. "I love incorporating reading nooks in kids' rooms: A window seat with lots of pillows, an oversize reading chair, a beanbag or a loveseat. I love getting lost in books with my own kids and encouraging kids to get lost in books on their own." To create a truly cozy reading nook, the designer recommends color, pattern, and texture: "I will introduce texture with a plush throw blanket and add color or pattern with pillow fabrics or window-seat cushions."

