

DOWN ON THE FARM: Designer Valerie Marcus achieved a warm farmyard motif by mixing a mural boasting many lovable animals with wooden furniture and a traditional rocker.





of jewels spilling out of it; and a map to his family members' homes is drawn on the wall. The treehouse room, meanwhile, which was constructed for the owners' grandchildren, features a vignette from the grandfather's own childhood abode.

Fanciful as these rooms are now, their architecture will allow them to grow with the children. The boy who loves ships today may turn his room into a racecar showcase down the road; the treehouse, Grant imagines, may become a palace in five years. After a new mural is up on the walls, you can easily switch out the accessories. "By the time [the kids] have spilled their soda or Kool-Aid or Cheerios or crayons," Grant notes, "you're going to want to move into a new theme." Pick out some fresh bedding, move the stuffed animals off the bed and into the cubbies, install some shelving for storage, and voilà! You have a new room in an old space for a growing child.

#### TRADITION MEETS TEEN

Look at this home's common room or either of its two bedrooms for the teenage Lauren and Drew, and you'd never guess white wainscoting and traditional Southern design details with New England influences dominate the rest of the house. Yet despite the novelty of the areas, which occupy the entire second floor of the house, the spaces pay homage to their environs in surprising ways.

For starters, there's the color. Wainscoting in a rubbed-through black lines the recreation room, but the shade acts as an accent in the rest of the house. Similarly, apple-green embellishments in the rec room get greater play in the house at large (as well as in Lauren's room). And then there are the ways that interior designer Stefanie Moore turned traditional features like wainscoting into youthful design elements. In Drew's room, for instance, stainless steel wainscoting replaces white beadboard; and the concrete countertop in his bathroom sings a very different tune from the Carrera marble countertop in his sister's bathroom.


The bathrooms, in fact, are tantalizing extensions of each bedroom. His features a stainless trim in the shower and wood cabinetry painted black; hers displays white cabinets with platinum accents and black-and-white pulls that the



*FAMILY CIRCUS: Because of this bathroom's circular shape, designer Valerie Marcus decided on a circus theme. The space is complete with swaths of colorful fabric draped from custom, tasseled corbels and a hot-air-balloon light fixture.*

homeowner discovered while shopping. But because these finishes harmonize with the rest of the house and, more important, reflect the personalities of the people living in them, they work.

Light fixtures, Moore adds, are another way to incorporate flashes of individuality. In Lauren's room, for example, a Miss Universe tiara was converted into a chandelier, and two ball crystal chandeliers take the place of traditional table lamps.

Though the kids in this home have their distinct and separate rooms—hers, vintage; his, contemporary—the rec room is shared space. So Moore made it as nongender as possible (khaki walls, black-and-tan carpet, red accents) and equipped it with all the technological features a teenager would want (flat-screen TV, Xbox). The result is a space the kids can enjoy now and one the parents might enjoy just as much once the kids move out. 

*See Resource Guide.*



# designing kids

Whether they're two feet tall or too cool to be seen with you, today's kids need spaces—colorful, cleverly designed, fully equipped spaces—of their own.

BY ELIZABETH EXLINE

Anyone who has ever arranged a nursery will tell you that it's an exercise in parental fantasy. Finally you have a chance to outfit a room in as unrepentantly girlish, boyish, comfortable or whimsical a fashion as you desire, all the while knowing that you will change everything in a few years. But the decorating enthusiasm that was once reserved for babies' rooms has now extended to children's and teenagers' rooms as well, resulting in fully customized, perfectly organized shrines to your offspring.

"The people who are doing children's rooms now," explains interior designer Stefanie Moore, "didn't have Pottery Barn or Crate and Barrel or any of that. So now everything coordinates; everything has a place; everything has a box. It's a new concept to us, [and] we're taking it to the next level."

Like the kids they cater to, these rooms grow up in roughly three stages. First there's the nursery, then the room for the 6- to 13-year-old and finally the haven for the teenager. Trends, of course, vary among these phases, but every kid's room, Moore says, is now incorporating more storage. That could

translate to built-in cabinets or toy trunks for playthings; shelving to display trophies and artwork; or multipurpose furniture. (Think beds with drawers fitted beneath them and diaper-changing stations positioned atop double dressers.)

The storage trend may be about the only thing to jibe with what's happening in the rest of the house, though. Children's rooms are often just that: designed to entice a home's smallest occupants with little concern about what their adult counterparts think of hot-pink shag rugs or sherbet-orange pillows. And while kids' rooms are growing up in many ways with contemporary prints, accents of bright greens and pinks, and more mature patterns like polka dots and checkers, they are still colorful design departures for most residential interiors. You can segue between the spaces with paint—for example, picking a yellow that coordinates with your home's golds and browns—but, Moore observes, these rooms have doors for a reason. Mostly, she says, "It's shutting the door and allowing the child to do what [she] wants in that room."

Ancillary spaces like playrooms and bathrooms are just as



festive. Bathrooms, for instance, can take the feeling of a bedroom to new heights. Fresh colors and designs on the walls, unusual hardware, vibrant accessories—all are fashionable bathroom accouterments for today's kids. Playrooms, meanwhile, can riff on the bedroom theme or display an altogether original motif so long as the basic components are there: tables for arts and crafts; storage for toys; soft flooring like carpet or rubber to cushion falls; and plenty of room for imagination.

#### FARMYARD FASHION

Every parent knows that bright, primary colors and contrasting patterns are the way, if not to your child's heart, then at least to her intellectual growth. That's why interior designer Valerie Marcus, owner of VM Concept, sees color as a constant source of inspiration. "My suggestion all the time is to do something attractive and colorful," she says, "because I think children need to have an environment [that's] fun to look at. It's why this [room] is painted. It's a whole big barn with animals, but [it's] not realistic. It's funny, of course, because it's for the eyes of the baby."

The eyes, in this case, belong to 14-month-old Justin; and they gaze into soft, bovine equivalents whenever his diaper is being changed, because Marcus had a muralist paint two cows on the wall to overlook the changing table. They are part of the room's bucolic farmyard theme that includes wooden furniture with two-tone paint, a traditional rocking chair, soft cottons and the room's coup de grâce: a mural with rolling hills, a bright blue sky, and plenty of cuddly animals like lambs, pigs and roosters. "I bet [when Justin goes] into his room," Marcus speculates, "he will look at [the] duck, and he will say something to it. He will be kind of interactive. Something is going on."

Something is also going on in Justin's bathroom, which Marcus bedecked with all the merry happenings of a circus...literally. Swaths of red, gold, blue and green fabric drape from custom, tasseled corbels on the ceiling. Hanging in the center is a hot-air-balloon light fixture that overlooks a huge circular tub. Unlike Justin's bedroom, whose design

stemmed from his mother's Midwestern roots and affinities, this room's look was born from the architecture. The space is round, and Marcus figured she could either design a silo to coordinate with the bedroom, or something with more flair. The choice seemed obvious.

Marcus, who hails from France and has designed homes in and out of the state, explains that custom homes in Arizona, which often feature big bedrooms, beg for these sorts of murals. "When you have a 13-foot ceiling, and you have an 18-by-18 [foot] bedroom," she says, "it's cold. So you have your bed. You have your changing table. You have your rocker. What else? You have to create something warm and comfy."

#### FLIGHTS OF FANCY

If there's one unifying element between these two rooms by interior designer Robin Grant, principal of Grant Designs, it's imagination. One, after all, features a bed-turned-ship cruising pirate-infested seas, while the other showcases a magical treehouse set among enough forest animals to challenge even Snow White's charm. "We find ourselves through our imagination, our creativity," Grant says, "and that's really what [these rooms are] about is helping children grow."

Grant was launched on this path by her father, who used to construct hideaways for her in their home when she was a little girl. Today, Grant draws on those experiences when creating spaces within spaces for her clients' children. In both the boat room and the treehouse room, Grant placed the beds on platforms, surrounded them with murals and turned the resulting nooks below into magical caves. (The one in the boat room even has stalactites, stalagmites and stars fashioned from iridescent paint.) What's more, both spaces boast flat-screen TVs—a must for clients and their kids these days—and places to play, sleep, read and reflect.

Not only do these rooms get their occupants' creative juices flowing, they also incorporate personalized touches. In the boat room, for instance, Grant had to turn the 5-year-old boy's love of pirates into something that wouldn't haunt him come bedtime. So Captain Hook became a supporting character. His dresser is painted to resemble a treasure chest with a cache





### PRETTY IN PINK

**Architect:** Linderoth Associates **Builder:** Tom Peck, Cachet Homes **Designer:** Valerie Marcus, VM Concept

"[The homeowners] wanted something feminine," Marcus says of this master bath, which was previously adorned in dark woods and dim colors. The designer brightened the space by replacing the masculine materials with luxurious fabrics, romantic colors and a candle chandelier.