

Child's room should change, not cost a fortune

BY BARBARA MAYER
AP NEWSFEATURES

Parents of newborns can spend a year's college tuition on a nursery filled with state-of-the-art equipment and fanciful wall covering with matching curtains and comforter. They shouldn't bother. Wee ones all too soon are out of the crib, past the terrible two's and into tastes of their own.

"Kids change from one phase to another easily," Ro Logripio says. "The child who loves teddy bears this week may prefer giraffes next week."

Logripio is author of "In My World: Designing Living & Learning Environments for the Young," due out in October (Wiley, \$24.95). And he's among a number of decorating advisers who say that the "perfect" child's room is usually neither practical nor cost effective.

While an adult may want to do a room once "the right way" and then live with it for years, a child wants a room that will change with him. Consider, then, plain but sturdy furniture and inexpensive accessories.

One family, whose daughter's room is pictured in the book, bought two window-box planters at a yard sale, painted them white, filled them with stuffed animals gone astray and set them atop inexpensive white bookcases. The same family painted old bunk beds white and the ladder in bright colors. Books and

toys created additional color.

An inexpensive cowboy theme was set for a 10-year-old boy with pillow covers sewn of old denims and tiebacks made of red bandannas. Since most furniture and many accessories can last until a child leaves home, make careful selections.

Spend more for a bulletin board that will accommodate changing interests and less for fabric with a theme that will soon be outgrown. Versatile items for a child's room include plain stacking cubes, a wood toy chest, a plain bookcase, a single three-drawer chest.

"I still have my old maple toy chest," Logripio says. "Now it is stained in a darker wood finish and is in the spare bedroom and holds extra linens and blankets."

Among newer furniture styles, Logripio likes loft beds, with the area beneath the bed used for a study or play area.

"Loft beds appeal to children, aged 10 to 16, and to college students," says Dixon Bartlett, vice president of merchandising at This End Up, a furniture retailer headquartered in Richmond, Va. "They can get a bed, a dresser and a desk in the space that one bed takes up."

For younger children, however, a bunk bed is a winner. When Bartlett's son turned 6, he took his father by the

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hand into a furniture store and pointed to the bunk beds.

"Kids from 6 to 12 love them for the fun of it," Bartlett says, "and parents appreciate that they are a practical use of often limited space."

A trundle bed or storage drawer can be put under the lower bunk. To get the most from bunk beds, select those that measure a full 39 by 75 inches and have a lot of head room for the lower bunk. As children grow and need less play space, they may want to turn the bunk beds into twin beds.

As for youth furniture, children quickly outgrow it. A small chest won't hold bulky sweaters, nor a small desk a full-size computer and accessories. Parents who buy bunk beds should be aware of the hazards.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission says injuries to children under age 15 are not uncommon, and there were 45 related deaths in the United States between 1990 and 1994. Many

bunk beds are manufactured to adhere to safety standards developed by the furniture industry in consultation with the commission. Those that meet the standards are labeled.

The label also offers guidelines for safe use of bunk beds. Standards call for guard rails on both sides of the top bunk, preferably the full length of the bed. The mattress in the upper bunk should be supported by slats that are securely anchored to the frame. Any gaps between two parts should measure no more than 3 1/4 inches. This includes the area between the mattress and bed frame, the mattress and the side rails and any parts of the headboard and footboard.

The guard rail should be at least five inches higher than the top of the mattress. And edges on the bed frames should be rounded and smooth. Keep assembly instructions in case the beds need to be taken apart and reassembled.

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