

INTERIOR DESIGN

Get creative with child's furnishings

No parent wants to stifle or confine his or her child. Keeping with that philosophy, it's easy to see why children are tough on home furnishings.

As they explore the depths of their energy and creativity, they can't avoid giving the interior design a tremendous beating.

Laminate is not just for kitchens. Laminate's super-resistant, wear-and-tear properties make it the ideal surfacing material for high-stress furniture such as tables, dressers, shelves, play stations and even bed frames. There is no limit to the type of furniture that can be created with laminate.

Wall and door cladding helps protect walls and doors from crayons, dirt and dents

while simultaneously dressing them up with large sheets of laminate. Normally used only in commercial environments, laminate for wall and door cladding has now made its way into the high-traffic areas of residential homes.

Children take as many hard knocks as they give. Therefore, the gently curved edges and blunt corners of certain Wilsonart Custom Edges and post-formed edges serve as safeguards since they eliminate the sharp 90-degree angles common with laminate furniture. They also do away with the brown laminate seam, creating a stylish look.

Laminate is priced affordably.

Bring the colors of outdoors inside your home

Gardening is the No. 1 pastime in America, according to lifestyle experts.

The feeling of the sun on your back and dirt in your hands can be rejuvenating and refreshing. But in a world of longer work hours and packed schedules, even the most enthusiastic gardener has less time to get outdoors.

People who love the outdoors but rarely get to enjoy it need not despair. Creative decorating techniques in the "garden style" can enable even those with a brown thumb to bring the peaceful feeling of the outdoors into their home.

The garden style is about bringing the outdoors inside by decorating interiors with elements of the garden and nature — blurring the lines between inside and out," says Linda Hallam, author of *Better Homes and Gardens Garden Style: Decorating Ideas for Indoors & Out*. "With our hectic lives, we all long for the feeling that fresh air and sunshine can create."

Elements of nature reflected inside the home through furniture, floor covering, and accessories can relax homeowners after a long day.

"Natural designs in flooring

are increasingly popular with today's consumers — sisal, ceramic, and wood with colors, patterns, and textures that echo those of nature are all favorites," said Francis Francavilla of Independent Carpet One in Westland. "And with today's new laminates, vinyls, and man-made fibers, you can combine a natural look with high performance and affordability."

One of the simplest things a home owner can do to bring the feeling of the outdoors inside is buy a few hardy potted plants — such as a spider or baby jade plant — and lay a sisal or jute rug on the floor. The green of the plants and the natural tones of the sisal fibers will echo the outdoors while making the space inviting and warm.

If you don't have a way with plants, wreaths of dried flowers or herbs, bouquets of fragrant eucalyptus, or botanical prints can create a garden feel.

"Natural fibers such as sisal, jute, and seagrass are as old as time itself," says Rick Fields, sales manager of Design Materials in Kansas City. "These fibers are strong enough to make ropes, so they make an incredibly sturdy floor covering."

According to Fields, these rugs

work for any home because they can be cut to any size and easily dyed to in a spectrum of colors, from natural golds and browns to greens and blues that echo the outdoors.

A natural extension of backyard brooks and winding stone walls, stone flooring has also made its way inside. "Natural stones like slate, granite, flagstone, limestone, and travertine give a room a classic timeless feeling," says Glenn Strohl, general manager of residential sales for Dal-Tile. "They are also extremely durable and will last the lifetime of your home — adding great value to the home itself."

Likewise terracotta ceramic tile can go from kitchen to family room to patio so you can't tell where the home's interior ends and the outside begins. "This is also a great way to make your home seem larger," said Francavilla.

In the bedroom, nature can find its place in subtle floral carpets and colorful area rugs that are both romantic and soothing. Hallam notes that bringing the outdoors in does not require spending an handsome chunk of change to replace all your furnishings. Attractive and affordable prices can be found in surprising places.

"The great thing about the garden style is that it concentrates on a more casual lifestyle. Your local home and garden center is a great place to find affordable ideas," Hallam said. "Less expensive furniture originally meant for the outdoors can work perfectly inside. You can even recycle items from your own backyard or basement and turn castaways into keepakes."

Home furnishing experts suggest some fun ideas to bring the freshness of the outdoors into your home:

■ Give older furniture a facelift with a fresh coat of white or brightly colored paint.

■ Keep the feeling and colors of summer year-round with dried flowers or flowering houseplants throughout your home.

■ Use tile, floral area rugs or sisal floor coverings in a room for a natural look from the floor up.

■ Bring "outdoor" furniture inside. Put wicker chairs or Adirondack chairs in the living room or outdoor bistro sets in the breakfast room.

■ Recycle elements from your yard as whimsical, decorative touches, like picket fencing as a headboard, tree branches as curtain rods, and birdbaths with glass tops as side tables.

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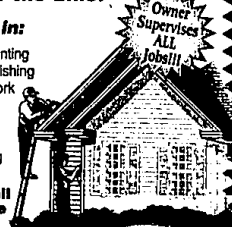
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