



Fall & Winter **Home Improvement**

ROOM TO GROW

Choose classic furniture, easily updated accessories

By Chandra Orr
Copley News Service

By the time your child starts kindergarten, he's going to want a room of his own. A place to play, study and show off his favorite things will take the place of pastels and nursery furniture.

"A child's room should be done twice — once for infancy and toddlerhood and again around the time the child starts school," said interior designer Debbie Wiener, creator of Designing Solutions, a professional interior design firm in Silver Spring, Md.

"This is not to say that rooms shouldn't evolve and reflect their changing tastes, but there are ways to design a functional and fun space that grows along with a child," Wiener said.

With the right furniture and a clever eye for storage, it's possible to design a child's room that will transform from toddler to tween with minimal effort. When shopping for kids' furniture, style is important, but durability and

functionality should always come first. It doesn't matter how cute it is, if it doesn't hold up and grow with your child's needs, you'll be redecorating sooner than you think.

Opt for furniture with simple lines in basic colors. Simple, streamlined styles in wood tones and whites work well with any decor.

Particleboard furniture has long been the choice for those decorating on a budget. It may be an alluring option, but it has a relatively short life span. Once it chips, warps or peels, there is little you can do to fix it.

Instead, look for durable hardwood furniture that can be stained or repainted if it suffers any major nicks or dings — or as your child's tastes change. "Some damage to the furniture is inevitable, so consider how easily these items can be touched-up," Wiener said. "Choose painted or wood finishes that match magic marker and crayon colors for easy touch-ups."

Skip the expensive kid-size furniture and pieces with overt children's themes. Now is the time to transition into classic, full-sized furniture that will last well into their teenage years.

Instead of race-car beds or cartoon character bedding, opt for race car pictures for the wall or a giant Sponge Bob pillow. It's much easier to keep up with your child's changing interests when you splurge on a few small pieces.

"Look for small ways to incorporate his favorite things so that you end up with a bedroom

you can both live with," Wiener said. "You want your child to love his room. Otherwise, he won't want to be in it."

In addition to a bed and dresser, every kid's room should have plenty of storage and a roomy work space for schoolwork, art projects, puzzles and games. Buy a big desk now, one that comfortably accommodates a computer, and you won't have to upgrade when the homework assignments start rolling in. Be sure to invest in a desk chair with rollers, which will protect your flooring and make it easy for your child to navigate their work space.

Look for desks with hutch-style bookcases to free up valuable floor space. To keep things tidy, add baskets or plastic bins to the shelving so kids can stow art supplies and schoolwork out of sight.

"Cubbyhole style baskets for storing wine and displaying plants make great desk organizers," Wiener said.

Modular shelving or plastic milk crates hold everything from homework projects and toys to backpacks and shoes — and they can be reconfigured as your child's needs change.

For additional storage, transform an old toy box into a bench by adding a seat cushion or look for ready-made lift-top benches for extra seating and storage. Even a simple box-style bench or a low table can pull double duty. Just add a few wicker baskets below to help keep the mess in check.