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Creating a kids' zone is child's play

By Paula King



Stephanie Catron finishes up decorating this kids' bedroom. Photos Andy Scheck

After building an addition onto her Orinda home, Meredith Friedman had several new living spaces to decorate and the most challenging was a front great room space designated as the hangout area for her two sons and their friends.

One of Friedman's goals for the project was to give the house more of an "adult" ambiance. However, she was unsure of how to balance the kids' entertainment needs and achieving her desired interior style.

"I wanted this area to be the place my kids would want their friends to hang out in, but it's also the first room you walk into in my house, so it couldn't look like a playroom," Friedman said.

Friedman's experience was a common struggle in interior decorating for most parents while trying create a home that is whimsical and comfortable enough for children yet stylish and striking enough for entertaining.

So, Friedman hired Orinda real estate agent and home designer Stephanie Catron of SBC Style, who believes that you don't have to wait for your children to grow up to have the home of your dreams and you don't have to spend a fortune.

"When you have small kids so much of your time is spent at home either having other families over, hosting play dates or just spending the weekend reconnecting as a family. It's important that you love the space you are in," Catron said. "Invest some time in pulling together

the main living spaces with art work and accessories that make you happy."

According to Catron, the key is occasional updates to create a space that is fresh and inviting to family and guests. She is known among Lamorinda clients for her inexpensive Home Goods, Living Spaces and Target finds of art, pillows and throws that are paired with investment pieces of furniture, professional painting and quality flooring to create a signature look.

"One day you will set an object on a low table and find that the kids are not interested in touching, moving it or putting it in their mouths. That's when you can move your style forward," Catron said.

Catron guided Friedman through a process of searching Pinterest and magazines for images of eye-catching rooms. As a family, the Friedmans tested out new accessories and the overall layout of each room until it was the right fit.

Catron often tells homeowners to utilize store return policies as they place things in various spots throughout the home and find what works for them.

"Don't be afraid to move things around after the kids are in bed. Pour a glass of wine and have fun creating your new space," Catron advised.

In the Friedman kid's zone, Catron placed the TV over a fireplace, suggested an L-shaped sectional and found the perfect placement for a seven-foot pool table. Catron finished the room with lamps, rugs and coffee tables and even Friedman's sons, ages 9 and 11, were impressed.

"Some of the items she shopped for me, but I also found options and asked her advice and she steered me in the right direction. I am so happy with how it came together," Friedman said.

Some of Catron's advice for parents of little ones is to keep the accessories to a minimum and opt for a clean and uncluttered look. To keep youngsters safe, use a big ottoman or a few average sized ones as a coffee table with a decorative tray.

Since children can be messy, Catron said to pick white furniture that can be bleached or utilize slipcovers on couches, chairs and ottomans. She noted that dual purpose pieces are ideal for saving valuable space such

as a tall bookcase that can house more valuable pieces on top shelves and toy storage in baskets on the bottom shelves.

"Think about your priorities and how you want the space to be used. That's the most important thing. And don't be afraid to repurpose what you have," said Friedman, who admits that her home's redesign was an education in interior decorating for her.

For families with infants and toddlers, Orinda's Trish McDermott suggested that portability and compactness of baby gear helps to cut down on clutter in the home. McDermott manages a baby equipment rental business called Babierge East Bay.

"Some high chairs and strollers fold more compactly than others and can be easily stored between uses in a nearby closet, which helps your home look less cluttered," she said. "You can also match your gear's color scheme with the same manufacturer like your pack n' play, infant swing and high chair."

A huge part of the process of redecorating a family home is to ensure that the kids feel comfortable and cozy there too. Catron said that plush rugs, beanbags and blankets are ideal for that.

"Get down on the floor and imagine how it feels to be there," she said. "Any home that is pulled together, looks great and has spaces that feel organized will add to a child's sense of well-being."

Before the home makeover, Friedman said her family knew what they liked but struggled with committing to real pieces over temporary solutions. Catron didn't come in and decorate the home but guided them with vendor and color choices and design options and empowered the Friedmans to create their new, family-friendly home.

"It has absolutely made us enjoy our home more," Friedman said. "She gave me confidence to make some of these decisions myself that I never would have before. She taught me what to look for and how to see design elements that would complement each other."





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