

On your mark, get set, play!

by Pamela Brown

Creating a playroom that's fun and practical is a win-win for everyone.

"Many parents want to create a functional, inspirational space for their children, as they understand how important play and creativity is to their developing minds and bodies," says Karri Bowen-Poole, owner/designer of Smart Playrooms in Ilye, N.Y., who designed a Westport playroom for two active boys, ages 4 and 6. "We had two large rooms, both blank slates. We made the larger area a physical play space with pretend play, and designed the smaller room as an art studio, building and manipulative area," she explains. The former featured a rock wall, monkey bars, punching bag, ropes, and a ball swing. She also designed two forts connected by a tube net and added a play table and open, accessible storage.

According to Bowen-Poole, families are embracing more muted, sophisticated colors. "If we want our children to enjoy being in the space, then it's best to create a calm, serene environment with colors that soothe and relax or excite but aren't too overwhelming," she says, noting you can add pops of blues, greens, oranges. Bowen-Poole keeps the colors gender-neutral, and designs the spaces to grow with the child.

Sean Bogert, store manager for Colony Paint and Wallpaper in Milford, recommends asking your kids how they would like to decorate their playroom. "They're going to be spending time in that space ... they should have some input as to how it should look."

Bogert is a fan of color, especially in a creative space, like a playroom: "Kids also like vivid, fun, vibrant colors, and it's easy to tone that down a little, or start with a neutral color, and add bright pops of color throughout the room," he says.

Clients often choose to create an accent wall with paint or wallpaper,



Jan Rubin



Lauri Draperie, Bedspreads & More

This playroom, above, designed by Ilye, NY-based Smart Playrooms, features a custom blue slide, fort, and loft, where kids can spend hours playing and using their imaginations. A modified Roman shade with pink ties, at left, designed and installed by Lauri's Draperies, Bedspreads & More in Norwalk, would add fun and whimsy to a child's playroom.

according to Linda Lupulio, interior design consultant for Colony Paint and Wallpaper. She notes that patterns and designs — including elephants, butterflies, mermaids, sports themes, anything Disney or Marvel, and stripes are trending. “Clients may pair a neutral gray, such as ‘Bunny Gray’ or ‘Quiet Moments’ from Benjamin Moore, with yellow, pink, or blue,” she observes, adding, “Gray comes in so many wonderful undertones, such as blue, green, or pink, that it works well with many other colors.”

Customers are typically choosing neutral-colored Roman shades or drapery panels, which can be coordinated with brightly-colored decorative accents, such as paint and pillows, according to Lupulio.

Regent has noticed a resurgence in wallpaper, particularly for accent walls. “Anything from Disney, Marvel, or Fairheads are selling, as are murals and animal-themed wallpaper from our

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Older Art

Artwork, such this whimsical bird drawing, photo left, by 19th-century artist and author Edward Lear, adds personality to a playroom, according to Beth Krupa, principal of Beth Krupa Interiors in Old Greenwich. Above, a playhouse designed for a Cos Cob family by Smart Playrooms in Rye, NY, features a custom slide, side market counter, an awning, and blackboard inside.



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National Geographic wallpaper books," he notes. Lupulio adds that clients are also opting for paint that resembles wallpaper: "We can recommend painters that can create wonderful effects, such as a horizontal stripe with flat and glossy paint, that looks like wallpaper."

When choosing window treatments for a playroom, Andrew Bogdan, owner of Budget Blinds, which serves Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Rowayton and Stamford, says safety, durability and utility are key considerations. "Most families want something that's easy to use, doesn't have cords, and is versatile," he explains. "Automated shades are becoming more popular as they can be operated through your phone and used as a security device to raise and lower shades at certain times of day or when people are away." Honeycomb shades are the most popular choice, followed by pull-down roller shades and fabric Roman shades, according to Bogdan, who adds, "with fabric Roman shades, moms may tend to get more creative in terms of fabrics, but durability and functionality rule." Solar shades that block UV rays, cut glare, and insulate yet offer a view, are also used.

Sandra Long, owner of Laura's Draperies, Bobrocada & More in Norwalk, explains window décor selection often depends on other accessories. "Some clients prefer the window treatments to not compete with any wall hangings, so they may be more muted. Others prefer colorful window treatments to coordinate with the room's theme and stand out as a decorating element," she says. Reds, blues and greens, as well as stripe patterns, are popular. "Often, patterns and colors are chosen to hide potential drink and food spills and creative crayon use," she observes, "while multicolor geometric patterns are popular because they look great, can work in traditional or modern décors, and are busy enough to hide virtually any problems."

Beth Krupa, principal of Beth Krupa Interiors in Old Greenwich, says that depending on the child's age, the best area for a playroom is close enough for a parent to check up on children using it, but far enough away so kids feel a sense of

autonomy and escape: "For one client, we designed an arts and crafts room where we carved out a large area of the finished basement, hung entwined decorative cording from the ceiling for a constant rotation of picture displays, provided many shelves for art supplies, and installed a Lachura wall organizer system to keep the supplies visible but neat."

Krupa encourages parents to involve the child in the design process. "Tap into their imaginations. Explore all the options together and create the ideas together. Get down on your knees and be their height. Play with graphics on the walls — designate areas for theater, art, climbing, or a cozy reading nook," she says. Think about layers. "For example, build a reading nook out of solid wood construction, then soften the inside with padding, fabrics, pillows. Positioned against one of the room's walls, the topside of the nook could be turned into a small slide with a wall ladder for fun climbing and access and a soft gym mat for their landing."

If considering a carpet, choose something stain-resistant and easy to clean. "Carpet squares are a fun alternative, can be easily removed for cleaning or replacement, and are another way to play with pattern in the space," Krupa says. "For a hard surface, the vinyl flooring tile options are practically indestructible."

Paula Chrowski, co-owner of Colby's of Ridgefield, suggests using wallpaper on an accent wall. "Most wallpapers are not only strippable, but may also be washable or scrubable," she says. For boys, she suggests anything nautical, faux textures, animal prints, geometric or horizontal stripes; for girls, it's flowers, butterflies, and tropical prints in bright pink, purple and turquoise. "Used in playrooms, gray, along with a bright accent wall, makes the room take on a younger look," Chrowski says. "Ceiling wallpaper is fun in any nondirectional print, such as stars, clouds or geometric designs."

Custom throw pillows, large floor pillows, and upholstered window seats in low-maintenance, washable and stain-resistant fabrics are also a great option. "Whether it's fabric or wallcoverings, choose a pattern you love, and design the room around it," says Chrowski. "It's a way to make a child's playroom a space in which he or she will enjoy spending time, and which will last for many years."