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October 14, 2008

Cooking up kid-friendly quarters

As the economy tanks, families make decisions like staying put instead of moving to more spacious digs.

And to transform their cramped, familiar quarters with style and savvy, design lovers might want to look to [Cookie](#) magazine for

some inspiration, thanks to its recent stab at decorating: [Cookie Living](#), a three-week long home show in Battery Park City that launched Oct. 10.

Cookie editor Pilar Guzman brought in designers from [Suite New York](#), [Minor Details](#), [Koko Architecture + Design](#) and [212box](#) to transform a three-bedroom duplex at the Riverhouse building into a family home. The main concept was to make every room kid-friendly.

This means novel ideas like:

- A special kids' area hidden behind the headboard in the master bedroom
- A frou frou living room pouf that has soft edges but is sturdy enough for kids to stand on and, inevitably, jump off of
- An Alice-in-Wonderland-like mini kids' door within a bigger door leading to the bedroom

The designers have also incorporated everyday children's objects (i.e. toys) into the decor instead of finding ways to hide them.

For example, chalkboard paint wainscoting is incorporated into the master bedroom. A wooden ball pit becomes a major element of a child's bedroom. Puppets hang artfully from walls, a traditional bassinet serves as a swing, and cubbies display collections of kids toys -- items ranging from Kid Robots to Barbies.

The showhouse also makes use of furniture with multiple functions. This is good for people on budgets and anyone who loathes the idea of buying and then tossing furniture designed for a few short years of a child's life. There are now changing tables that transform into dressers, cribs that turn into beds -- pieces that can grow with a child from infancy into their teenage years.



October 2008

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Wednesday, October 22, 2008
Last Update: 09:40 PM EDT



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It's not just furniture that transforms in this family showhouse. Spaces shift, as well, growing to accommodate a family's changing needs. For example, the hidden play area for children in the master bedroom can

become space for a home office once the kids are old enough to do their own thing and the parents have the time to get back to work in a more serious way.

The showhouse also offers cheap, effective ways to decorate by bringing some outdoor touches indoors (the opposite of the recent trend of bringing indoors -- fireplaces, sofas, kitchens -- outdoors). Summer shell collecting on the beach turns up great items for children's rooms decor, and potted herb gardens can spruce up a living room. Color can also be used in a fun way for kids and adults. And, of course, there's that most important key to family decorating -- finding fabrics and floor coverings that hide stains or are washable.



Below are a few more tips from designers for those anxious to maintain a stylish pad -- even if it's on the small side -- as families grow to include toddlers prone to destroying anything, and everything, in their path.

Jennifer Ward, of [Minor Details](#):

- Give a room an inexpensive facelift with a new paint color, window treatment, rug or piece of art.
- Look for multi-purpose pieces, like a coffee table low enough to double as a child's table (like the [OFFI Scando Table](#), \$499) and toy storage bins that also work as seating.
- When quarters are tight, incorporate space for your child in every room. For instance, keep a low kitchen drawer filled with pots and pans that double as kid toys, or a spot in the home office where kids can "work" beside you.
- Get rid of old toys when you buy new ones.
- Nix bulky items like old-fashioned highchairs in favor of the [Meetoo chair](#) (\$49.95) from [Phil and Teds](#) or the [HandySitt compact highchair](#) (\$89).

Professional organizer [Barbara Reich](#):

- Group like things together throughout your apartment. This is the only way to know exactly how many magic markers your kids have and how many black sweaters you have.
- Use adjustable shelving for maximum flexibility. Consider built-in bookshelves, and let the shelves conform to what needs to be stored on them. As your kids get older, toys and books get smaller, but clothing gets bigger.
- Place items where they'll be used and designate a place for everything. Store towels near or in the bathroom, paper and ink cartridges near the printer, and DVDs near the television.
- Eliminate visual "noise" by using uniform hangers and containers. Use clear plastic containers to store toys and household items. Then, stack the containers to maximize space.

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-- Provide a quiet, uncluttered, well-lit area for kids to do homework. A desk isn't necessary if there's an area that's kept free from distractions.

-- Clutter will expand to the space allotted to it. Instead of focusing on how much more space you need, consider how much more space you'll have if you discard the gifts you'll never use, the clothes that no longer fit, and the toys that are collecting dust. -- **Jennifer Gould Keil**

Posted by **Adam Bonislawski** on October 14, 2008 2:37 PM

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