

# Once Upon a New Room —

## Destinations for Designing Parents

From pastel pink plaids to hip streaky purple walls, children have always had their own ideas about what makes their room a cool place, and more importantly, their own personal space. As a parent, you normally only get a couple of years to decide what your child's room décor will be, before the demands for cartoon characters, dump trucks, and princesses start pouring in.

It can be difficult to decide on a theme you both like (I've personally had to axe the black walls and faux blood look from my son Alexander's list) that you can afford from both a time and money perspective. Luckily, for those of us in and around the Toronto area there are some great places to shop for unique, affordable, and "really cool" kids' stuff. As well, we've rounded up our panel of expert Moms and Dads to provide us with some great tips for making your child's bedroom fun and practical.

Everything old is new again, and Antique stores are a wonderful place to shop for toys, prints, pictures frames and furniture. Heather especially loved the rocking chairs and quilts which are easily found. If you have the time, take a drive to St. Jacobs (near Kitchener/Waterloo) and discover their many antique shops. Terrific quilts handmade by the Mennonite Community are sold at astonishingly reasonable prices. The best antique warehouse to find "old" toys (i.e. when we 40-year-olds were young) is the Waterloo County Auction Warehouse, just off Highway 8 on Regional Road 15. From Star Wars Pez dispensers to Bobbsey Twin books and Mr. T dolls, they have it all. ebay.ca is an amazing place to shop for vintage knobs, baby toys, quilts, retro lunchboxes, music boxes, baby dishes...the list is endless. Particularly great if your shopping time is limited to when junior is sleeping upstairs and you can't

get out of the house.

**The Barn in Mississauga** (1675 Lakeshore Rd. W, 905-822-6574) always has an eclectic mix of classic antique furniture, rocking horses, cradles, and even cactus-shaped chairs the last time I visited. And if you make the trip to Mississauga you can also stop at **A Room of My Own** (2111 Dunwin Drive, Mississauga, 905-828-2525, www.aroomofmyown.net) which worked for both Robynne and Sue V. While not cheap, items are still usually less expensive than downtown and sales staff give discounts and will negotiate. "I really liked it because they have at least a dozen "mini-rooms" set up with bedding, accessories, art, lamps, etc. so you can see what look you can get.

They also carry extensive linen lines, have wallpaper books and there's a closed off play area in the back for the kids," says Sue. Travel a little further west down Dundas and you'll come to one of the **Crafters Marketplace** stores (2575 Dundas St West, Mississauga, 905-828-6266) inside a terrific **Designers Showcase Mall** amongst the linens, fabrics, and home furnishings stores. Individual craftspeople 'rent' booth space to sell to the public in this unique store space. You'll discover hand-crafted wooden furniture, quilts, shelves, pictures, wooden blocks for spelling out your child's name, and hand-made toys as well. From ceramics to old-fashioned macramé, you can find a range of reasonably priced, unique items for your kids. Also in this neck of the woods you can visit one of the **Bombay Company for Kids** locations (2501 Hyde Park Gate, Oakville, or go east for the **Markville Shopping Centre**, or 20 Kingston Rd W location in Ajax). When I saw the store sign reading Bombay For Kids, I was immediately intrigued. The juxtaposition of dark, solid, 'older'

style furniture that the traditional Bombay Company is known for, and a children's bedroom market seemed untenable. I changed my mind instantly when I entered the store. First, the positives: the girls' room décor, from the beaded, purple, really groovy canopies, picture frames, to the ingenious boldly coloured wall-mounted school lockers (perfect for makeup, jewelry, etc) would put my 12-year-old Victoria in heaven. And the prices were very reasonable (\$39 for a set of three wall boxes to mount and display girl things). Loads of fun animal prints mixed with pinks, purples, and bright oranges. The under ten female crowd could also find a lot in the princess-themed section that wasn't too precious. The negatives I found were all on the boys' side of the store. Retro sports and aviation themes came across a little too staid for either my ten-year-old or two-year-old sons (bring on the monster trucks and dinosaurs!) but would have still been a little too cute for anyone much older. Overall though, well-priced, good value, and yes, you can get a dark mahogany play table with matching chairs if you want.

Traveling back into the city, stop in at the **Etobicoke Ikea**. While many of us resist shopping at a store where the Allen key is king, the kids' furniture and accessories are fun and colourful. Sue E. found funky but cheap storage solutions for her daughters Liana and Kate, and Sue V. came across a funky (there's that word again) lamp for her son Adam. The real drawback to Ikea is that the Children's Play Area's height, age, and toilet training restrictions are so severe: your child will only fit all three criteria for about a five minute period during their lifetime. Take advantage of this free babysitting while you shop, if you can. (Other Ikea locations in North York, Burlington, and Vaughan, or shop on-line at [ikea.ca](http://ikea.ca) and avoid the madness).

While in Etobicoke, you won't want to miss **Naked Furniture** (24 Ronson Drive, Etobicoke, 416-248-0007). Ken and Sue found the unfinished furniture and bookcases perfect for daughter Liana's room. "The wood is solid, perfect for painting or staining, and not too expensive," says Sue.

While the Naked Furniture website claims that "Even an enthusiastic beginner will find success," that didn't stop her husband Ken from complaining about having to paint it.

If downtown is your haunt for trendy kids' pieces, Queen Street is a good bet. **Designer Fabrics** (1360 Queen St W, 416-531-2810), amazed Sue E. with their terrific selection of fabrics for kids' rooms. "A whole new world of choices opens up when you see all those fabrics and are not limited by box store choices," says Sue. Even if you don't sew, it's worth the trip to get inspired and think outside the Disney box. **Kids At Home** (2086 Queen Street E, 416-698-9726) was her next shopping stop for her daughters' rooms, and there she found cool knobs, bedding, furniture, blankets, toys, and accessories. While the store is fairly up-market, the uniqueness of the products make the purchase prices easier to justify. Pick out one or two items to showcase. Further down the street, Sue came across **Kol Kid** (670 Queen Street W, 416-681-0368) which also fits the "cool and funky" criteria for their modern Beaches home. You can visit their website at [kolkid.ca](http://kolkid.ca).

At Bloor and Dundas **Macklem's Baby Carriages & Toys** (2223 Dundas Street W, 416-531-7188, [macklems.com](http://macklems.com)) was just the place for Robynne to find a perfect dresser for Paige's girly room. While Macklem's has been well known for specializing in stroller and pram repairs for over 59 years, they also sell a good selection of infant and young children's furniture.

Traveling north, **The Country Store** (1657 Bayview Ave, 416-322-8883) was one of my husband's favourite stores even before he contemplated shopping for children's furniture. But their wide selection of solid oak wardrobes, dressers, beds, and other accessories provide you with pieces which can be used from childhood right through to the years when you're wishing they'd leave home (is 12 too early?). Unique knick knacks - coloured bottles, faux antique knobs and assorted pictures - can complement the furniture you choose, which can be stained (by them!) in many different colours. If

you're feeling flush, venture over to **Nesting Kids** (418 Eglinton Ave. W, just west of Avenue Rd, 416-322-0511, [nestingkids.com](http://nestingkids.com)). While not for the faint of wallet, they stock and sell some of the most beautiful and charming children and baby furniture in town. It is free to browse, and you will most certainly pick up some terrific decorating tips in this inviting and artfully displayed store. You might even find yourself justifying at least one antique toy box, or a pint-sized lounge for your priceless youngster. You can't call yourself a Torontonian without having visited Yorkdale Mall at least once. Find the **Pottery Barn for Kids** – it will make the long trek from the parking lot worth your while. When Robynne was putting together Paige's room, she saw just what she wanted for her 'girly girl' in the matching coordinates and accessories. Sticker shock? You bet. But you don't have to blow the whole home budget on one room. Robynne got creative and matched the curtains she found on sale at Pottery Barn with coordinating bedding from **Homesense** (a Winner's Company, there's a location at 1865 Lakeshore W in Mississauga), and some fun and funky furniture from (where else) Ikea. While in a mall frame of mind, head out to swanky Bayview Village and the **Restoration Hardware** (416-223-2055, [www.restorationhardware.com](http://www.restorationhardware.com)), which is a visual treat. Skip past the heavy Missionary style furniture and head for the knobs, gardening, and toy sections. Recreated vintage toy airplanes, yo-yo's, metal cars and '20's style posters will transport you back in time. The gardening section is interesting if you're looking at creating a themed room around nature – from cool watering cans to funny signs, you'll see what I mean. For the older child (or husband), they even carry a foosball table which will be the focal point of any child's room (or office!).

Okay, you made it to the malls, go all the way and try out a local **Wal-Mart**. There's a reason this retailer is so successful. Their prices are fabulous, although their selection can be limited as they truly embrace the 'just

in time' delivery and stocking system. Most Wal-Marts have a great craft section for felt sheets, unpainted shelving and picture frames, as well as the paint and glitter required to help put together a 'cheap but cheerful' child's room. And yes, they do carry a wide array of Spiderman and Spongebob junk, er, accessories also.

If you find yourself on the very east end of the GTA, **Sure-Fit Factory Outlet** (458 Fairall St, Ajax, 905-683-2222) is a unique place with its on-premise bedding factory. "I loved the fabric and they made the duvet cover up for me there (I picked it up a couple of weeks later), and then I purchased extra fabric to cover a pillow and window swag," says Judy who was looking for something perfect to go in daughter Amy's room.

You don't even have to leave the house to find some cool things for your kids' rooms. Besides the variety you'll discover on ebay, you can find specialized retailers that are just a click away.

**Beddingtoons.com** specializes in cartoon character bedding packages for babies and kids. They have a great selection of the hippest kids' characters – from Bob the Builder, through Dora the Explorer and the ubiquitous Spongebob. While you will find the linens you want here, checking prices at department store sites like [sears.ca](http://sears.ca) might save you a bit of money.

A light can be a central part of the theme for your child's room. Kathryn Alan found a lighting solution for her son Tristin's room; she started a new company called **Kid Around Decor**. "I discovered a gap in the marketplace – interesting, attractive and affordable children's lighting fixtures were simply not available. It was surprising to me, as babies spend so much time looking up." They offer children's hand painted lights and coordinated switch plates. From the whimsical to the downright girly, these will be the light of anyone's life. Call 416-421-4330 for more information.

*Kathy Buckworth is a Mississauga based writer with four children aged 2-12, and is eternally grateful to the editor that photos from her own*

*children's rooms were not used as the 'before' pictures in this article. Her first book, The Secret Life of Super Mom: The Shocking Truth About the Women You Love to Hate will be released by Sourcebooks in the Spring of, 2005.*