



Home & Design

SECTION E

www.philly.com

What dreams are made of

Rooms for small but exacting clients.

By HILARY JAY

Like most interior design projects involving two or more people, decorating a child's bedroom is a lesson in psychology. I certainly learned *my* lesson recently after working with my 5-year-old, Grace.

Grace requested a pink and purple palette for her new boudoir. Over my dead body, I thought, smiling down at her blithely. I grew up in a sappy sweet bedroom of my mother's making. No way was I going to create a girlie girl's room in my own home.

"How about we match the colors of your old globe collection," I suggested, pointing to the cool sea-blue and earth-green shades of her mid-century cylindrical maps. She seemed to agree. Sort of.

All right, all right. I wanted to believe she was with me because I had a vision and, by God, I'm the professional here.

A few weeks later, when Grace went on a weekend sleepover, I spent two days overhauling her room as a surprise gift. I painted earth-green polka dots on one wall and vertical stripes on another to match a dresser of the same shade. Two walls became solid green lined with globes on high shelves, like a three-dimensional border. Above the windows, I hung sky-blue panels from freshly cut bamboo rods. Her bedspread was a sea of purplish blue.

Grace took one look and started to scream: "I hate this color! I hate green. I wanted pink and purple. What have you done? I wanted hearts, stars and rainbows.

Besides, even if I did do stripes and dots, they would go stripe, dot, dot; stripe, dot, dot. Like that." I shouldn't have been surprised. I had blown the golden rules of interior design: One, know your client, and two, make their dreams reality.

"Kids have a much more highly developed aesthetic sense than we give them credit for," says Center City-based interior designer Barbara Eberlein. "If you give them the forum to verbalize their visual concepts, they will — and often better than adults do." She has firsthand experience. Her son, Peter, now 8, knew at 2½ he wanted a room full of wild animals.



"He was allowed to tell me what he wanted, but he wasn't permitted to pick the paper," says Eberlein, who maintains control in matters of taste.

"The problem is most people over-edit. They don't allow for a big enough dose of fantasy," she says. In her 6-year-old daughter Caroline's room, Eberlein pushed the fairy-tale look to the edge: floral drapery topped in scallops, a pretty painted pedestal desk, a princess-size playhouse to store toys, a ceiling full of birds, all in pastel shades of pink, purple and green. The bed — dressed and draped in ribbons, ruffles and assorted patterns — is Caroline's favorite touch. "That's good," her mother says. "Beds should be fantasy objects."

This month, Caroline adores Winnie-the-Pooh, but Eberlein isn't about to paper the walls in Pooh Corner. "I'll buy something small, like a pillowcase that can be thrown away in a year," she says. "To Caroline, it's a big deal because she can sleep on it." To her mother, the concession is no big deal since the pillow gets tucked out of sight when the bed is made. "The trick is to try and figure out which boundaries to enforce and which to let go of so that they can feel part of the process," Eberlein says. "You really want to encourage that kind of creativity. If they can't do it in their own environment, gosh, where can they do it?" □



Barbara Eberlein acceded to a request for wild animals when she designed a room for her son, Peter (right). Daughter Caroline's room is all girl.

