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How to design a great child's bedroom that will encourage them to ditch their screens



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11 OCTOBER 2019 • 8:00AM

Getting youngsters involved in the design of their little corner of the home will see their inspiration soar, writes Jessica Doyle

The question of how to get children off their screens and into practical, creative pursuits is an increasingly pressing one. The World Health Organisation's current advice is that children between the ages of two and 5 should have no more than one hour of screen time a day, but as the days get shorter and the weather less appealing, what can you do to encourage screen-free play? The answer could lie not only in outdoorsy pursuits, but also in the way their bedrooms and playrooms are decorated and furnished.

The homeware company [Swoon](#) has just launched Little Creatives, its first collection of children's furniture, which the brand's co-founder, Debbie Williamson, was inspired to develop after watching a TED talk about creativity. "It really got me thinking about my nieces," she says. "Creativity is not just about design and art, it's about problem-solving and invention. We were looking at producing a line of storage, and I thought, rather than us thinking we know what children want, why don't we get them to help with the process?"

To come up with the designs, Williamson and her team held a workshop in tandem with design studio [Tilt](#), where groups of children played with colour and materials and chatted to designers about the kind of furniture they wanted in their rooms. The design team went away and created prototypes, then held a further

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workshop to see how the children interacted with the products.

“The way kids look at furniture is pure; they think in a very functional way,” says Sam Baldry, Swoon’s head of design. “A desk doesn’t need to be static, it just needs to have a surface, and that surface doesn’t have to be flat. Things can be on wheels, and desktops can stand up. We asked them what they thought a trolley should look like, for example [the answer was, naturally, a monster], and they all loved the idea of secret functions, and multifunctional pieces.”



Swoon's Ailya coat rack, which can be turned into a den

One little girl, Aiyla, wanted a secret place to read books and draw, so the coat rack named after her can be easily transformed into a den, over which a sheet can be thrown to create a little tent. The Freddie desk has a lid that flips up and becomes an easel on one side - complete with a shelf for holding brushes and paints - and a

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blackboard on the other; while the Fynne desk has a tray top that conceals hidden storage inside, and can be lifted off completely if its owner wants to sit on the sofa or bed to draw. “I believe that everyone is creative deep down,” says Williamson, “it’s just how we bring that out.”

Interior designer Anna Burles, founder of design studio [Run for the Hills](#), watched the same TED talk mentioned by Williamson, and was similarly inspired to use design as a tool to unlock children’s creativity. At the [Decorex](#) design fair in London earlier this week, she created a dreamlike children’s room set that was fantastical in some respects - a Princess and the Pea-style bed made of a stack of mattresses and a balloon-filled ceiling, for example - as well as demonstrating other ideas that could be more easily transferred into a home setting, such as incorporating foliage patterns and real plants into the design.

“Reconnecting children with nature is so important,” says Burles. “Art and creativity is one thing, but science and nature is another, it really inspires them. We put lots of planting into this room to bring the outdoors in, because you can’t always go outside. My five-year-old daughter has a bug hotel that we made together - just a jar with holes in the lid - which she loves. You can get them to decorate plant pots too.”

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Anna Burles' design for a children's room at the Decorex design fair CREDIT: RUN FOR THE HILLS

Getting children involved in the design and decoration of their own rooms is also, Burles believes, a fun and engaging way to get them to think creatively and in a problem-solving way. She previously worked with the education charity Inspire!, working with children on the interior design of their bedrooms - which was in fact a maths exercise in disguise.

“They measured their rooms and their furniture, worked out where things could go, and made moodboards,” she says. “It was a fun exercise, but taught them how measuring and maths are important skills for life. It was amazing how well they did it when it was tied in with creativity; they got so excited about it, because it was so personal to them. If you make it about the child, you can unlock a lot. It’s also an opportunity to teach them how to customise and reuse something, by repainting it, drawing on it or decorating it with

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reuse something, by repainting it, drawing on it or decorating it with stickers.”

This concept of children customising their own spaces was similarly behind the new children’s interiors brand Pea, which launched over the summer, providing themed collections of children’s furniture inspired by the outside world. Along with reversible bedding and personalised posters, there are wall-sticker and stencil sets that match the motifs and colours in the fabrics and furniture.



Pieces from the new Little Creatives collection by Swoon (swooneditions.com)

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How to design a creative children's room

- Get them involved - ask them what colours and patterns they'd like to use, measure up the space with them and encourage them to work out where furniture can fit. Task older children with assembling flatpack furniture: it's a skill they'll probably need at some point.
- Customise - choose an old, tired piece of furniture and turn it into a craft project. They can repaint it, doodle on it, and use stickers to create scenes.
- Use the walls - consider magnetic wallpaper, or the more affordable option of magnetic paint. You could also paint a wall in chalkboard paint for them to draw on.
- Make it fun - create a dedicated arts and crafts area, with well organised storage so that they know where to find papers, pens, etc (and where to put them away again). Children love an 'art cart' - a trolley stacked with art supplies that they can wheel from room to room.
- Bring in outside elements - spark an interest in nature by making a bug hotel or giving them plants to look after.

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