

HOME FRONT

## Furniture Grows Up Fast

Designers, Decor Makers Push  
Fussy and Formal Kids Rooms

By JUNE FLETCHER  
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

With a baby on the way, Scott and Tiffany Smith wanted to get the nursery squared away and they brought in a decorator for just the right look. But there's not a cartoon character or pink bunny in sight. Instead, it's a "French provincial" look, with an iron crib with green-velvet bumpers, an antique bamboo table and a club chair -- \$8,000 in all. Mrs. Smith says they want it to fit with the rest of the house, which is "formal and sophisticated."

Kids' rooms aren't kid stuff anymore. Following the lead of the fashion world, which has been cribbing styles from adults and downsizing them for children, furniture and decor makers are pushing grown-up looks for kids' rooms. Brandee Danielle, a maker of crib-bedding sets, is trading in the baby animals for toile pour bebes decorated with 18th-century landscapes, while Standard's new Kathy Ireland furniture line for kids has a modern, two-tone design, not flowers. Big companies like Pottery Barn and Ethan Allen are downsizing grown-up fare, including Pottery Barn's vintage-style, \$500 iron bed and Ethan Allen Kids' \$1,300 dresser with six drawers and a jewelry tray, identical to the company's adult version.

### THE 'SNOOPY' BACKLASH

See a sampling of [sophisticated fare](#) offered this fall for children's rooms.

The reason for the \$1.4 billion furnishing industry's move into more adult designs: Nothing's too good for Junior. Even in the slow economy of the past few years, kids' furniture sales kept growing, with sales of the

top 20 kids' retailers up 4.3% last year. Now, with the economy improving, furniture and decor manufacturers are betting homeowners will want to match their home's grown-up decor, even in the eight-year-old's room.

### The 'Be-Careful' Bed

But will kids like this stuff? Many of these furnishings and fabrics aren't meant for marathon bed bouncing or spilled apple juice -- and they can be way too fussy for some kids. When six-year-old Noelle Xie flung herself down on the bed of her dreams at Furnitureland South in Jamestown, N.C., two weeks ago, her choice was a surprise to her parents. Han and Bo Xie had driven from Lambertville, N.J., to buy Noelle

whatever she wanted -- only to see her bypass the pricey hand-carved, hand-painted furniture. She wanted a cheap, plain, matching white set. Anything else "looks too much like my parents' " furniture, she says.



'Antique' Venetian bed

But the bottom line, retailers say, is that dual-income couples can afford more expensive furniture in general than their parents could, and a disproportionate amount of that is being spent on their children, sometimes in the form of busier, and certainly pricier, decor. The lesson isn't being lost on mass-marketers: Ethan Allen, founded in 1932, just opened its first store dedicated to kids and plans another by year-end. Pottery Barn, which introduced a kids' catalog four years ago, now has 65 children's stores. The latest kids' catalog from Bombay Co. features feathered lampshades and jeweled drawer pulls touted as "lip gloss for furniture."

"It's 'Honey, I Shrunk the Furniture,' " says Louise Slater, president of Brighton Pavilion of Memphis, Tenn., which makes \$8,000 custom-made canopy beds for children, decorated with hand-painted birds of paradise, along with matching nightstands and desks. Sales of the company's scaled-down children's furniture, which mimics its adult line, are up 18% this year.

Having nice things encourages kids to act more grown-up, says Austin, Texas, resident Vala Harbison, who just redid her eight-year-old's room at a cost of \$15,000 with a queen-size Parisian antique bed, a dome ceiling painted to look like the sky, and a chaise longue in pink and mint green. (The three-year-old's room is next.) "I'm going overboard," admits Mrs. Harbison, a homemaker. Having a strict no-eating-in-the-bedroom rule helps, and she expects to be able to pass all this furniture down to her grandchildren. Cartoon furniture can be outgrown, she notes. "I don't do Snoopy."

#### Not for the Nursery

But there are some safety issues, too, concerning adult-appropriate home accessories scaled down to kid size. Ken Giles, a spokesman for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, says the spangled pillows, puffy duvets and tasseled curtains now showing up in stores are fine for school-age children but could present choking or suffocation dangers for children under three years old. "Parents shouldn't get so caught up in style that they forget about safety," he says.

Indeed, many of these fussier or more sophisticated items aren't meant for young kids, says Louise Traficanti, design director of Eastern Accents in Chicago. The company's kiddie pillows are feathered and beaded, she says, but nursery ones are cotton velveteen. "It's up to the parents to show a level of discernment when they buy."



Faux-fur bedding

Some parents find all this a bit too extreme for kids. Esther Farnham, a Charlotte, N.C., financial-services executive has shopped at a number of stores for nursery furniture over the last few months -- and decided to go with sturdy pine furniture from her own childhood. Furniture manufacturers' new offerings were "overwhelming, complicated" and easy to damage, she says. "I'm staying away from beading, delicate designs and all these frilly features." After all, "what do you really need for a newborn?"

Parents in some cases admit the pricey furniture may be, just a bit, for themselves. Mike Warren of Grand Rapids, Mich., plunked down \$3,500 for a solid wood "Young America" bedroom suite for his nine-year-old son, Nick, who wasn't much involved in the shopping. Mr. Warren didn't mind paying a bit more, figuring it was sophisticated enough to last his son through college. But the more he looks at its sleek, slatted headboard, dark finish and round finials, the more he can imagine it in his weekend house.

"If he ever decides he doesn't like this set," Mr. Warren says, "it's all mine."

---

#### Big Looks for Little Kids

This fall, furniture and decor manufacturers are offering more sophisticated fare for children's rooms.

ITEM NAME	PRICE	COMMENTS
<b>Venice bed</b> <a href="http://www.paintedfurniture.com">www.paintedfurniture.com</a> <sup>1</sup>	\$8,000	This iron replica of a Venetian antique may be too pricey to jump on, but the company will paint any scene you want on it. Sales are up 18% over last year.
<b>Little Molly Mermaid chandelier</b> <a href="http://www.louiseantoinette.com">www.louiseantoinette.com</a> <sup>2</sup>	\$1,100	Five ceramic mermaids with garlands made of real Austrian crystal -- but kids may wonder why the mermaids don't look like Disney's Ariel.
<b>Out of Africa collection</b> <a href="http://www.brandeedanielle.com">www.brandeedanielle.com</a> <sup>3</sup>	\$500	They offer a twin-bedding set in mixed faux furs, with matching pillows, lampshade and hamper. A crib set with furry mobile was last year's best-seller.
<b>Lil' England dresser</b>	\$875	It's part of a 10-piece collection that includes a life-size knight for storage and a castle headboard.
<b>Personalized wallpaper borders</b>	\$30 per spool	If your kid's name has fewer than 11 letters, this company will put it on a wallpaper border. Since it came on the market eight months ago, the border has become the company's best-seller.
<b>Spencer-Margaret collection</b> <a href="http://www.largoint.com">www.largoint.com</a> <sup>4</sup>	\$300 to \$1,000	This unmatched 11-piece collection is modeled after various French antiques that actress Jaclyn Smith used in her daughter Spencer-Margaret's bedroom.