

Child's play: Do you involve kids in the design process?



By Haley Chouinard

Inherent in designing a family home is creating rooms for children. We asked eight designers—**Kelly Schandel**, **Phillip Thomas**, **Shavonda Gardner**, **Rinat Lavi**, **Cathy Maready**, **Margaret Ash**, **Jessica Geller** and **Virginia Toledo**—how (or if) they involve kids in the design process.

FREESTYLE

“Designing for kids, specifically teens, is my favorite. I treat them as I do any adult client and consult with them to determine what they want their space to look and feel like. As a mother of a teenager and a tween, I give my kids complete autonomy over the design of their rooms. When you're a kid, you don't have much control over anything; giving them control over the design of their room is a great way to teach them to make decisions based on what they like rather than based on someone else's vision. I also think it's important for people to have the freedom to create spaces that feel safe and reflective of them, and I believe that starts at a young age.” —Shavonda Gardner, *SG Style*, Sacramento, California



Shavonda Gardner Courtesy of SG Style

MORE THAN A MINIMAL INTEREST

“We treat it like any other room in the house, and usually the parents are involved too. Usually, they don't just go, ‘Do whatever you want!’ Recently, I worked on a project where there was a 13-year-old girl who was very clear about wanting a minimalist bedroom—which was interesting for a teenager! She didn't want bright colors or a lot of patterns, but she also wasn't that interested in the process while we were doing it, so I wasn't sure what her reaction to the finished product was going to be. With kids, it's fun if you can do a big reveal and not let them see it as it goes along. In this instance, the clients were traveling for the summer, so we did the install while they were away, and when she



Kelly Schandel Courtesy of Kelly Schandel

we were traveling for the summer, so we did the install while they were away, and when she

came back and saw it, she was so happy. I think it's often more satisfying to see that final reaction from children than from adults, because they really don't know what to expect."

—*Kelly Schandel, Thinkpure, Santa Monica, California*

TEACH THEM YOUNG

"Including kids in the design process can be fun, but we try to make sure the kid is old enough to enjoy the process. It's a confidence-boosting experience for most anyone when they feel they are part of a positive experience. If a parent wants them to be a part of it, then we really encourage them to let us guide the child through making good choices. Once they see a room completed and they have become a part of it, it's a win-win and we keep loyal clients for generations." —*Cathy Maready, Elephant Ears, Wilmington, North Carolina*



Cathy Maready Courtesy of Cathy Maready



Jessica Geller and Virginia Toledo Courtesy of Toledo Geller

OPINION SECTION

"We always make sure to have, at a minimum, some touch-base with our younger clients, especially tweens and teens who have opinions with a capital O. We are currently working on a bedroom for a 12-year-old girl who has a very particular shade of blue in mind, so we are checking in with her more regularly than with our adult clients during our design process, sharing color palettes and patterns via email instead of waiting until our in-person

presentation with her. We let them take a strong standpoint in terms of design, but we guide the kids and their parents on the design's staying power and longevity." —*Virginia Toledo and Jessica Geller, Toledo Geller, Englewood, New Jersey*

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

"It all depends on the age of the child. As kids grow and their needs change, we do bring them into some of the overall design processes. I think it is essential to set guidelines with children, so they understand that their parents have the final say. This way, the children feel involved, but the adults are making more significant decisions about budget and aesthetic." —*Margaret Ash, Margaret Ash Design, San Francisco and New York*



Margaret Ash Courtesy of Margaret Ash



Phillip Thomas Courtesy of Phillip Thomas

LEARNING CURVE

“I am a strong believer that an interior is a reflection of the person inhabiting that space. While I ultimately will follow the directive of my clients—the parents—I like to involve the children in the design of their own rooms whenever possible. I want them to feel proud of their space and like they have been instrumental in its creation. At the same time, it is my task to guide them along to create a space that reflects them but also is cohesive with the overall design of their parent’s home and that will last for several years. It is a lot of fun to work with children and see the design process through their eyes. You can actually learn a great deal!” —*Phillip Thomas, New York*

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

“Initially, the parent will define the scope and direction, but I also like to listen to the child and let them express their request. However, I always try to interpret the request in a way that will endure. For example, when an 8-year-old girl asked for a blue room, we ended up with a floral wallpaper with blue accents, which was applied above a chair rail and then we had the wall up to the rail painted a bright blue. The results made both mom and daughter very happy.” —*Rinat Lavi, Rinat Lavi Interiors, New York*



Rinat Lavi Courtesy of Rinat Lavi

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