

Design For Kids Part Four

Many addition/remodel projects start because of kids. There are either more of them on the way, they've outgrown their spaces, or the family is cramped because of all the stuff and activities that go along with kids. It's important to involve kids in the process of planning for a remodel/addition. Not only will that reduce stress and family friction, you'll discover some good ideas that will contribute to everyone's enjoyment of the finished result.

We've discussed why it's important to involve kids in the process of planning for a remodel/addition, and how to go about it. Now we're continuing our notes about features that kids have contributed to some of our clients' homes. Some of my favorites that we've already covered:

Bat Caves. Small places that kids can claim them as their own.

Alcoves. Window seats and reading alcoves.

Kid Size Elements. Scaled down doors, windows, and hardware.

Observation Lofts. Spot where kids can see what's going on.

Perches and Sleeping Lofts. Like "built in Bunk Beds."

Peek Holes. Kids love to make discoveries. Some additional things you'll want to consider for your children's benefit, and yours:

Places For Kids Stuff. All kids today have an incredible amount of "stuff". The older they get, the more "stuff" accumulates. Sometimes the best way to accommodate all that stuff is to put shelving in their room. It is important that it be located low enough so that they can use it themselves. After all, the goal is to get them to put their own stuff away, as well as get it back out. If you make

that physically impossible, it definitely makes that training take longer.

Another way to accommodate stuff is with furniture, such as a toy chest at the foot of a bed. Another related notion is to create a whole range of little spaces to keep things in. Kids love niches, nooks, and crannies especially if each one has some unique character such as a name, shape, color, or door. One advantage of these approaches is that the storage place itself can be a fun, whimsical element. Although it seems at times to every parent easier to bark instructions about putting things away, it is actually possible to make a game out of most routine chores. Games obviously can make chores more palatable, and some fun design ideas might help.

As kids get older, whole closets get consumed. Even a small closet can be increased in efficiency through careful design by a factor of two. For older kids, storage areas can even be opened up in attics using pull down stairs, or in loft spaces in garages. The accumulation of stuff to be accommodated never seems to end. In fact, eventually the children grow up and require entire houses of their own for their stuff.

Practical kid Issues. Kids don't see messes where moms do. Rather than try to change their whole perception of the world, sometimes it's easier to put doors in strategic places like in front of open shelves. That way mom can protect her sensitivity to clutter by a simple swinging action. Don't forget that closet poles need to be low enough for kids to reach themselves if you expect them to get their things and put them away. Don't underestimate the ability of kids to get into places that are not safe, and plan accordingly. Provide planned places for study - either built in desks, study nooks, or make sure

there is wall space to accommodate furniture.

It is also important to consider how kids habits and needs will change as they get older. For example, it isn't realistic to expect a six year old to be using a desk in their room. To be working alone in a room so far from where the rest of the family is like being banished - definitely a punishment scenario. A fourteen year old, however, needs a private, quiet space for homework.

design planning process. In fact, once they are part of the design team they usually end up being a project's biggest booster. That can be especially important if mom and dad's morale starts to sag somewhere in the middle of the project.

Copyright 1994 Michael F. Malinowski

With just a little bit of attention and energy kids can be made an important part of the