

**T**HE VISIT STARTED WELL. BUT WITH CUPCAKES DEVoured, THEIR DAUGHTER WAS UP AND OUT OF HER SEAT. Though my friends brought along toys, she found something much more entertaining—my sunroom blinds, which have little metal weights in the bottom to hold them in place. In a flash, the “tiny redecorator” was removing the metal weights from my blinds, one by one. Eek! Thankfully my friends put a stop to their daughter’s redecorating efforts and I breathed a sigh of relief. But after the visit, when I put the weights back in the blinds, for some reason they no longer all hung at the correct angle. Some twisted. Not that I’m irked or anything. Too much. You’ve got to be a little relaxed when it comes to children, right? But the visit did make me wonder whether children are destined to be a danger to décor and whether you can still live stylishly when you have children?

I decide to put the question to well known Toronto-based interior designer Kimberley Seldon, who is also a mother of two teens. “Yes, you can live stylishly but you have to be realistic about your set of circumstances,” she says. When children are young, safety concerns will dictate style to some degree, as sharp corners, baby gates, and collectible items become topics to consider. Indeed, when Lise Upshall had her daughter, who is now almost two, she had to give away her glass and steel coffee table. “We had to get rid of the death-like object with the eye-remover,” the Toronto mom says pointedly. Now she uses a Rubbermaid toy container as a living room coffee table with a tea towel thrown overtop when guests come over.

What’s more debatable is whether you need to modify your decorating direction. “When you first have a kid, you say, ‘I’m going to stay stylish.’ Then reality sets in,” Upshall

*It’s not that I’m a neat freak. Really. I just like my home to be tidy. So it was with some trepidation that I invited two friends and their highly energetic four-year-old over to my condo for tea and cupcakes.*

## CAN YOU RAISE CHILDREN *On A White Sofa?*

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explains. Baby furniture, for one, makes it difficult to stay true to your design vision. The playpen became a permanent fixture in Upshall's living room for a number of months and has now been replaced by a prominent Dora the Explorer chair. Doesn't exactly make the same statement as a Barcelona chair. Furthermore, any sophisticated furniture you have may be marked for extinction when children arrive. Pristine light-coloured *objet* inevitably become a target for sticky hands and muddy feet. That's why Seldon advises families to modify their style. When her children were young, Seldon opted for pattern rather than solid light colours on upholstery. "Pattern can be a good friend and hide a multitude of indiscretions, such as apple juice stains on the sofa," she explains. In terms

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of flooring, hardwood or laminate with Turkish or Persian area rugs makes more sense than broadloom, which can easily become the victim of spilled grape juice. Then, of course, there are the toys, which end up—well everywhere. "Toys are the new décor," says Emily Illiatovitch-Owen, a Toronto mother of a six-year-old boy and three-year-old girl. She does have a playroom in the basement, but the toys still seem to mysteriously migrate upstairs each day.

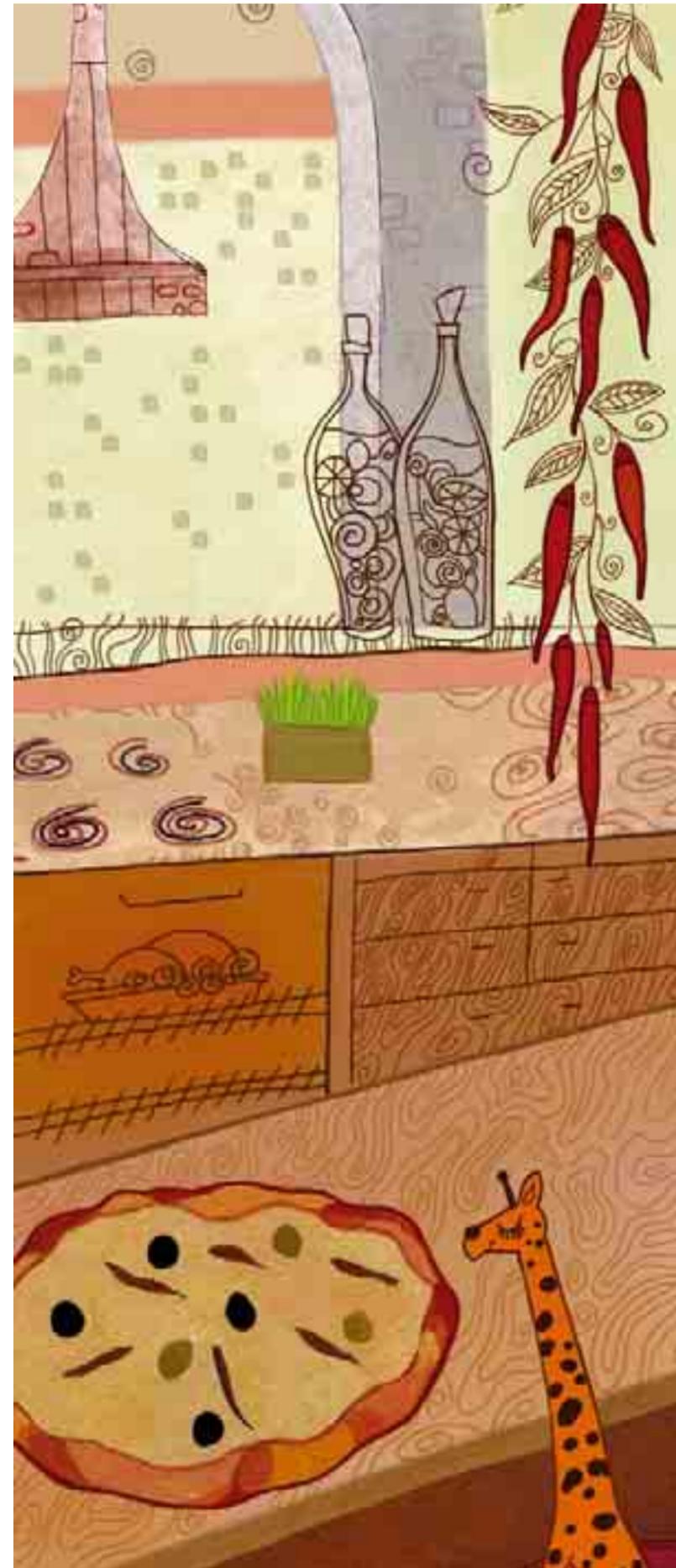
HOWEVER, EVEN WITH THESE CHALLENGES SOME PARENTS SIMPLY AREN'T PREPARED TO COMPROMISE ON THEIR AESTHETIC VISION. "I DIDN'T BUY KID-FRIENDLY FURNITURE. I DON'T THINK YOU NEED TO," says Vancouver-based interior designer Jennifer Johnston, who has a four-month-

old daughter. She boldly went out and purchased white couches for her new condo. While I think this is risky business, I do sympathize with Johnston, as I would be resistant to parting with my much beloved UpCountry Parsons chairs. Johnston says that if the cushions get dirty on one side, she'll simply flip them over. Also, she did at least buy a couch with slip-covers, which can be removed for washing, if necessary. Additionally, Johnston isn't buying typical baby colours. "I bought a baby swing that goes with the interior of our living room: chocolate brown and cream."

Whether you're adjusting your aesthetic vision a little or a lot, every child needs a play area. Seldon used her basement as a playroom for her kids and their friends. "Our basement

was not fit for human habitation," she jokes. "Our son was a Lego monster for years," she recalls, explaining that the floor was a minefield of colourful little building bricks. Johnston, who doesn't have a basement, plans to designate the den as a play area when her daughter gets older. Her den sofa and rug are both chocolate brown, dark colours that Johnston says will help hide any dirt or stains. She also has purchased toy bins, which at the moment are in her daughter's room. "I toss her stuff in the bins in at night," Johnston says.

On the flip side, some parents will cordon off rooms of the house, and tell kids they are not allowed in there to maintain a certain aesthetic and protect expensive furnishings, but none of these moms do it, as it separates the family. "The kids have to be able to use every room in my house," Seldon says.



Instead, Johnston plans to prevent accidents by putting a simple rule in place: no eating outside the kitchen. "We want our daughter to eat meals at the table with us." Hmm. We'll see. You know what they say about the best-laid plans of mice and men. Upshall considered that rule as well, but abandoned the idea as her daughter is a fussy eater. So Upshall lets her eat on the couch or in front of the TV in the living room if it means she eats a full meal. "There's grape raisinettes under the couch and the carpet is permanently encrusted with crackers," she admits adding, "You've gotta do, what you've gotta do." Even if kids will eat at the table, many have secret ability to sneak food out of the kitchen.

EVEN WITH KID-FRIENDLY DÉCOR ADJUSTMENTS AND RULES IN PLACE, SOONER OR LATER, YOUR PRECIOUS LITTLE ONE WILL LIKELY COMMIT A DESIGN CRIME. Seldon recalls that when her son was eight, he thought it would be a lark to clean the pot-lights in the basement with Windex while they were turned on. "I heard a large bang coming from the basement and laughter," Seldon recalls. She hightailed it downstairs to discover that the pot-light had exploded and her son was in the process of "cleaning" another one. "He thought it was hilarious." Needless to say, Seldon removed the Windex from the clutches of her son before he took out all the lights. Similarly, Illiatovitch-Owen's daughter prefers drawing on the walls rather than paper and has taken a green magic marker to the white archway in the hallway of her house. "The green really shows up on the white," she comments. Seems every family has a story, even mine. When my brother and I were about five and seven, one of us took a black magic marker to the white piano keys and drew a line all the way along the front of the keys. I'm sure it was my brother, but the memory is hazy. What I do remember is that my parents couldn't clean the line off the piano.



Of course, as kids get older, your design challenges change. It's no longer so much about roaming sticky fingers, but about assertion of independence—and that crosses into the realm of home décor. Seldon encourages parents to let their teens have free reign when it comes to their bedrooms, even if it means a black cave for few years. Just guard your design contacts and credit card. Why? When Seldon's daughter was 14, she wanted to makeover her bedroom in a hot pink and black scheme. She found a chandelier she liked from one of Seldon's suppliers and put in an order. "They knew who I was so they sent it over to me along with the bill. Imagine my surprise. We kept it, but we also had a little chat about getting approval on purchases first," Seldon recalls.

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ONE FINAL NOTE ABOUT THE STATE OF YOUR HOME: IF YOU WERE THE NEAT AND TIDY TYPE, THAT'S LIKELY GOING TO CHANGE ONCE YOU HAVE KIDS. Yes, Illiatovitch-Owen has managed to enlist her kids to help her clean up the toys each night and return them to the basement, but some amount of a happily haphazard environment is par for the course. "I put a stack of books together and then my daughter mashes them down. It's like a tower to her," Upshall says. You learn that it's not worth getting worked up over. "I asked myself, 'Am I really going to toddle after every piece of Lego?'" says Seldon. Besides those years pass quickly. Seldon says, "When the toys are gone, you'll actually miss them and find yourself saying, 'Where's the Lego?'" OL