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National College of Art & Design

Printed Textiles, Faculty of Fashion and Design

‘An Exploration into the Decoration of Children’s Bedrooms’

by

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To Hilary O'Kelly who patiently helped me put this thesis together.

INTRODUCTION

The significance and importance of a child's bedroom to a child should never be underestimated. To a small person, your bedroom is much more than a place where you sleep, get dressed and play. The bedroom acts for and serves the child in many ways, fulfilling a variety of roles.

It can perform the robust roles of playroom and adventure terrain or quieter roles of learning, through reading, listening to music or simply making and doing. When these are amalgamated the list of functions a bedroom must fulfil are as endless as the needs and imagination of the child itself. Since all aspects of child development commence from the home, parents and designers naturally recognise the need to provide the correct equipment and starter kit for life within the context that is the child's bedroom.

This thesis is an exploration into the child's bedroom as a subject, it concerns itself with the broader issues of the subject, as well as examples of real and ideal children's bedrooms. Although the broader issues may not deal specifically with the decoration of children's bedrooms, it is intended that they act as devices to put into context the subject as a whole.

Although this subject is discussed from Georgian rooms to the present day, the discussion is not intended to be an in-depth, historical exploration but is constructed in this way solely to demonstrate the evolution in terms of attitude of society towards children, home decoration and the concept of the child's bedroom.

At the end, Chapter 5 deals in its entirety with examples of children's bedrooms. These include real bedrooms of children from a selection of average homes across Dublin today and also examples of children's bedrooms depicted in home decoration magazines and books recently published. This Chapter has been left until late in the exploration of the subject within the thesis, as the other Chapters (containing broader issues of the subject) aim to build together to provide the main subject with a contextual background.

The main sources for this thesis have been:

1. Real children's bedrooms which have been photographed.
2. Cuttings from a wide variety of magazines listed in the Bibliography.
3. The *Home Front* B.B.C. interior decoration book.
4. Lifestyle and home improving television programmes on R.T.E. and the B.B.C.

including:

- a) *Beyond the Hall Door*, R.T.E.
- b) *Our House*, R.T.E.
- c) *Changing Rooms*, B.B.C.
- d) *Home Front*, B.B.C.

These sources were easily attainable as contemporary cultures interest in interiors and their decoration is high. The method of research for this thesis began with extensive reading of Barthes and Saussure. These books were helpful in establishing a method of looking or way of seeing interiors. It was this method that was then adopted when approaching the subject of the thesis, both for research and writing purposes.

CHAPTER ONE : WOMAN AND HOME

Between the home set up in Eden and the home before us in Eternity, stand the homes of earth in a long succession ... every home has its influence for good or evil, upon humanity at large.

Julia McNair Wright

The Complete Home. An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Life and Affairs (1881)

The relationship between a woman and her home has always been more than that of a person and an environment. Home has always been associated with security and warmth. “Home sweet home”, “Níl aon tinteán mar do thintéan féin”, translated there is no fireplace like your own, are perhaps overly simple maxims for our complex associations and emotional investments with the four walls that surround us. Within this section I intend to discuss the importance of the role of the home. Looking specifically at the relationship of a woman to her home and the decoration of it by her at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and how it revealed, not only her role within society, but how the home was an expression of an ideology. The home became an embodiment and signifier expressing aspirations, attitudes, status, education and the epicentre of a cultural ideology that became visible with the onslaught of the Industrial Revolution.

During the 19th century the role of a woman within society was significantly coupled to that of her role within her home. It was such a strong bond that it seemed as though the embodiment of womanhood was to be found in the entity known as home. The relationship between woman and home was so significant that any influence or attitude upon the perception of the home within society would, dually influence the role of the woman in the home. With the development of industry came the fragmentation of the

notion that working and living were to be done in the same quarters. Previously, within the cottage industry, the workers lives were lived upon the premises, now, 'working' had been removed to areas such as offices, factories and shops that had expressly been built for working in. Where once working and living were intertwined, they now had separate physical and mental locations. This division of the function of the home from being a place of work and living, to solely being one for living in, led to the home acquiring a new status and function within society.

The cultural phenomenon of industrialised working life had a marked influence upon the relationship of the woman within the home. The home became an embodiment of positive virtues, these were detached in every way from the workplace. The norm within 'middle class' set ups was that husbands would go to their place of work whilst women stayed at home. Middle class women were not permitted to work, with the sole exception being made where single women who needed to work for financial reasons, could work as 'nannies' or 'governess'. The fact that the work was of a domestically orientated nature made it permissible as an occupation. Women were seen as the ideal candidates for the maintenance of the home, they could separate work and living situations, and were encouraged to do so.

The woman's power is not for rule, not for battle and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, management and decision.

(Ruskin Lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens')
In *Sesame and Lilies* - 'Unto the Last'.

Published in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, New York, 1949 p.86

The gentility and femininity of the late 18th century woman encapsulated all that a home should suitably be. In contrast, the vigorous growth of a competitive and demanding work place led to the emergence of a new brutality and ruthlessness.

Slowly, the home became viewed as the ideal sanctuary from this new competitive, working, commercial world. The middle classes encouraged this by enforcing a cultivation of habits between the different situations of home and work. As a signifier of this separation, men from the middle classes would wear different clothes whilst they would work, these would differ again from those they wore at home. Different modes of acting and mannerisms were also encouraged. The public world was viewed with suspicion, a place of deceit, whilst the domestic sphere was illuminated and viewed with reverence. This attitude could only lead to the birth of a society that aspired to ideals that were not based in a reality, but ideals that were cloaked with illusion.

During this time, there was a constant reference to the notable decline of morality and taste within society. In a bid to combat the ills of moral social decline brought about by the Industrial Revolution, religious leaders in England and Ireland lectured at the pulpits and through the domain of print on the virtues of women being in the home. This notion was talked about by Rousseau whose views on education were expanded upon during the 18th century.

The first education is the most important and the first education belongs incontestably to women, if the author of nature had wanted it to belong to men, he would have given them milk with which to nurse the children. Always speak, then, preferably to women in your treatises on education, for beyond the fact that they are in a position to watch over it more closely than are the men and always greater influence on it, they also have more interest in its success, since most widows find themselves almost at the mercy of their children, then their children make mothers keenly aware for good or ill of the effect of the way they raised their children.

Rousseau (1762) p. 37

Whilst their husbands worked, the role of the woman was to permit their husbands success to be judged through them. This was done by viewing what way a woman (who through her husband's salary was permitted to be at leisure) occupied and functioned within the home.

What this meant in material and aesthetic terms was quite complex. In creating a home for her family, the middle class housewife was communicating an image of herself, both to herself and others, as well as simultaneously positioning herself within a social group in a contradistinction to other social groups.

At this time, women and their identities went unrecognised by mainstream culture, a clear demonstration of this was their inability to vote. In seeking a voice and a mode of expression, women turned to the sole vessel for communication that was deemed acceptable to them by society, the home. The home became an environment where women could exercise their aesthetic sensibilities, their social aspirations, their self identities, through the acquisition and arrangement of objects. For example, the participation in and maintenance of the home by the woman was viewed as critical by society. Evidence of this can be found in the form of a plethora of guidebooks and manuals that were published for women (often by women) on the subject of the home.

'An Encyclopaedia of Domestic Economy' (Webster, 1844), 'The Modern Housewife' or 'Ménagère Soyer' (1849), 'The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine' (Beeton, 1852). These were guidebooks that promoted attitudes for a woman to adopt within the home. Later editions of these types of manuals

indicated an impact from the Industrial Revolution where aspects of taste and judgement of taste in terms of decoration within the home were beginning to appear.

'Hints on Household Taste' (Eastlake, 1872), 'Decoration and Furniture of Town Houses' (R.W. Edis, 1881), 'The Art of Housekeeping' (Haweis, 1897), 'The Art of the House' (Watson, 1897).

The 'morals' of housekeeping centred not only on 'taste' but between 'starting and continuing' and between 'acquiring and aspiring'.

Briggs (1921), p. 219

Large scale exhibitions became platforms for new fangled goods such as statuettes, ornaments, furniture, knickknacks e.g. the Great Exhibition of 1851 held in London's Hyde Park and the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876.

Women within the home functioned on a level which had never before been seen. This, again, can be viewed in Adrian Fortys discussion of the role of the 'Home' in this era.

The many late 19th century handbooks gave a wealth of detailed advice on domestic decoration from which certain principles can be deduced. After making the home as unlike the husband's place of work as possible, the second general principle as mentioned by 'Elsie de Wolfe' was that 'the interior should express the personality of its occupants especially that of the lady of the house.'

Forty (1986) p. 105

The paralleling of women and their homes grew to such an extent that domestic environments were now becoming regarded as barometers of the level of the occupants culture and civility. The association of home environment and the level of cultivation, morality, aesthetics and ethics one had was such that, inadequate consideration, in terms of the design of one's interior, could mean social suicide.

Society was caught up in the Industrial Revolution which was eagerly generating goods for consumption. It was the objects which were considered 'articles of virtue' which were of particular interest to women. Women could consume these objects and then display them in their home as a sign of good character, and whilst styles and fashion, as to what was considered fashionable changed, the factor which remained consistent was the idea of the object being utilised as a sign of good taste or character.

The phenomenon of an object being an emissary of a culture became firmly established at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century which is a concept that is discussed in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER TWO : READING ROOMS

Post modern culture tends to define identity in terms of ownership: possessions, status and qualities ... yet ... Our modern hunger to belong is particularly intense. An increasing majority of people feel no belonging.

O'Donohue (1998) p. 2.

The increasingly fast pace of daily life means that people are returning to their homes later in the day, with more things occupying their minds, requiring more than ever a sense of sanctuary from their home. The sense of requiring a place where we belong has been an issue which has become more dominant within our culture as the millennium approaches.

Sanctuary 1. A holy place. A place of refuge
Take sanctuary, seek asylum
Asylum, refuge, retreat, shelter.
Asylum, refuge, protection, shelter and safety.

Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus

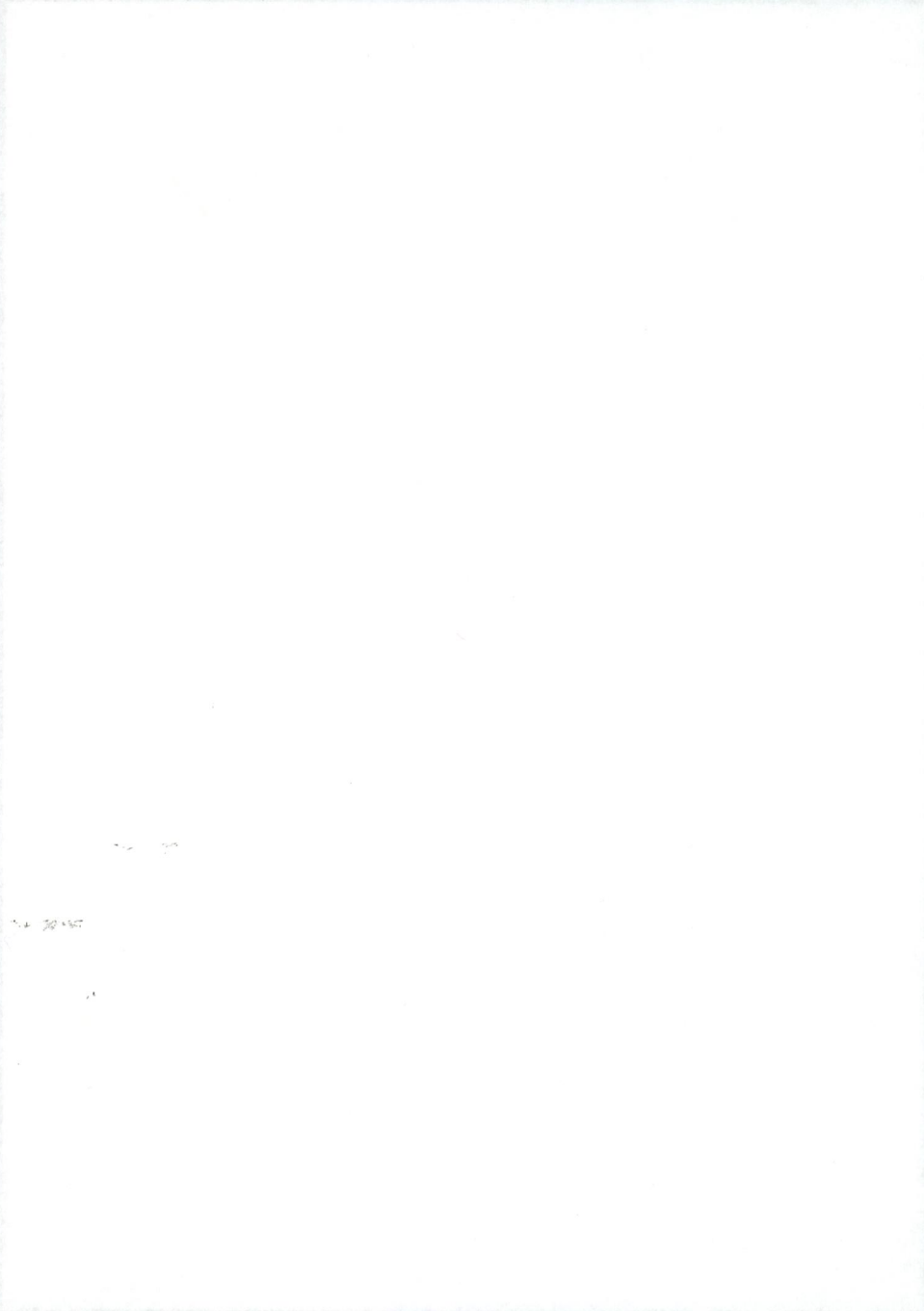
If the notion of protection is important to us as adults, then the importance of it to a child can only be magnified. After the mother's womb, the child's bedroom aims to form the ultimate sanctuary. It is a place that receives the child as a baby and returns a young adult to the world. It is also within this spatial context that identity unfolds and firms. The interesting issue with children's rooms is that because they are places where identities are created, they must contain so many facets of the child's developing personality - past, present and future.

Oftentimes the varying objects found in children's bedrooms reveal the history and future that form the child's personality.

Picture 1 documents this clearly.

Picture 1





This is a photograph of a young girl's bedroom from an average suburban home. She is eight. On her desk there are many objects which are symbolic of this child's development and formation. On the top shelf of the desk there are two Barbie dolls, a set of books which include childish stories like *The Secret Life of Bears*, *The Borrowers*, *The Magic Showbird* and *The Mystery of the Invisible Thief*. But below this there are CD's aimed at a teenage market which include music from *All Saints* and *M People*. The little girl's desk is filled with objects that reveal what she is interested in now as well as objects that she has grown out of.



Picture 2



Picture 2 is a photograph of the little girl's desk. This desk is composed of history that is indicative of what education and interests this child has already gone through and also the interests she may have in the future.

Each home hosts the arrival of history and assists the departure of new destiny. The walls of the home contain immense happenings that occur gradually under the subtle veil of normality. Though each family is a set of new individuals, ancient relics and residues seep through from past generations.

O'Donoghue (1998) p. 38.

Who we are, what we are interested in and simply, what we do with our lives are forms of influence. These influences, of course, infiltrate our environment. It is no different in the case of the children. 'The home hosts the arrival of history ...', as O'Donoghue says, but equally our interiors are composed of many varying histories: history of our personal past, and our daily history which consists of our daily routine - getting up and going out - as well as references to the future. Our environments therefore are an expression of who we are.

Our relationship with our spatial context documents more than we realise. In the case of children's rooms, what is being documented is a growing child. It is for this very reason that a child's bedroom is a constantly moving thing. It is kinetic. Its' elements move to follow the child's development whether this is physically, mentally or spiritually. Picture 3 illustrates this.



Picture 3

Picture 3 is of the same little girl's door. On it there are emissaries of the past, present as well as future. The fabric letters that spell the name 'Laura' were given to her when she was born. They might be described as the remnants from her baby days. These letters have a soft felt like texture, they are in pastel colours, which can be associated with femininity and babies, and the actual shapes (in terms of typography) are very rounded and gentle. This again brings the 'connotations' of 'baby' to the room. These letters are an emissary of the past.



The Disney stickers that have been stuck on were collected from cereal packets. This in itself symbolises the growth this little girl has undergone. She is now eating cereal, she has also entered the world of mass-produced, child orientated products. These stickers are her prize for eating cereal. Because they are prizes they have a value. She may have to fight brothers and sisters in order to get them. She might also trade these objects amongst friends so that these objects are not only stickers, they become 'prized objects' and therefore might attain a status of currency.

These objects are further emissaries of this little girl's growth and changing relationship with the world of child orientated objects. Another symbol of change is visible in the form of writing, that is found on the door. The little girl has stamped her mark on her territory by writing 'Laura's room' on her bedroom door and also the words 'keep out' on her wardrobe door. The fact that she has done this indicates her ability to write and perhaps, more importantly, the recognition of her identity. This room is her own after all and as the domain is hers she feels that she might dictate the behaviour of others in it, i.e. Keep out of my wardrobe.

She has also taken pages from teen magazines such as *Top Pop* and *Smash Hits* and pinned them to her door. The pages of these magazines refer to singers such as Sporty Spice from the *Spice Girls* and Nathalie from *All Saints*. Most interesting of all is the fact that this little girl has made a collage of her favourite actor, Leonardo di Caprio. She has cut out a picture of him and stuck him on a white page, then she has stuck on stickers of him all around the white page. It is these objects and combination of these objects that document the changing relationship of this little girl, with child orientated,

mass produced products. It also reveals what she is interested in now, as well as her aspirations for the future.

Picture 4



Pictures 4 and 5 show the inside of this little girl's wardrobe. Everything within this wardrobe is highly organised and choreographed. This girl is tidy and organised, and enjoys categorising objects.



Picture 5



Picture 6 is a further example of storage within this little girl's room. A plastic rack which is moveable is filled with plastic drawers. Picture 7 is a photograph of the top of this rack. It shows us the objects she uses everyday including hairbands, pink slippers, 'Spice Girls Impulse Deodorant', and a Barbie make-up bag.





Picture 6



Picture 7





Picture 8

This little girl's room is not simply composed of incongruous objects, it is filled with objects that are utilised daily by the child, it has been arranged by the child to express to the world who she is, what she is interested in and aspirations she may have.

(The television in this room is visible in Picture 8).



Magazines and, in particular, the television in this room act as a source for this little girl in finding images and icons to emulate. It is through the advertising of products such as 'Spice Girl Deodorant' that this little girl may discover the world of child related fashionable mass produced goods.

The composition of this room denotes the history of the development of the child. It is almost an archaeology of her development, illustrating baby in a nursery, to a child who eats cereal and wins free stickers, to a more sophisticated pre-teen who composes collages with favourite persons. This does not encompass her actual personality. Instead, the individual objects that have been gathered by the child become signs that record the changing engagement of the child with the world of fashionable mass produced child orientated products.

The child refers to the world of marketing and consumption by looking at the television or magazines. This world becomes a source, a pick and mix for selecting ideals and stereotypes. It is with or against these sources that she may validate herself, her gender, her identity.

Picture 9



Picture 10

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the transparency and accountability of the organization. This section also outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze data, ensuring that the information is reliable and up-to-date.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the implementation of the proposed changes. It details the steps involved in the transition process, from the initial planning phase to the final execution. This section also addresses the potential challenges that may arise during the implementation and provides strategies to overcome them.

3. The third part of the document discusses the long-term impact of the changes. It highlights the expected benefits, such as improved efficiency and cost savings, and provides a timeline for when these benefits are expected to be realized. This section also includes a discussion on the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the changes to ensure they are meeting the intended goals.

4. The fourth part of the document provides a detailed overview of the financial aspects of the project. It includes a breakdown of the estimated costs and a comparison of the expected benefits against the initial investment. This section also discusses the funding sources and the timeline for the financial review.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the legal and regulatory requirements that must be met. It outlines the various laws and regulations that apply to the project and provides a checklist of the required documentation. This section also includes a discussion on the potential legal risks and how to mitigate them.

6. The sixth part of the document provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations. It highlights the most important points from the document and provides a clear path forward for the organization. This section also includes a discussion on the next steps and the timeline for the implementation of the changes.

Pictures 9 and 10 are the final photographs of this child's bedroom. These photographs show how the parents were the initial influence on creating an identity or tone in this bedroom. The duvet cover, pillowcase and curtain fabric have all been selected by the mother. The imagery on this fabric is of Holly Hobby. This aspect of the decoration of this interior was selected by the parents on behalf of their child when she was a baby. In themselves, these objects are visible signs of 'femininity' and 'little girlness', they connote all that a little girl should 'ideally' be. In themselves, these objects dually document the aspirations that these parents have or had for this little girl. They are also objects which reveal the history of this little girl's formation, as they represent her parents' vision of what they expected their little girl to be like.

One of the fundamental differences between a child's bedroom and an adult's one is that the child's bedroom is composed of an amalgamation of objects usually from birth to their present age. Since this 'time period' from baby to say 'ten year old' encompasses such a huge expanse of change, growth and time the room tends to reflect this.

The room holds an archaeology of symbols. It is these that reveal the various stages that have met this child as they have grown. Adults are different from children, they tend to have personalities and identities that are definite and fixed. The adults have already gone through the process of having varying interests and learning different skills and acquiring new knowledge, so their bedroom reflects this. When an adult decides to decorate their bedroom, it is not just the bedside table that gets altered. Usually, it is the whole room that gets overhauled. The whole identity of the adult is updated. The case of the child is in marked contrast to this. Firstly, it is the parents

who initially set the decoration in place and it is from this that the child then begins to define themselves and mark their territory. The child's bedroom is a moving canvas, the documentation that is occurring is fluid. The room is put together piece by piece.

It is interesting to enter a child's bedroom. It is a place that is composed of many objects, textures, scales, colours and shapes. It is multi-faceted and incongruous due to having so many influences upon it. It witnesses many changes which visit the child through their various stages of growth and development. The parental influence, the influence of peers and the influence of culture are all manifested within one physical space. It is the child though who has the greatest influence upon the environment. Through looking at photographs of the room and examining them, the room clearly sends a semiological message. This message denotes information to the viewer about the child, their place within society, gender and interests.

By utilising a semiological format, the content and form of a room is separated. The room which is composed of objects can then be examined in terms of sign. Therefore, the bedroom is not seen as an environment with a bed, desk, bedside table and wardrobe, rather as a sign system conveying messages or meanings related to matters such as education, status and aesthetic judgement.

The system of sign is a theoretical concept which can be broken down in various ways. Saussure, Barthes, Baudrillard were among the leading semiologists. In particular, Barthes, in his book *Mythologies*, revealed

how apparently familiar things signify all kinds of ideas about the world

Forty (1986) p.6

It is hoped that the semiological approach utilised in examining the child's bedroom would highlight the importance of a child's bedroom as a document of an emerging identity.

Even the humblest material artifact, which is the product and symbol of a particular civilisation is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes.

T.S. Elliott
Note Toward the Definition of Culture (1947)

CHAPTER THREE : BEFORE THE CHILD'S BEDROOM - THE NURSERY

This chapter deals with the subject of the nursery. The topic of the nursery will be discussed on two levels.:

1. The relevance of the modern day nursery to the child's bedroom.
2. The history of the nursery in relation to the identity of the child.

Firstly, the modern day nursery will be examined. Pictures 11 & 12 are portrayals of nurseries in a *Homestyle* magazine (February 1999 issue). They are examples of modern nurseries.

The nursery is the room that usually welcomes the new born baby into the home. This room is the starting point, a blank canvas from which both the child and the room will evolve. The relevance of the modern day nursery, to the subject of this thesis (the child's bedroom), is that, the nursery is usually the preliminary stage of the development of the child's room, i.e. the nursery is the child's bedroom's predecessor. It is this room that is the first environment of the child, and it is from this spatial context that the baby will begin to evolve into a child.

As a result of this, one room will also begin to evolve into another, transforming from a nursery that caters for a baby/toddler to a child's bedroom that caters for a little girl or boy. The connection between the nursery and the child's bedroom is clear and obvious. The nursery is the foundation for what is to become a child's bedroom.

Picture 11

‘The Modern Nursery’
Homestyle, February 1999



from from Credit
and include) a
sample of 117
a sample 117
a \$30 There is
in the sample
agrees and more
1544543.

of getting out
in this way
Hence the
the SVC in
and the unit also
the industry
with high and
as a high line
of the unit
and wheels
of 11724
11724

Picture 12

‘Mamas and Papas’
Nursery featured in *Homestyle*, February 1999





Just as the new born baby will grow into a young child, so too the nursery will grow into a child's bedroom.

The nursery is kinetic, adapting to the needs of the young child. Where the room/nursery might once contain a cot or cradle, eventually a bed will be put in its place. The short life span of nursery furniture, is an example of how radically the needs of a growing child change. Companies that manufacture such goods are now realising that their furniture must be adaptable to the differing stages of childhood.

In Picture 11 there is a nappy changing table. This wooden cabinet is at a comfortable waist high height for an adult to easily change the baby's nappy. The top part of this cabinet has a wooden safety feature which prevents the child from rolling over or falling from the nappy changing area.

This piece of furniture is an example of a quite adaptable object. Whilst the primary function of this piece of furniture is to change nappies, once the child has become toilet trained the cabinet will not become redundant. Instead, it will continue to serve as a storage unit in the child's bedroom

Nowadays, furniture is multifunctional, it evolves with the growth of the child - from the differing stages of infancy to the active years of early childhood. The input of the parent to the room is critical at all stages. The relationship of the parent to the room is a close one. One of the examples of this is the increasing number of parents who buy flatpack children's furniture from stores such as IKEA and Habitat. The furniture is sold as a flatpack and it is the parent who must put it together like a 3D jigsaw puzzle.

In doing this, they actively create the nursery/child's bedroom by physically assembling it. This is a mark of the input a parent has upon the creation of the child's bedroom. This aspect of D.I.Y. decoration has recently become very fashionable in contemporary culture, particularly in the media.

The interest in home decoration and design has manifested itself in the form of television programmes that have been created in conjunction with magazines. This magazine and related TV programme phenomenon, has occurred both in England and Ireland. In Ireland, R.T.E. have produced a TV programme called *Beyond the Hall Door* - there is also the R.T.E. magazine which is of the same name and deals with interior design.

In England, B.B.C. have produced a plethora of TV programmes, *Changing Rooms* and *Home Front* being examples. *Home Front* is a B.B.C. produced TV programme that has a magazine of the same name produced in conjunction with the programme.

Pictures 13 and 14 are examples of pages from the *Home Front* book. This book does makeovers on differing interiors. The make-over in question here is of a nursery. Pictures 13, 14, 15 and 16 are typical examples of pages found in this book. Picture 13 is entitled 'The Baby's Room' and shows the 'before' shot of the makeover. Picture 14 is the 'after' shot of the makeover. These two shots, as well as the comprehensive explanations of techniques used in the makeover, aid the parent to see the potential of a room. The *Home Front* book is a guide to realising your own personal makeover. Picture 15 and 16 are clear examples of the book demonstrating to parents how to build a changing unit to fit on a chest of drawers. This book is

actively encouraging parents to participate in the interior decoration and creation of their child's nursery. An interesting note can be found on Picture 16, on this page there is a tip which suggests that the changing unit could, once finished with, be used as an underbed storage drawer.

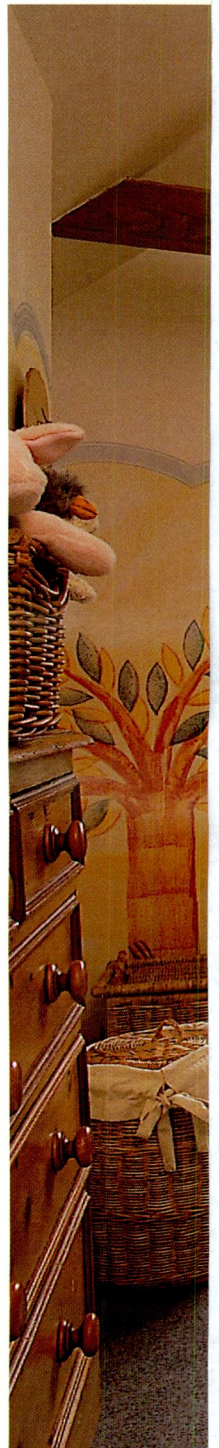
Picture 13

B.B.C. *Home Front* Series
'The Makeover of the Baby's Room'

The baby's room is in a country cottage that had been newly built to an old design. Although the room has plenty of interesting features, the new hard edges needed softening. Colourwashing and stamping did the trick.

The *Baby's* Room

BELOW: THE SPARE ROOM HAD JUST BEEN
DECORATED WHEN THE OWNERS DISCOVERED
THAT A NEW BABY WAS ON THE WAY.

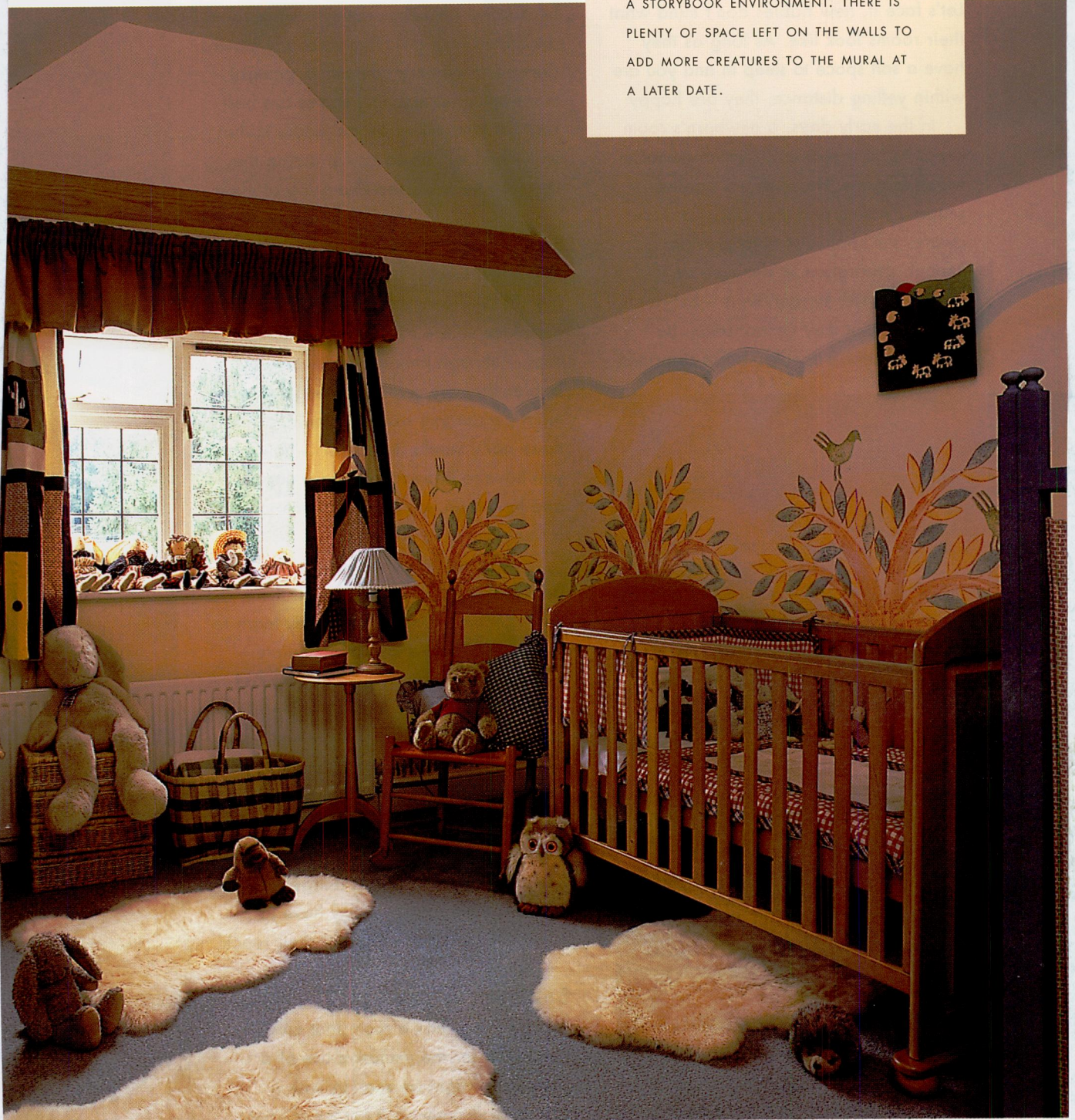




Picture 14

B.B.C. *Home Front* Series 'The Makeover of the Baby's Room'

BELOW: WE CHOSE A COUNTRY THEME FOR THE ROOM, USING MURALS AND APPLIQUÉ COTTAGE CURTAINS TO CREATE A STORYBOOK ENVIRONMENT. THERE IS PLENTY OF SPACE LEFT ON THE WALLS TO ADD MORE CREATURES TO THE MURAL AT A LATER DATE.





Picture 15

B.B.C. *Home Front* Series
'The Makeover of the Baby's Room'

THE BABY'S ROOM

Changing unit

This is based on a similar changing unit that we saw at a friend's home many years ago. It consists of a removable tray that fits on top of an existing chest of drawers. The unit is held securely in place by a lip below the base.

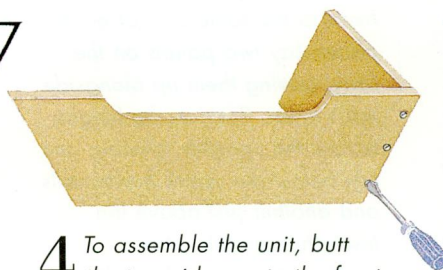
YOU WILL NEED... 18 mm ($\frac{3}{4}$ in) MDF for the base, front, back sides and undershelf
• A handsaw • An electric drill or hand drill fitted with a countersunk bit • A jigsaw • Wood adhesive
• Wood screws, 25 mm (1 in) long • A screwdriver
• Wood filler (optional) • Wood primer • Satinwood paint in your chosen colour • A small foam roller or household paintbrush

1 Measure the top of your chest of drawers and cut a piece of MDF to the exact size. This is the base of your unit.



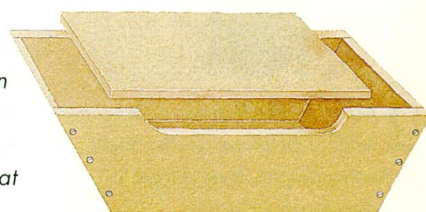
2 Draw a base line the same length as the chest of drawers on a sheet of MDF. Mark a 30-degree angle at either end to give the slope of the sides, extending it 15 cm (6 in) above the base line and 4 cm (1½ in) below the base line. This will give the lip that is needed to hold the unit on the chest. Using this drawing as template, cut out two pieces of MDF – one for the front and one for the back. Then use a jigsaw to cut a curved section out of the front only.

3 Cut out the two end pieces. These are rectangles, each the same depth as the chest of drawers and 15 cm (6 in) high.



4 To assemble the unit, butt the two sides up to the front and back pieces, mark the position of the screws, then drill pilot holes through from the front and back. Glue the pieces together, then reinforce with screws. If desired, fill the pilot holes with filler before painting.

5 Drop the base in from the top. It will not go all the way to the bottom. Press it in firmly, check that it is level then secure it with wood screws through the sides. Cut a small piece of wood to form a shelf at one end of the changing unit.



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Picture 16

B.B.C. *Home Front* Series
'The Makeover of the Baby's Room'



6 Prime the entire unit, inside and out, then paint in your chosen colour – we used cornflower blue. Leave to dry, then fit the changing mat and shelf inside.

TIP

When the changing unit is no longer needed, why not convert it into an under-bed storage drawer?

ABOVE: MAKE THE UNIT TO FIT ON TOP OF AN EXISTING CHEST OF DRAWERS, USING A STANDARD PLASTIC COVERED CHANGING MAT OR PRAM MATTRESS TO PAD THE INSIDE.



The aim in looking at contemporary nurseries is to highlight the connection between them and the child's room. In the following section the nursery is discussed from the 16th Century to the 19th Century. The purpose of doing this is to give an historical context 'to what was once the child's room'. The second purpose is to highlight how the emerging recognition of the identity of the child by society influenced the environment that parents provided for their child.

The modern day concept of giving a child a bedroom of their own has not always been in operation. The history of the nursery can be documented as far back as the 16th Century. In 1583, Sir William Ingilby had a nursery at this house at Patsidehead and in 1613 the Shuttelworths of Crawthorpe listed amongst their household inventory "twelve yards of frieze for cradle blankets". The history of the nursery can be defined in two specific stages:

1. Pre the Age of Enlightenment
2. Post the Age of Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment was contributed to by the Writings of Rousseau, specifically his book *Emile*. During the Enlightenment there grew an increased recognition of the identity of the child as being one of 'a child' rather than a miniaturised adult. Prior to the Age of Enlightenment, during the 16th and 17th Centuries, the nursery acted as a 'garderie' for these miniaturised adults. Children were viewed as props, or decorative objects which provided amusing distractions for parents. The 16th and 17th Century aristocratic nurseries were draped in lavish and opulent fabrics, e.g. silk, velvet and cloth of gold and silver. The purpose in doing this, however, was not for the comfort of the child, but rather as a method of displaying wealth or status amongst adults.

Picture 17 is a photograph which displays such lavish use of fabric. Although it is of a later period, it is still indicative of fabric usage in a nursery context. The reality of 'Pre Enlightenment' childhood was austere with rules and strict modes of behaviour. Children had to endure a multitude of regulations. The 17th Century nursery was a spartan place, the room was generally located in the attic, the reasoning behind this being that it was the furthest room from everything, including the parents. The children were vigorously guarded by a nanny who supervised meals and bath times. As well as having to provide tutoring for older children, the nanny lived with the children for 24 hours a day and would often sleep in the same bed as the child. Conditions were basic - floors were kept bare for utility purposes and the sounds of the children's voices were muffled in the baize covered doors.

Before the Age of Enlightenment the nursery was a physical space that existed, not for the basic good of the child, but as a symbolic emissary by the parents to society concerning their wealth. With the Age of Enlightenment came a gradual improvement of conditions in the nursery. The shift in attitude also coincided with the Industrial Revolution. As previously discussed, the Industrial Revolution developed a society who were aware of education and technology. Products that came out of the industrial boom reflected the changing attitude within society towards children. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was an example of how society was embracing change. The young Queen Victoria and Prince Albert who frequented the Exhibition were role models for society. They were young, of childbearing age and concerned with the trappings of domesticity. The fact that daily child care routines within the Palace were more relaxed and natural, also had a bearing on society's treatment of children. Changes began to visit nurseries across England and Ireland.

Picture 17

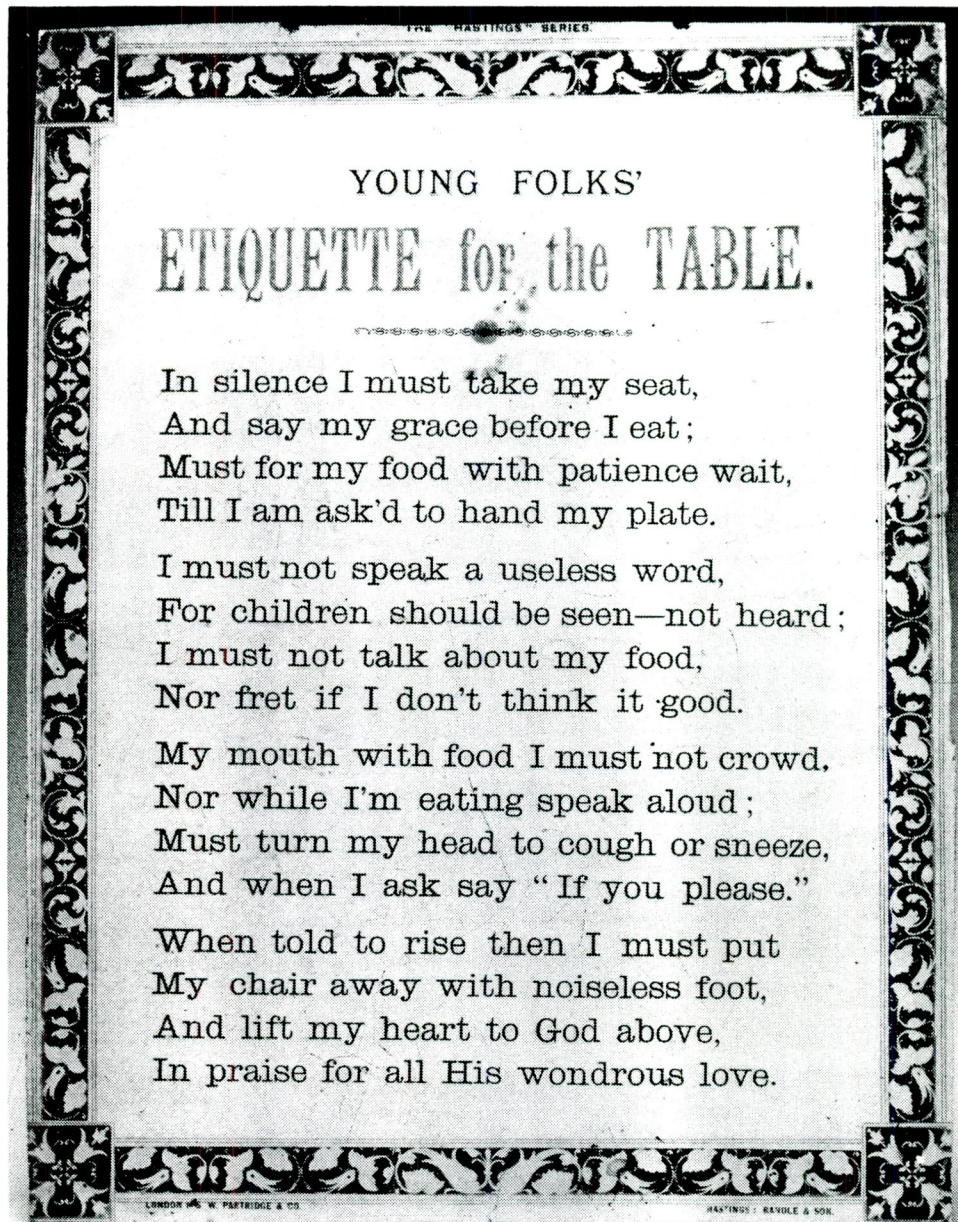
Osborne





Picture 18

A late Victorian Card endorsing the philosophy 'Children should be seen and not heard' circa 1880, Cambridge & Co. Folk Museum.





The greatest sign of change was the consideration with which society approached children. Now the nursery was no longer a place of children only, parent were involving themselves more in their child's lives. The nurseries contents began to reflect the change of attitude of society towards child care. Furniture such as screens, wash-stands, tables, chairs and high chairs began to be built to suit the children's needs.

One of the first areas to receive attention were the walls of the nursery. With mechanisation, the slow block printing process for wallpaper was speeded up. This occurred in the 1840s, during the 1860s there was an improvement of colour usage and by the late 19th Century the mass production of low cost wallpapers was in evidence.

Artists such as Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane provided aesthetic yet educational designs for wallpapers in nurseries. Picture 19 is an example of the type of wallpaper being produced. Nannies and mothers were further encouraged by guidebooks which promoted the jollification of dank and stuffy nurseries. *The Magazine of Art*, published in London, declared in the 1880s of the contemporary child:

He may be said to be something of a critic 'ere he leaves the cradle and an adept style 'ere he sees fit to abandon long garments for his aesthetic opportunities are innumerable and matter produced for gratification of his pampered appetite is perhaps the daintiest ever seen.

Picture 19

The section taken from nursery wallpaper designed by Kate Greenaway in 1893. It is entitled 'The Months' - showing scenes from the different seasons.



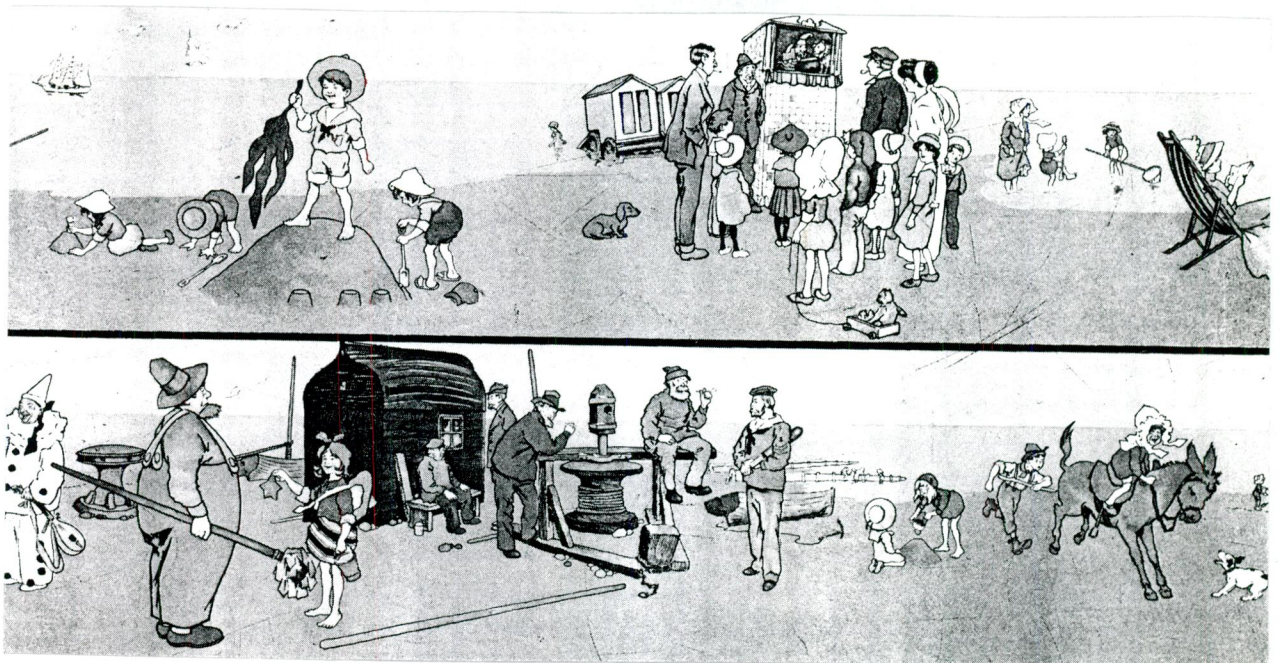
1941

1. The first part of the report is a general survey of the situation in the country. It is followed by a detailed account of the work done during the year.

Date		Description		Amount	
1941	1	Jan 1	Balance forward	100.00	
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1941	3	Jan 3	Jan 3	100.00	
1941	4	Jan 4	Jan 4	100.00	
1941	5	Jan 5	Jan 5	100.00	
1941	6	Jan 6	Jan 6	100.00	
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1941	8	Jan 8	Jan 8	100.00	
1941	9	Jan 9	Jan 9	100.00	
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Picture 20

An example of a frieze that became popular during the 1890s - again evidence of decorative features that indicated a shift in attitude towards children.



Picture 21

A selection of 'Bunnykins' ware, 1934. Royal Doulton.
This type of nursery paraphernalia was actively sought by parents - it is still highly popular today.



The Victorians were besotted with all paraphernalia but where it concerned children the interest in objects and the production of objects orientated towards children's use was astounding. China companies such as Wedgewood and Royal Doultan produced nursery china for consumption. Plates, cups and saucers were decorated with scenes from Alice in Wonderland. A late production, which remains popular today, was a Royal Doultan collection named 'Bunnykins' (see Picture 21 previous page).

It was clear that the advances made in technology as a result of the Industrial Revolution were infiltrating the home, in the form of objects. The developing consumerist culture of the day wanted new things, especially new things that demonstrated that you were following the pressures to show you were child-orientated, and therefore domesticated and civilised.

The acquisition of pro-child products was actively met by the suppliers of paraphernalia, e.g. Wedgwood, Chippendale, Royal Doultan, Staffordshire Pottery. Bric-a-brac provided the perfect opportunity for the display of child friendly images and ideas. These were further embellished onto objects. Embellishment meant anything from embroidery on babies' bibs and nursery textile pieces, printing and enamelling on chinaware to hand painting and stencilling of furniture.

The foundations for what we recognise as today's child's bedroom were firmly being established in the nurseries in the late Georgian and Victorian periods. The importance of the nursery, both during the late Georgian and Victorian periods as well as today's modern nursery, is that they have both contributed to the formation of what we recognise today as 'The Child's Bedroom'. By the Edwardian period, the nursery had evolved to a level where it is almost on a par with the nursery that the 'Mamas & Papas' company are promoting. See Pictures 22 and 23.

Picture 22

The nursery at Wallington Hall, Northumberland.
This shows many features typical of a Victorian or Edwardian nursery.





Picture 23

Advertisement by Mamas & Papas Company for nursery furniture and accessories.
Homestyle, February 1999.



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CHAPTER FOUR : THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD **RE BEDROOM**

By education most have been mislead.
So they believe, because they were so bred.
The priest continues what the nurse began
And thus the child imposes on the man.

John Dryden
From a book of quotations
The Promise of a New Day, 1983

In discussing children's bedrooms and their decoration, one of the issues which is important to mention is the two different relationships that parents and children have with the room.

The domain of a child is the domain of an individual who is emerging out of themselves, they are learning, mentally, physically and emotionally about who they are and what their place in the world is. Therefore, their environment, most especially their bedroom which surrounds them, which they occupy and is reserved as theirs, is vital as a contribution to their emergence and development of personal expression. These have always been the needs of a child, but it is only since the Victorian times that these needs have begun to be recognised and considered when providing quarters for children.

The relationship of a parent to the environment that has been allocated the child is interesting. Providing there is no major financial or physical restrictions within the home, the role of the parent is to provide the child with the best possible habitat and surroundings to facilitate the development of the child.

Of course, this is the theory. But there are nuances that appear within this theory. Initially, it is the parents who decide on the format for the child's bedroom. This, of course, is for obvious reasons, namely the child is too young to be looking through swatches of wallpaper and fabric.

The child's room tends to evolve from a nursery 'stage' and parents do all of the controlling here, in terms of decision making on behalf of the child. The position of the bed, the amount and type of storage that is to be provided are all chosen by the parent. The amount of arranging, and defining of what the child's bedroom (both at the nursery stage and later) will look like is very much controlled by the parents. The extent to which this control is exercised varies from family to family, but the issue which remains consistent homes is that it is the parents who initially decide upon the decoration and definition of what a child's bedroom is, or consists of. It is this factor which is most important. Parents are not simply deciding upon a colourful frieze and a lick of paint, they are not simply buying matching Mr. Men curtains and duvet covers, other issues are at hand. As with any interior, the factors which decide the reasons for the way an interior looks vary greatly. There are many influences for the way a spatial environment is decorated, which include; personal taste, a desire to express or validate the self through objects, the desire to demonstrate to society status or aesthetic knowledge. These reasons, of course, will also enter into the equation when a child's bedroom is decorated. To look at this scenario from the parents' standpoint might be useful.

Firstly, parents, on average, are enthusiastic creatures, they happily want to provide objects for their children. In decorating a child's bedroom what may happen is the

enthusiasm of the parent takes over. Parents may indulge in their own personal fantasies or try and reclaim some of their lost childhood when decorating their child's room. In doing that their role as providers is forgotten and the adults purchase and acquire not on behalf of their child, but for their own personal gratification.

The issue of identity in a child's bedroom is one which needs assessment. Exactly whose room is it? Whose influences can be found in it? Who chose the colour of the walls or the duvet cover? Identity in a child's bedroom is an issue where there are two opponents. The struggle a child and parent go through is documented in the differing objects that can be found in any child's room. There is a delicacy with which identity in a child's room must be handled. A child needs encouragement to become themselves, true, they also need boundaries to add definition to who they are becoming, but most important of all a child needs a space which will allow them to fully form and establish their own identity. Should a child's bedroom consist solely of the parents identity, in the form of their taste, their desires and their aspiration, then the child will not be able to acquire the independence of an individual.

A second occurrence that can happen is that parents may purchase objects or decorate the child's bedroom based on the reasoning that this way of doing things demonstrates their 'taste' and therefore satisfactorily demonstrates a 'style' or 'taste' for their child. In this case, the child's bedroom does not express the identity of the child occupant, but rather the interior of the bedroom becomes an extension of the parents' own identity or own social aspirations.

Finally, a third phenomena that may appear, parents may purchase a curtain style or image in terms of bedroom decoration because they feel pressurised to create a bedroom that is in keeping with stereotypical ideals, concerning what a little girl's bedroom, or a little boy's room should look like.

There are many reasons and underlying factors for the way the interior of a child's bedroom is assembled. In discussing children's bedroom decoration, these issues can be more easily viewed and discussed by taking examples. In the next chapter this will occur. By taking examples and ideals that feature in the media - in home decorating magazines and books (B.B.C.) and contrasting these with photographic images of a real child's room found in an average home in Dublin. By doing this, the realities of the child's bedroom in terms of its expression, message, function, image can be discussed.

Prior to doing this, however, it is important to look at the influence of 'reals and ideals', to put into context their role in our culture and how they might influence how we go about decorating an interior.

The late 20th Century has seen the development of a popular culture that is obsessed with itself. Self development, self preservation, self help and self esteem are evidence of the way in which our language is even orientated towards the concern we have with ourselves. The focusing of an individual upon oneself has been a process that has become more evident within society as the 21st Century approaches. The social values have become values which reflect this change in society. Values that have manifested include; the desire for individual identity, personal pleasure and personal gratification.

These, it may be said, are upheld as ideals. Material culture has played an active role in brining about the way we form, reinforce and embody these ideals.

Since we are concerned with self, we have projected this into our environments, our possessions, our social outlook and our mental and spiritual health. Materialistic tendencies within culture have provide a way of validating the self through acquisition of objects that sustain our lifestyle ideals. The most important aspect concerning ideals is that often the act of buying and possessing, by the consumer, is the act of buying and possessing not of the object, but of the value or ideology which has been assigned to the object. This is where the issue of stereotypes slips into the equation, stereotypes allow the average person to recognise a sign of a certain group of people within society. (An example of a stereotypical vision of a little girl's room is discussed in Chapter 5).

As ideals are translated into forms, they are transformed into material backcloths of our lives, which in turn play a part in helping to reinvigorate, substantiate and indeed, to construct those same ideals.

The circular process is central to an understanding of the way in which material culture - the objects and environment which surrounds us - intersects with culture in general.

Sparke, 1995, P. 6

The material culture which was born out of the Industrial Revolution has bred choice, it has created idealised ways of living which are separate from reality. To be aware of these ideals and reals in our culture, allows us to correctly assess and examine how they operate in our homes. We can look at how ideals affect the way we select and choose the decoration of our interiors and contrast this with the realities of daily life. It is necessary to have discussed this in order to provide foundations for the discussion

of ideals depicted in interior design magazines and the actual realities of the decoration of children's bedrooms. This is the main subject in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE : REAL, MAKEOVER AND IDEAL

This chapter deals with the subject of 'the little girl's room'. The subject has been looked at in three different categories. The reason for looking at differing versions of a 'little girl's room' is to gain more information as to what a little girl's room really is. What does it consist of? Whose identity does the room hold? It is hoped that it is this type of questioning that will reveal answers as to what a child's bedroom is really about. This chapter may be broken down into three parts:

1. The ideal little girl's room
2. The makeover room - from real to ideal
3. The real little girl's room

For an example of an ideal room a photograph depicted in the English magazine *Perfect Home*, January 1997 was selected. Although it is not an Irish example, it proved to be the most suitable example of an 'ideal'. See Picture 24. The 'ideal' or unreal nature of this bedroom can firstly be gleamed from the magazines title for the article; 'Dream bedroom for children'. Unfortunately, this title does not appear directly near the picture so it could not be included. The interior of this bedroom has been created utilising quite stereotypical 'little girl' ingredients, from the colour of the walls to the use of theatrical fairytale type sets, the identity of this room has firmly been established as being one of 'little girl'.

Picture 24

Perfect Home, January 1997
'Dream Bedrooms for Children'



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The identity of 'little girlness' has carefully been choreographed so that the language in this 'ideal' little girl's room is inherently female. This feminine identity has been embued into all aspects of the decoration of this room.

Firstly, the walls have either been painted or wallpapered a soft pink colour. Pink is traditionally the colour associated with little girls, from ballet shoes and tutus, little girls have been perhaps stereotypically linked to the colour pink since birth.

The walls also feature a wide border which is like a frieze with images on it. This border acts as an alternative to a dado rail. Normally, this decorative feature is found in rooms that are used by adults such as dining rooms, lounges, libraries and studies. Their original use was in dining rooms to prevent scuff marks appearing on the walls. Picture 5 is an example of an adult room with a dado rail. However, in the little girl's room the decorative feature that is the dado rail has been transported from the adult context to the context of a little girl's room.

The use of fabric in this ideal room is quite stereotypical in nature. Pleats have long been considered a feminine way of displaying fabric. Because they consist of vast 'amounts' of fabric, pleats naturally fold and gather, it is this gentle undulating effect (which is without practical function) that is visible in this ideal room. The treatment of fabric around the window is feminine because of the amount of fabric and also its colour (pink). The curtain also has a pelmet which hangs like a miniaturised curtain over the main curtain. The end of the pelmet has been edged with pink trimming. It is these details, this type of treatment of a window in terms of adornment, that lets us recognise that this room is 'for girl' and could not have any other identity, or function.

Picture 25

From *25 Beautiful Homes*, April 1998
'Looking at the dado rail, and ornate pelmet ...'



more than 100
followers who club
by point

The 'dream room' utilises fabric around the bed. The duvet fabric co-ordinate with that of the window curtains. Instead of pillows, there are cushions on the bed, all of the fabrics feature the colour pink - both in the strip and floral motif. The cushions also have pleated edges. There are 3 chairs in this room. These wooden chairs all have little cushions, these small cushions are made of 'pretty fabrics'. The cushions are circular in shaped, with piping and pleating.

Moving to another symbol of the little girl to be found in Picture 24, the bed. In this case, the bed has been raised from the ground. It has been placed on a wooden platform which is painted pink. The bed has been encased on three sides. There are know associations (perhaps stereotypical) of the love that little girls tend to have for anything theatrical or fairytale-ish. The manner in which this bed has been assembled is reminiscent of the front of a theatre, the front part having a theatrical, wooden pelmet and the curtains which gather at each end of the bed like stage curtains, the fairytale is complete. The interior of the room has a comfortable, cosy feel to it. It has an armchair in the corner of the room, a delicious thing to read adventure stories in, and beside it is a huge wicker work basket for the storage of bric-à-brac and toys. In all aspects of its decoration, this room aims to be the ultimate little girl's room, a true dream.

This room, however, is definitely a definition of an 'ideal' room. Whilst the room is neat and pretty, it does not posses the symbols that document the child's identity (as in the room of the little girl in Chapter 2). On the floor of this little girl's room there are a few games that have been left untidied, on the platform of the bed there is a large fluffy toy.

These are the only two objects which have been left out for the viewer to see. The room does not possess any stickers on the wall, any drawings or any writing saying 'Keep Out'. The room has been very carefully orchestrated to give a representation of a 'dream bedroom'. Ordinary emissaries found in a child's room have not been included, e.g. socks on the floor, drawings by the child on the wall. These real elements have been obliterated as they do not conform to dream status. In trying to create a vision of an 'ideal' little girl's room, the incongruity found in a real bedroom has been smoothed over.

This room is not an emissary of a child's growth, development and interaction with the world, rather it is a watered down, stereotypical representation of a room which is a fantasy.

Pictures 27, 28, 29 and 30 deal with makeover room.

The second category being discussed is the makeover room. This example of a room transforming from a 'real' to an 'ideal' situation was found in a B.B.C. book called *Homefront*. This book is a type of do-it-yourself manual that is linked to the interior design B.B.C. TV programme also called *Homefront*. This example of a little girl's room changing from a very 'real' room to an 'ideal' one is currently very much in vogue. This makeover book is pitched at adults who want to change their environment. The book offers ideas, as well as a range of practical step-by-step guides to creating objects or special effects in the room. In this case, this book (one of a series) concentrates on doing makeovers in children's rooms.

Picture 26

B.B.C. Book *Homefront*

The biggest changes in this room were achieved by ruthlessly ripping out some badly designed fitted cupboards, pulling up a shag-pile carpet and having a lot of fun with paint. Once we had decided on the look – green and cream checks – we were able to use gingham fabric to pull the elements together.

The *Little Girl's* Room

BELOW: THE ROOM WAS A JUMBLE OF TOYS, SHELVING, CUPBOARDS AND BOXES – SET AGAINST A BACKDROP OF DATED PAINT EFFECTS.





Picture 27

B.B.C. Book *Homefront*

BELOW: EVEN THOUGH WE USED A LOT OF DIFFERENT SHADES AND PAINT FINISHES, THE FINISHED ROOM LOOKS QUITE SIMPLE AND HARMONIOUS. IN THE END, WE REALLY FEEL WE HAVE ACHIEVED OUR OBJECTIVE AND GIVEN THIS LITTLE GIRL THE PRETTIEST ROOM IN WHICH TO GROW.



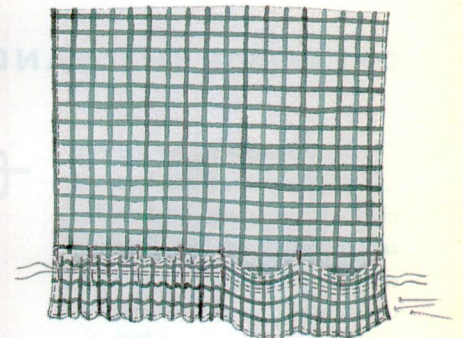
W.C. Thayer and
Society of 'Wesley'

Picture 28

B.B.C. Book *Homefront*



LEFT: WE GAVE THE SINK A FEMININE LOOK WITH A FRILLED GINGHAM SKIRT. THE EXISTING TILES DIDN'T SUIT THE NEW DÉCOR, SO WE COATED THEM WITH WHITE SATINWOOD PAINT AND ADDED A BLUE BROKEN STRIPE IN ARTIST'S OIL PAINT.



6 Lay the curtain panels right side up on a work surface and place a frill right side up along the lower edge of each. Pin the frill to the curtain at the centre and side edges, then pull up the gathering threads to fit. Pin, then topstitch in place.

7 We fixed our curtains to the hardboard with Velcro, but you could use staples and net curtain wire instead. Cut a piece of Velcro to fit, and fix the looped side to the hardboard. Pull up the cords on the curtain header tapes, then attach the other half of the Velcro over the top. Press the Velcro strips together to hang the curtains.

Picture 29

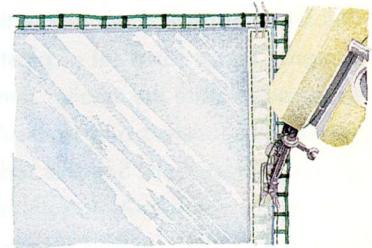
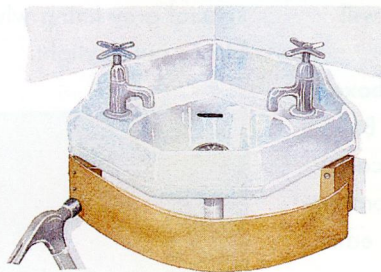
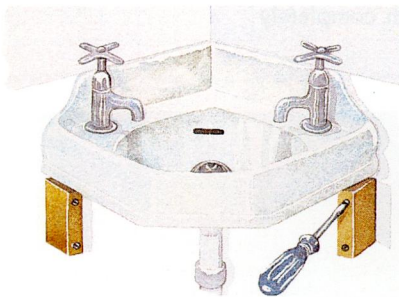
B.B.C. Book *Homefront*

THE LITTLE GIRL'S ROOM

Sink curtains

A small corner sink already existed in this room, but the pipework beneath it made it look ugly and utilitarian – even though it was actually a very pretty shape. We decided to make it more a part of the room by fitting a green gingham skirt around the sides, which not only hides the pipework, but also provides a useful storage area for toiletries and cleaning products.

YOU WILL NEED... Two 12 cm (5 in) lengths of wooden batten • An electric drill fitted with a 7 mm masonry bit • Masking tape • Brown wall plugs • Gauge 10 chipboard screws, 75 mm (3 in) long • A 12 cm (5 in) strip of hardboard • Panel pins • A hammer • furnishing fabric in your chosen colour • Sewing thread • Dressmaker's pins • 2.5 cm (1 in) curtain heading tape • Plain or self-adhesive Velcro tape



1 The curtains are secured with Velcro to a piece of hardboard that fits around the sink. You will need to fix a short batten on either side of the sink to support the hardboard. First drill holes into the side walls, just below the sink, then insert rawlplugs. Fix the battens in place with chipboard screws.

TIP

When drilling into tiles, place a small strip of masking tape on the wall to prevent the drill bit from slipping.

2 Dampen the hardboard to make it more flexible, then attach it, shiny side out, under the sink. First fix one side to a batten, using a row of panel pins, then bend the hardboard into a curve and fix the other side to the batten on the opposite side.

3 Cut out the two curtain panels, making each one the same width as the hardboard to allow for the gathers. Cut out a 12 cm (5 in) frill for each curtain, making them twice the width of each curtain panel.

4 Neaten the raw edges of each curtain by turning under a narrow hem around all four sides. To gather the top edge, stitch a length of heading tape to the wrong side, catching in the cords down one side only.



5 The frills are made from single thickness fabric, which is hemmed around all four edges and gathered at the top. Start by stitching a narrow hem around all four sides, then gather the top edge with two parallel rows of stitching.

100

100



Picture 30

B.B.C. Book *Homefront*



LEFT: WE REPLACED THE TALL AND IMPRACTICAL FITTED CUPBOARD WITH THIS STYLISH CHILDREN'S WARDROBE, COMPLETE WITH TWO LARGE DRAWERS BELOW A REACHABLE HANGING RAIL. CHILDREN OF THIS AGE ENJOY ORGANIZING THEIR OWN SPACE, SO WE PROVIDED WICKER BASKETS AND A SET OF WOODEN BOXES. SOFT TOYS ARE STILL A PROMINENT FEATURE, AND IT IS A REAL BONUS TO BE ABLE TO PROP THEM UP AROUND THE SIDES OF THE BED.

Picture 26 is the real little girl's room before the makeover has occurred. The title of this makeover is 'The little girl's room' - on top of the real picture there is a caption which reads:

Below: The room was a jumble of toys, shelving, cupboards and boxes - set against a backdrop of dated paint effects.

Before the makeover began this room was incongruous in terms of colour, shape and style.

This book is prettifying real rooms. In this case, the style or look of the room was inspired by the Swedish designer and decorative artist, Carl Larsson. He was very much interested in and aspired to an idyllic family life. The dual function of this book is to demonstrate techniques for the prettification of the rooms. Pictures 28 and 29 are examples of this. They are the make and do, D.I.Y. aspect of the book, the techniques explain how to tackle the problems on a very realistic level. Paint techniques are explained and in the case of this room, prove to be the most important within this project. Firstly, imitation gingham wallpaper and the painted swags, bows and ribbons are the strongest motifs in this room. The paint effects, it is explained, break up the height of the room separating the wall into different parts. The finished room should look quite simple and give the room a Scandinavian style. The Swedish look is sought in the way the furniture in this room has been handled. The bed is of typical Scandinavian style and provides a theatrical box type effect for the little girl to sleep in, again the fairytale of Sleeping Beauty seems to be evoked. The room also has a desk which is painted white, a traditional Scandinavian treatment of furniture to lighten

them. The stool has been made fresh and feminine through the use of blue gingham, the stool also has pleating used to soften the edges of it.

Picture 30 depicts how the child is expected to store objects and clothes (note the pleated fabric in the door frames). This room is an evolution from the perfectly pretty interior of Picture 24, yet it still utilises idyllic representations of femininity and, in particular, the level of style cultivated within this room (whilst being achievable through the careful following of the techniques) remains outside the parameters of average homes.

This makeover bedroom has taken reality and almost painted over it by giving this room a particular style. By making this room look less incongruous, the design team have created a room that in the end reveals more about the parents' aspirations and involvement in selecting this bedroom, rather than the identity of the child. This room no longer documents the child's relationship with the world or, if it does, it does so on a much quieter level. The decoration of this bedroom is very stylish but it lacks the very essence of the child's identity. The style of this room may be recognised as Scandinavian but the identity of the child and emissaries of its interaction with the world have been homogenised in order to create a pretty room.

The final example of the little girl's room is an actual room photographed in Dublin recently. The reality of the room is apparent as these following photographs were taken whilst the little girl in question was playing dress-up with her friends. Picture 31 depicts the bed and edge of the wardrobe.

Picture 31



The eclectic feel of this bedroom conveys its reality. From discussion with the parents, the room was designed for the little girl utilising traditional methods of decoration for a little girl, but the reality of the room means that it is the little girl who has the final influence upon the way the room looks.

It is evident from the photographs that originally the style of the room was closely linked to that of Picture 24.



Picture 32



Photograph 32 is evidence of that. The walls are painted pink. They have been broken up by a paper border which is pink and depicts the 1970's classic symbol for little girls - Holly Hobby. This character is a little girl who wears petticoats with her dresses and wears a bonnet on her head which is tied with ribbons. The border is a decorative feature which goes all the way around the room.



The window treatment in Picture 32 is also reminiscent of Picture 24. The fabric used is a co-ordinate of the decorative border. It is a white cotton which has been lined to keep out light. The curtains hang from the window to the floor, in this case they are not hung from a pole but operate on the system of runners, the curtain, theoretically, may be opened or closed at the side of the curtains by a draw string. But these curtains are not usually closed, as the amount of things, i.e. desk and trays filled with trays actually get in the way of the pleated drapes, so they are rarely closed. These curtains also, interestingly, have a pelmet which is trimmed with tassles. The message of "little girl" is to be found in the decoration of this room, true, but it is not the prettified version. The reality of this room indicates a conscious desire by the parents of wanting to give their daughter an ideal little girl's room. The reality, however, of the situation is that this little girl's own individual expression has come to the fore and obliterated her parents' visions of an 'ideal' room. This room, instead, is housing a living, breathing identity, one which is not solely interested in pink and pretty things. The room is an emissary of who this little girl is. Her own hand-made mobile hangs from the light. This little girl wants to become an astronaut. This type of mobile would not have been found in the interior of Picture 24. To look at the dressing up table is a wonderful example.

Picture 33



The real girl's bedroom can be found on this table. There is a Barbie wearing a short, pink dress. Next to that there is a plastic display stand which is filled with pots of nail varnish. Also, on the table is a diary, a jewellery box, a trophy, a fluffy toy, a collection of hairbands and two tubes of tennis balls. The variety of interests that this little girl has can be found here.



Picture 34



The storage system within this room consists of shelves which are found over the bed and a wardrobe which stores clothes.

Practicalities of ideal storage systems are put into effective treatment in this wardrobe.



Picture 35



The realities of a real child's room prove so much more interesting, as they are interiors that are played in, where socks and silver shoes adorn the floor. The reality of the child's presence ensures that the ideal portrayal of children's bedrooms cannot occur. The bedrooms of real children also incorporate the potential of the child and that this cannot simply be stencilled and embroidered over in order to create an environment that represents stereotypical visions of parental aspirations or status. The reality of the real child's bedroom is filled with incongruity.



It is an environment which, in the beginning, was styled by the parents, displaying their hopes and visions for their daughter, but where now the identity of the child has taken hold. This is the real little girl's bedroom.

CONCLUSION

The writing of this thesis has resulted (on a personal level) in a realisation of the importance of the child's room. Often overlooked, it is a room that is filled with fascination. Most importantly, this thesis has revealed that on a certain level a child's bedroom is a document. It is a physical space which documents the daily histories, as well as the past and present, of the child. It documents an emerging identity, the influences of a parent, and the engagement of the child with the world of manufacturing and consumerism. It is a room that is often incongruous in style and content and it is for this very reason that it is also a very interesting environment especially on a visual level.

In writing upon the subject of a child's room I was excited by and interested in the level of interaction a child has with their environment. How their physical space was used by them. The examination into the decoration of a child's environment has resulted not only in the discovery of the contents of a child's bedroom, but in a physical diary of an identity.

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Homestyle (February 1998) London. Robert Brown

Perfect Home (January 1997) London. DMG Home Interest Magazines.

25 Beautiful Homes (April 1998) London. South Bank Publishing Group.

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