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The last WORD



Designing with a family in mind

By Antonia Stewart



Antonia Stewart studied History of Art at University and then went on to spend seven years at one of London's leading interior design practises before founding her design studio, which changed from Antonia Lazenby Ltd to Antonia Stewart Ltd in 2008.

Having worked with many families, and having recently moved to a family home myself, I regularly develop schemes that work for the whole family unit, future-proofing the property to ensure each area can be used not only by an expanding family, but also to meet the changing needs and requirements of the children as they grow older.

At the outset of designing a new family home there are key areas that need to be considered to achieve the best scheme. The critical and over-riding themes are always the same: space, storage, practicality, flexibility, safety and security.

With space often at a premium I encourage my clients to apply a ruthless approach to their belongings before work even begins, to de-clutter in order to create more space. Little people come with a lot of kit and as they grow their possessions accumulate (at an alarming speed), so paring down is essential if the space is to be successfully maintained.

Storage is a key element of getting the space to work. Designating storage for specific items makes things easier to find and easier to put away. I use solutions such as a combination of open and closed storage enabling children to easily access their toys by day whilst the adults can reclaim their space in the evenings.

Practical finishes for furniture and walls create a more durable family living space. Fabrics which are washable or at least wipe-clean work well in high volume areas where jammy little fingers are a threat, and striped or patterned carpets for hall and stair areas are more forgiving against the inevitable spills and trips. I tend to stay away from age specific themes when designing a child's room, opting for colourful fabrics and wallpapers that work equally well for a two year old all the way to 10 years of age. This avoids having to update the room as frequently as the child grows.

Flexible space has to be at the heart of designing a family home. In particular, smaller properties where rooms are limited will require a flexible space that can be used for play time and social interaction but can also be adapted to accommodate other uses or more people when needed.

A child's incessant tendency to investigate every corner of the house, coupled with an ongoing balancing act as they learn to walk, are just two safety considerations. Simple solutions like locks on cupboards and not placing valuable or delicate items at low levels make for a safer and ultimately more harmonious space. Finally, a recent Ofsted report maintains that locked doors can invoke feelings of parental distrust amongst children, so avoid locks on internal doors to generate a stable emotional and social environment. ■

Antonia Stewart specialises in high quality residential projects in the UK and overseas. Providing a complete interior design service; from the initial design concepts, through to the specification and execution of each element of the project, and through to the final delivery on site, Antonia and her team have quickly established a reputation as a dynamic practice that produces individual and elegant interiors. Working closely with clients to ensure that their house is suitable for their needs, Antonia and her team have built up an impressive client base which ranges from families with one or more homes in the UK, to city professionals and international clients. Recent projects range from the refurbishment of a penthouse in Chelsea to a Georgian family house in the Cotswold, from a contemporary new build property in Moscow to a Regency London townhouse.