

THE FIX

## Double the Children, Double the Challenge

Designing a room that two children will happily share isn't easy. Still, it can be fun — provided you follow a few rules.



How do you unify a space used by children of different ages? Denise Davies of D2 Interieurs used bold accents against a neutral backdrop. *Jane Belles*



By Michelle Higgins

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Decorating a child's bedroom is hard enough when you have only one child. Add another to the mix and the challenges multiply.

Where will you store all their stuff? Should you go with bunk beds or twin? And how can any well-designed room possibly reflect the varying ages and styles of two or more children?

Before you buy those matching quilts, consider this advice from designers with children of their own.

### Divide the Room Into Zones

Start by carving out zones for various activities — sleeping, playing, reading, changing, chilling out. That should help you map out a functional floor plan and address each child's needs.

“You can create zones by thoughtful positioning of furniture, use of rugs and hanging decorative items like bunting or canopies,” said [Cat Matthews](#), a stylist in Parkdale, a suburb of Melbourne, Australia.

While decorating a bedroom for her 7-year-old daughter and 2-and-a-half-year old son, Ms. Matthews created a reading nook under a tented canopy at one end of the room for her daughter, and put a changing table at the base of the crib on the other side of the room for her son. Art and accessories that reflected each child’s personality were hung near their beds.

“Positioning the beds with a shared piece of furniture between them or a rug that stretches underneath them both will help each child have a sense of their side while still bringing the room together visually,” she said.

Another tip: “Consider what each child can see from their bed, including whether or not you want them to be able to see each other.”



For a room in Sagaponack, N.Y., that would sometimes be shared by three girls, the design studio Hernandez Greene painted the walls and ceiling in Farrow & Ball's Calamine and put bunk beds on one side, leaving the floor open for play. Eric Piasecki

## Keep It Neutral

To help maintain a sense of equality (and tranquillity) in a shared space, keep the background colors neutral, suggested [Aamir Khandwala](#), an interior designer in Manhattan. Instead, use shapes and texture to add interest to the room.

Mr. Khandwala used twins beds with arched headboards covered in light-colored embossed leather to add personality to a West Village bedroom shared by a brother and sister. “This was the one statement that made the room,” he said. “I also wanted to keep it gender-neutral.”

Between the beds, a marble bookcase served as a nightstand for both children, to teach them “that things have to be shared,” Mr. Khandwala said.

In Sagaponack, N.Y., Katrina Hernandez and Joshua Greene, of the New York firm [Hernandez Greene](#), created a bedroom for the oldest of three girls that could also accommodate all the sisters on occasion. “When the house was filled with guests, the eldest daughter would have her younger two sisters bunk with her,” Ms. Hernandez said.

Twin bunk beds scale one wall, freeing up the floor for fort-building or reading on oversized throw pillows. “When children’s rooms have gracious ceiling heights,” she said, “we love to do bunk beds, as it keeps more floor space for play.”

The walls are painted in [Calamine](#), a feminine neutral from Farrow & Ball, and multiple [RH Baby & Child](#) pendant lamps hang from the ceiling, drawing the eye up toward a regal stuffed lion in the top bunk.

“It was the perfect mix of all of their interests: adventure, princesses and reading,” Ms. Hernandez said.

## Or Unify With Pattern and Color

“Wallpaper gives a room such a distinct personality, so the fact that it’s a shared space does become something of an afterthought,” said [Hannah Crowell](#), an interior designer in Nashville, who used Mermaids wallpaper from [Hygge & West](#) in a bedroom for two sisters who were 6 and 7. “I wanted this space to feel totally magical and dreamy, and what is more magical than a room full of mermaids swirling about?”

In the adjoining bathroom, she used a bold jungle print from [Aimée Wilder](#) to reflect the personality of the older sister, who “loves all things animals, and has the most wild and beautiful spirit,” Ms. Crowell said. The vanity and mirror frame were painted in [Vardo](#), from Farrow & Ball, to add a pop of color and bring in the turquoise of the bedroom. “It ties the two rooms together, and more important, it brings their individual personalities into their shared space,” she said of the design.



A bright green wall unifies a small bedroom that Ms. Davies, of D2 Interieurs, outfitted with furnishings intended to grow with the children, including vintage twin beds, nightstands from Restoration Hardware topped with Lillian August lamps, midcentury-style Cedar & Moss sconces and an industrial-style ceiling fixture from Barn Light Electric Company. Jane Beiles

“Having children can inspire the décor to be bold, magical and colorful — and when done well, the rooms have longevity as the little ones grow,” said Denise Davies, the founder of [D2 Interieurs](#), in Weston, Conn. “I always design a kid’s rooms so the bones of the room — meaning bed, rug, furniture and window treatments — are timeless and can grow along with the child.”

For a small bedroom in Irvington, N.Y., Ms. Davies painted one wall a striking Kelly green, leaving the other walls and the sloping ceiling white. Then she outfitted the space with furnishings chosen to appeal to the children over time, including vintage twin beds, night stands from [Restoration Hardware](#) topped with [Lillian August](#) lamps, midcentury-style [Cedar & Moss](#) sconces and an industrial-style ceiling fixture from [Barn Light Electric Company](#).

For another bedroom for very young children — a 4-year-old and an 18-month-old — Ms. Davies painting the ceiling bright blue, but left the walls white, adding orange accents with a striped tepee and window coverings. Using a bold color on a single surface like she did in both bedrooms, she said, not only made a statement and helped unify the space, but also made the small rooms feel larger.



Hannah Crowell, a designer in Nashville, used a jungle-print paper from Aimée Wilder to add personality to a bathroom adjoining a shared bedroom. The vanity and mirror frame are painted in Vardo, from Farrow & Ball. Seamus Payne

## Let the Children Pick the Accessories

“If we create a room with enough individuality for each child, then we safely avoid the old line-down-the-middle scenario,” said Jenny Vorhoff, the owner of the Manhattan firm [Studio Riga](#), who encourages children to make their own choices after she has narrowed down the possibilities.

“Or if I have the pleasure of getting to know the children during the process,” she said, “I treat it just like I do with their parents, where I’ll find something along the way that I think they may like and I’ll present it as an option.”

She added: “I try not to get too specific in the design with themes, because kids grow and change their minds. So if they want ‘Star Wars,’ I’m probably not going to outfit their bed with that theme, but the kid can use their stuffed animals to accessorize. I just try and provide a tasteful backdrop for their things — which generally means colors that will work with brightly colored kid items.”

# The New York Times

Worried that the children's choices will clash? Then let them choose the sheets, suggested [Melanie Raver](#), an interior designer in San Diego. "It is totally fine if the sheets are different or they don't match the look of the room," she said. "This is something fun for the child and will ultimately be covered up."



Cat Matthews, an Australian stylist, created zones for sleeping, reading and playing when she designed a room for her 7-year-old daughter and 2-and-a-half-year-old son, with a reading nook under a canopy at one end of the room for her daughter and open floor space on the other side for her son. Cat Matthews

## Double the Storage

"Clutter can get crazy in a shared room," said Ms. Raver, who has three girls, ages 7, 3 and 2. "More kiddos equals more stuff."

Her advice? "Keeping items up off the floor and put away in a designated spot is essential."

[Jess Cooney](#), a designer in Great Barrington, Mass., recommended putting rolling carts under a window seat, and using open shelving together with closed cabinets. "I also like baskets in cubbies for socks, underwear and T-shirts, rather than drawers for kids," she said. "They stay organized over a longer period of time that way."

# The New York Times

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Ms. Vorhoff, of Studio Riga, said she has used beds with drawers built into the base and night stands with drawers. “Giving each child baskets or trunks is also an easy way to store stuffed animals, large trucks and so on,” she said. “Everyone can have designated spots for their treasures.”

And whenever possible, she noted, a reconfigured closet will go a long way toward bringing order to a room: “A simple bar and shelf won’t do in these situations. Adding extra shelves, drawers and double-height bars can free up play space in the room or furniture storage for toys.”



Melanie Raver, an interior designer in San Diego, covered one wall in her children's room with a removable cactus print while keeping the remainder of the room more subdued. The twin Minnen extendable beds are from Ikea. *Melanie Raver*

## Take at Least One Risk

“I love having one bold feature in the room, whether it be a patterned wallpaper, an unexpected fun piece of furniture or a quilt with a bold print,” said Ms. Raver, who covered one wall of her children’s room with a peel-and-stick cactus print that can be removed if she or her daughters get tired of it.

The rest of the room was painted white, to keep it “light and airy,” she said, as “the wallpaper was so bold.” She also chose twin white [Minnen](#) extendable beds from Ikea that don’t compete with the wallpaper.

For warmth, she used a jute rug, which “can start off rough to the touch,” she said, but “as soon as it wears in, it is as soft as can be.”

And the flush-mount ceiling fixture with wood beads and a tassel that she found at [Pottery Barn](#) “played so well with the natural jute rug, tying the white and the natural brown colors together,” she said. “Designing is like putting together a puzzle: Once you find the right combination, you complete the puzzle.”