

Modern kids' furnishings put fun in functional

By Kim Cook
FOR THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Designers of kids' furniture are letting their imaginations run away with them, and that's great news for hip parents looking for fun, exuberant decor.

The color wheel is spinning happily amidst bookcases and bedding. And many designers are taking a whimsical, artistic approach with the very shape of furniture.

Judson Beaumont, owner and head designer for Vancouver, B.C.'s Straight Line Designs, has concocted a world of Alice-in-Wonderland-esque pieces that straddle craftsmanship and inventiveness.

Bookcases stack haphazardly, like a giant tossed them into the air. Cabinets with names like "Oops" and "Boom" appear to have had run-ins with things wild and wonderful. Others, like Joined at the Hips and Sobey, bend and twist, yet have perfectly aligned drawers.

The effect is fanciful, but the furniture is practical and well-crafted.

"The idea behind the pieces is more about, what if a piece of furniture could change and have its own personality?" says Beaumont. "I've always been a fan of Disney and Dr. Seuss, so it just made sense to make these crazy shapes. But the

most important thing with my designs is they have to be functional as well as fun."

Dust Furniture in Valparaiso, Ind., is another studio experimenting with shapes. A deep blue side table and lime green bookcase may slouch saucily, but they're still serious working furniture.

Jessie Leman, Dust's project manager and wife of designer Vincent Leman, says the pieces are intended not just for young people but "for youthful spirits, no matter their age. Our furniture is definitely for anyone with a playful imagination."

Plushpod, long a retailer of trendy kids' furnishings, carries the iconic P'kolino line from Italy, featuring a kid-size clothes rack in happy hues like tangerine and lime, and a collection of pint-size laminated play tables and chairs. Their Tarantino layered high-density foam chairs would withstand the most high-spirited of play dates.

This spring, Pottery Barn Kids partnered with the Dr. Seuss Foundation on a line of decals, organic cotton bedding, and soft furnishings featuring Seuss' most popular characters, such as The Cat in The Hat and the One Fish, Two Fish gang.

Janet Hayes, executive vice president for the retailer in San Francisco, says the collaboration aims "to excite and delight" children while inspiring parents to get creative.

There was another, practical consideration. "One of the most popular requests we receive

from our customers is for patterns that go into a shared space," notes Hays. The colors and images in Dr. Seuss' illustrations suit both girls and boys.

Pair any of the collection's pieces with a stacked teacup lamp for a room that gives off a definite "Seussian" vibe. Or opt, perhaps, for the multi-shaded cluster ceiling fixture that asks: Why have one of anything, when a whole bunch is way more fun?

Other inventive light fixtures can be found at Lamps Plus, including a plump, gleaming Prop Plane in brushed nickel and frosted glass, and a Planet and Stars pendant which projects colorful outer space images on the ceiling.

Over at Kid Carpet, two mind-bending area rugs — appropriately named Off Balance and On the Curve — feature bold graphics that play with dimensional space. Either would provide a good base for indoor adventure.

Claire Eglizeaud and Paul Moreau, artists from Bordeaux France, sell their unique throw pillows online at Bonjour Mon Coussin. Choose from scrumptious photoprinted images of candies, chocolates, licorice or pastries; some of the delectable pillows are even scented. If sugar isn't your style, consider some of the other kids' collection designs with a sophisticated but playful French flair.

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