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Make Room for Junior Decorators

Stores Target Girls and Boys With Wall Decals, Beanbag Chairs; Parents, Beware of Fickle Tastes

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Blake Jacobs wants to spruce up her living space for the holidays—with pink, orange and green paint. Blake, a 12-year-old, is also in the market for a new desk and funky wall art for her bedroom. She says she likes decorating, and the look of her bedroom is important to her. "It makes me feel like my room is more than just a room," she says.

Blake's mother, JoAnn Jacobs, says her daughter has developed bold—and, at times, expensive—tastes. She likes to shop at stores like [Pier 1 Imports Inc.](#) and [Williams-Sonoma Inc.](#)'s Pottery Barn. "If it's hot-pink and has got bling-bling on it, she's going to get it," says Ms. Jacobs, a 42-year-old Tallahassee, Fla., real estate agent.

Meet the new home decorators—tweens. Kids in the 8-to-14 age range represent a major sales opportunity for home-furnishing retailers in an uncertain holiday season this year.



A mod Boho room designed by Jennifer Ellen Frank. Balancing tween fantasies and parental limits isn't easy, even for a professional. Jennifer Ellen Frank, a designer with Anasa Interiors, New York, says requests from clients' children have ranged from a "Boho" look, à la Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, to "Can you feng shui my room?" She takes them into consideration. Underage decorators can be endlessly fickle, she warns. "You can't let them take over. You'll never get it done."

Sales of home merchandise geared to the under-18 market make up one of the fastest-growing segments in the home-furnishing industry, according to NPD Group, of Port Washington, N.Y. "This is not just about girls. Guys are all over this as well," says Marshal Cohen, NPD's chief retail analyst. He is optimistic about "domestics," a housewares category including bedding, towels and decorations (and excluding furniture and appliances). "Look for domestics to be an area that gets some nice growth for the holiday season as people try to spruce up their own home or give them out as gifts," he says.

Interior-design websites, magazines and TV shows provide tween decorators with ideas and, in some cases, decorating tools. The dream bedrooms on TV shows like "Hannah Montana," "iCarly" and even "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" are inspiration. HGTV and Better Homes and Gardens feature photos of kids' rooms on their websites. And on Pottery Barn's PBteen.com, kids can design their own bed, study space and lighting, with mix-and-match patterns.

The market has come a long way since bunk beds and posters. Pottery Barn launched the PBteen brand in 2003, opening the first store in Atlanta and adding two stores in New York and Chicago last year. Teens and tweens "want to have [their own style] in their own rooms," Celia Tejada, senior vice president for product design for PBteen and Pottery Barn Kids, says.

Among PBteen's holiday-gift offerings are a skier wall mural (\$99) and the Cottage Garden beanbag chair (\$139). Young decorators can accessorize with more extravagant items, such as a teardrop chandelier made with acrylic beads (\$129), a wall-mounted "beauty station" (\$149) and the "Splendid Spa" massaging foot bath (\$35).

There's plenty of incentive to go after tweens, retailers say. Their tastes change as they age, meaning they're likely to come back to buy more. And retailers see them as a chance to line up customers who will eventually shop for dorm-room furnishings, and possibly to win them over for life. "We want to introduce her to home furnishings as a teen or tween and then keep her," says Stacia Andersen, senior vice president of merchandising for home at Target Corp., which introduced tween bedding this fall including the Xhilaration Black Dot Quilt Set (\$49.99) and a black textured pillow (\$19.99).

Retailers who cater to mature tastes say they see some of their bolder prints and colors attracting tweens and teens. Crate & Barrel says its Marimekko Tikkula Spice bed linens, with a colorful rectangle pattern and priced from \$35 to \$139, appeal to buyers who are adults and younger.

Tween decorating items are priced across the spectrum. Brewster Home Fashions Inc., of Randolph, Mass., says kids often use their own money to buy its WallPops removable wall decals, priced from \$13 to \$30. It says a new line called Habitat, a mix of teal and metallic colors with leaves, will appeal to the environmentally conscious child. And it has rolled out WallPops dry-erase calendar decals this year, giving kids a way to keep track of their own schedules. "With technology, [tweens and teens] have become increasingly informed," says Paula Berberian, creative services manager at Brewster. "They're just very aware of what's out there."

Some items may seem pricey, considering they're meant for customers whose primary source of disposable income is an allowance: PBteen's vanity desk and mirror combo, for instance, is priced at \$1,299. But what tweens lack in purchasing power, their parents often will make up—and parents definitely take their children's tastes into account. In April, NPD surveyed 67,000 consumers and found 61% of adults with children under 18 said the kids influenced their purchases of domestics, up from 45% in 2005.

Many parents say they pick up on their children's decorating hints. Kerry Jeter says she and her husband surprised their 13-year-old daughter, Madeline, by redesigning her room for her birthday

in October. "She had been nagging us to do something with her room and had an idea in mind," says Ms. Jeter, a pharmaceuticals sales rep in Abilene, Texas.

Madeline drew a picture of what she wanted and showed it to her father. She had to think creatively because she didn't have much space to work with, just a bedroom that is roughly 11 feet by 11 feet. She asked to put her bed on top of a wooden platform with a storage area underneath—an idea she got from the Disney Channel show "Good Luck Charlie." "One of the characters on the show had that kind of bed, and I thought, 'Oh, that would be cool,'" Madeline says.

One day, while Madeline was at school, her parents built the platform and put up new curtains. "She came home to a newly redesigned room according to what she wanted," Ms. Jeter says. "She was thrilled."

A Brooklyn, N.Y., couple, Alisa Lamont and her husband, Jon, recently created a room in their basement for their daughters, 8-year-old Malinee and 6-year-old Sirina. The girls had input on everything from the bedspreads (from Crate & Barrel's Land of Nod) to the paint (bright pink). "My husband kept warning them, 'Remember, you are going to have to live with this for at least a few years,'" Ms. Lamont says.

Malinee was looking to impress her guests. "When I have play dates, my friends come over, and they come to our room. They like it to look good," she says. The family reached a compromise: Two walls are pink, two are white. "Sometimes, the kids really have a vision and it's right on, so we have to trust a little bit in their intuitions," Ms. Lamont says.