

Mid-century modern for kids

by Gillian - Thursday, September 25, 2014

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Here's how to spread your MCM habit to the little ones, one stylish piece at a time. By Gillian Drummond

The Risom child's side chair from Knoll features brightly colored webbing. Photo courtesy of Knoll.

The principle behind mid-century modernism - that less is more - would seem to go against everything that kids stand for. Try the less is more line on the parent of a teenager, or a toddler, or a LEGO lover, and you're liable to be laughed at.

But then again, maybe not. When you really think about it, the looks we associate with the MCM style - sleek, simple, functional, bright - could be the perfect antidote to the stresses and messes of life with children.

Heather Wuelpern chose this acrylic coffee table for her daughters' playroom. Photo by Rachel Miller

Heather Wuelpern describes her Tucson home as "rustic, hacienda-style, old Mexico." So when it came to furnishing her two daughters' bedrooms and playroom, Heather deliberately went the mid-mod route. "It was to have some balance. I felt it should be more bright and colorful and crisp and clean," she says.

Heather's customized tulip-based chair. Photo by Rachel Miller

Heather, an [artist and freelance interior designer](#), says her daughters' favored style is shabby chic. But they have, by and large, stuck with the mid-mod look created by their mother. Heather admits she didn't give them much choice. "I went in that direction before [my eldest daughter] had an opinion or a say," she laughs.

Heather has had fun sprucing up old vintage pieces for her daughters. A 1960s desk she bought from a neighbor for \$20 many years ago was painted turquoise. The desk's chair was a Brush and Bulky roadside collection find. Heather sanded it down and painted it from grey to white.

On the wall of the same bedroom is a mural painted by Heather that continues the mid-century theme. It features an [Arne Jacobsen Egg Chair](#) - an iconic mid-century furniture piece - and a table similar to those by Japanese mid-century architect and designer Isamu Noguchi.

A 1960s desk in one of Heather's daughter's bedrooms. Photo by Rachel Miller

Vintage accessories can add a mid-mod look to a kid's room too. This clock and monkey are available on [Hot Cool Vintage's Etsy site](#). Photo courtesy of Hot Cool Vintage.

In the girls' playroom, the [mid-century modern theme continues with an acrylic table](#) bought from Overstock for \$150. Heather also added one of her own customized furniture pieces: a chair with a tulip base that echoes the shape of Eero Saarinen's chairs. She painted the base of the chair metallic silver and covered the seat in melted records. And yes, she says, you can actually sit on it.

One little girl who may not have much choice but to follow the MCM path is Nova Mae Fletcher, daughter of Casia and Eric Fletcher. The couple, [owners of Purple Nickel Studio photography](#), have scored some beautiful mid-century modern furniture for their home and office space, much of it from thrift stores and Craigslist.

But when it comes to buying MCM for kids, Casia is disappointed by what's on offer. "It's slim pickings out there. A lot of it is inspired by mcm and are reproductions. I haven't ever really found a vintage piece here in Tucson," she says.

Baby Nova Fletcher's mid-mod-style space. Photo by Casia Fletcher

Nova still sleeps in their bedroom, in a crib by [Nursery Works](#), a Los Angeles-based company that has given a modern twist to the traditional baby crib. Nova's, in WHAT WOOD and white, is used (they bought it at [Little Bird Nesting Company](#) in Tucson) but in great condition. A changing table is integrated into the crib. Nova's other furniture includes [a black Harry Bertoia chair](#) (bought on Craigslist) and a leather pillow from [MAST](#) in Tucson. A Mexican blanket, bought from a street vendor in California, a rug bought at a flea market, a desert mobile by [Mimo Project](#), a woven IKEA basket, and a few bright plants finish off Nova's corner of the bedroom.

MCM for kids needn't stop at furniture. These vintage accessories are available on [Hot Cool Vintage's Etsy site](#). Photo courtesy of Hot Cool Vintage.

Eric Lin, designer with [Nursery Works](#) in Los Angeles, says MCM for kids is growing. "In the past few years, as parents have started to recognize that the design of the nursery can complement the design aesthetic of the rest of the home, we've started to see an increase in the availability of more modern and mid-century modern cribs on the market." Parents like Casia and Eric are recognizing that "the nursery doesn't have to be defined by the traditional 'baby' aesthetic", says Eric Lin.

Electron Pendant Lamp, \$69. Photo courtesy of Land of Nod

One of Nursery Works' designs, the Vetro Crib, takes the 'less is more' theory to its limit. [The Vetro is a clear acrylic crib](#), 100% recyclable and non-toxic, that gives unimpeded views in and out.

It's not only a style departure from the traditional wood, it has positive effects on a baby, says Daniel Fong, Chief Executive Officer at Nursery Works. "It's an attempt to eliminate the visible barrier of the usual spindles separating the inside and outside of the crib, reminiscent of a cage or a fence. The real effect to the baby is that he or she cannot see the barrier. It's as if there's direct contact with all those outside the rib, creating a calming effect," says Daniel.

Nursery Works' Vetro crib. Photo by Noah Webb

Buyers of the Vetro include Robert Downey Jr, father to two-year-old Exton, and Beyonce and Jay-Z, parents of Blue. Its celebrity appeal comes with a suitably high price: \$4500.

The kid version of the iconic Diamond Chair, designed by Harry Bertoia, priced at \$723; and kid's Saarinen side table, 16" round, \$597. Photo courtesy of Knoll

Over at Knoll, purveyors of modern furniture since the 1930's and a company that boasts Harry Bertoia ([see our interview with his daughter in this issue](#)), Eero Saarinen and Jens Risom among its designers, mini versions of some of its iconic pieces are available for kids. The Risom child's side chair, priced at \$262 and pictured top, is a scaled-down version of one of the first ever pieces designed for and manufactured by Knoll.

Kids' MCM pieces need not be pricey, though. In fact, finding bargains may be a much more practical way to go. That's as long as you're not precious about your find, of course.

Jo Herbst's remodeled desk. Photo courtesy of Jo Herbst.

When Jo Herbst bought a vintage cabinet for just one Euro on eBay for her young son, she chose to repaint it bright blue. "It was made out of dark brown wood, a little dull looking to me," says Jo, who lives in Berlin. She believes it dates back to the 1960s or possibly '70s, and comes from the former GDR. Luckily for Jo, "they stuck on that mid-century style much longer than in western countries".

As well as repainting it, Jo also covered the inner back of it with fabric. Sadly, her son broke the table one day by sitting on it. "And I told him so many times not to do this," she laughs. Which is one reason buying used - and scoring bargains - is not a bad idea for mid mod parents of little ones.

"Anything super nice we had is not nice anymore," says mother of two Amanda Domergue, a.k.a. blogger [MODG](#). When she came to decorate a nursery for her baby, she mixed up finds from IKEA, Overstock, Craigslist, Etsy, Walmart, CB2 and West Elm. The changing table is a \$30 find on Craigslist (plus a case of beer to persuade her husband to sand and re-stain it), with a changing pad holder on top.

Amanda Domergue has mixed vintage, new, Etsy and Craigslist finds. Photo by Amanda Domergue

Amanda Domergue's customized changing table. Photo by Amanda Domergue

"I wasn't necessarily going for MCM," says Amanda. "I really prefer to mix styles. I like a little MCM, a little rustic, a little glam, and mix it all up."

Parents like Casia Fletcher believe there is a market for something in between the high-end mod kids gear and the thrift bargains, though. "There is a market and a need for it. Many of us would prefer clean simple well built wood pieces over the plastic, fake wood stuff."

Lastly, there's a question - one that's screaming (high, pitched, toddler-like) to be asked: How do you deal with clutter when you're a streamlined MCM-loving parent? "You have to just deal with it. Mess happens. Embrace it," says Amanda Domergue.

Heather Wuelpern admits that mess in a child's room is par for the course. But she says having a mid-mod style can offset that clutter more than another design aesthetic might. "If you at least have furniture that isn't heavy and dark, if you have the likes of white and birch, it's going to give the room a light feel," she says.

In other words, mid-mod parents can close the door on the mess at least knowing it's a mess that's got style.

*** For mid-century modern furniture and accessory finds in Tucson, visit Tucson Modernism Week's Mid-Century Furniture Marketplace, 2903 E. Broadway Blvd, October 3-5. More details at tucsonmod.com**

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