

Making Room For Baby

By *Angela Gorini Perrone*

As a decorative artist, my favorite projects are those that I am commissioned to help create a space for our city's newest and smallest residents: babies! Designing and painting nurseries for expectant new parents are some of the happiest projects to be a part of. These rooms really are quite special, and have capped some of the highlights of my career. Nurseries, or baby's rooms, always hold a gentle, but strong energy. These spaces are created to house, protect and enchant the tiniest and most vulnerable amongst us... they set the tone for childhood, and when done well they will nurture, comfort and soothe. The very potential of new life and new beginnings is miraculous in its own right and quite contagious. Fresh start, clean slate...hope. Who doesn't want to be a part of that?

Although no two jobs are ever alike (as the old saying goes, there are many roads to Rome) the sensitive method of guiding expectant parents through the process of creating a space for their child is the same. As the mother of a nearly 9 year old son, I have experienced the "nesting" phase firsthand. I remember the desire, the dreams, the indecision, the budget constraints... as well as the feeling of impermanence in our current living situation and the complications of not knowing the child's gender. I often work very closely with the expectant mothers, like a protective, experienced older sister. Young couples, the mothers-to-be, most especially, are consumed with readying the space for their soon to be born child. This room is simultaneously a new decorating project, a space for a new human being, and the first outward expression of your parenting style. Choices must be wisely made, things kept in perspective and stress absolutely kept to a minimum.

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Many parents nowadays are returning to the “surprise” factor. They do not wish to know the gender of the baby before it is born. On some occasions two rooms are actually designed and planned. Project A if it is a boy and Project B if it is a girl. Two color palettes, two completely different furniture sets and two unique room concepts. We have a sense of the due date... it is scheduled in the calendar (in pencil), it stays on my radar. We may not be pacing the hospital halls, but we still eagerly and excitedly wait for the call. When it finally comes and after rounds of congratulations, we are unfurling drop cloths, cracking open the paint cans and installing the artwork. Stroke by stroke, we now know your name and excitedly ready your precious room. Hopefully, if all goes well, we are done by the time you come home from the hospital. From mother’s womb, into this room. I am honored and privileged to be a part of the magical collaboration.

New paint products on the market make painting a child’s room easier and safer than ever. In addition to the earth friendly paints there are also low or no odor options that cover in one coat and dry quickly, enabling baby to sleep in the space that very same night. Stencils and wallpaper murals make it easy for do-it-yourselfers to achieve professional results over a weekend. Personal items, like family heirlooms, antique toys or precious mementos will also lend character and ambiance to the special project. Think outside the box. Look at the space as a child might see it. Really use your imagination.

For inspiration it’s always fun to think back to your favorite childhood stories. What was your favorite book? Who was your favorite character? How did they dress? Where did they live? Get inside the pages of that book. Perhaps we can duplicate it as a wall mural. Or take an element of the essence of the story and use that as our springboard into a larger design concept. I also often interview expectant parents to find out more about their dreams for this space. Budget is discussed. No detail is too small. No request is too obscure. These are signs and clues as to finding the right theme for this very special project.

I often ask my clients to describe their childhood bedroom and what they loved about it... you’d be surprised at the amazing accuracy with which they can still remember even the tiniest of details. Regardless if this room was shared with siblings or the size of a closet, you will always hear a cherished memory, a special story.

I still remember my banana yellow nursery walls. I remember standing up in my crib and waking up bathed in light. The room was liquid sunshine. I remember the feeling. Yellow to me to this day is pure joy. There is no coincidence that most of the many bedrooms I have inhabited over the years have been a shade of yellow. We may not be conscious of our color choices, but impression is there, deep in our memories. These first bedrooms will leave a lasting impression on your child, especially the colors. Choose wisely. Color can and will affect their mood...and yours.

It is my professional opinion that nurseries shouldn’t be too neutral or too serious. Playful, sophisticated looks work for every family and in every budget. I especially love designing the nursery as a dedicated nursery, a room that will remain the “baby’s room” in the home for all the future babies that will inhabit the space in their due time. For these non-gender specific, permanent baby spaces I adore the idea of a sky ceiling. Hand-painted sky ceilings are very popular because they are so natural looking and charming. The color blue you select will usually not have any impact on the wall color, the same way a real blue sky looks magnificent against a desert landscape, or a meadow of flowers. And who says the sky is always blue? Sometimes skies are gray, lavender, peach or red. It can be sunset or sunrise, spring or summer. The sky is the limit! Painting the ceiling is a terrific investment because ceilings are not as prone to fingerprints and

surface damages like walls are. If need be, you can certainly repaint the walls anytime and the ceiling can remain untouched, rendering you a completely different space with the artwork intact.

For fully decorated theme rooms you don’t necessarily need to know the gender of the child to select a natural theme. Rooms that use playful nature elements will bring the outdoors in, will never go out of style and are most certainly non-gender specific. Design themes like enchanted forest, jungle safari, gardens and aquariums can be rendered within many different price points and on many different scales. The “essence” of things growing and flowing is quite beautiful, auspicious and most appropriate, symbolically. Child’s first taste of nature is happy, gentle and soothing.

Colors should never be over the top with brightness, saturation or hue. Try to aim for a palette that is softer and more muted. And always make test swatches on the wall. Check out how different a color looks in day light and then again in electric light. Find one that looks great at all times of day. Non-gender-specific greens, yellows and beiges can be lovely when accessorized with pops of creamy white accessories and darker wood furniture. Aim for softness and classic combinations. If you are not working with a professional artist and feel challenged about color bring the bedding to be matched at the paint store. Most shops have computer programs that scan the color and match it up for you.

New products have made painting easier for expectant parents doing the projects themselves or being in the home when the work is executed. Products are safer, less toxic and some paints have virtually no odor. It is safe in some cases to paint the room in the morning and have baby sleep in there that night.

When you decide upon a theme for this room you are essentially “setting the stage” for the childhood you hope your child will have. Think safe, peaceful and restful. Also, don’t underestimate how much time you will spend in this space too! More than likely your eyes will be at half-mast, but the room is for you to enjoy as well. Sweet dreams...

Angela Gorini Perrone is the owner and founder of Divine Rooms (www.divinerooms.com), a full-service decorative painting company providing custom faux finishes for residential and commercial interiors since 1997.

