

DAUGHTER KNOWS BEST

Canadian House and Home

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My daughter moved to LA last spring, and found a rambling apartment with pre-war door mouldings and latch windows in a Spanish-style 4-plex in Silver Lake. One day she called to tell me about a fabulous find that she'd picked up at the Rose Bowl Flea Market.

“It’s a vintage green and stainless steel wall of lockers that the guy refinished,” she said. “I’m using it as a buffet. You’re going to love it, Mom.”

I more than loved it. It struck me as the perfect expression of my daughter’s signature aesthetic that I’ve watched evolve since childhood, and that I like to think I’ve played a part in shaping, especially when it began to flower in earnest during adolescence, when we launched Project Teen Bedroom.

I have a position on teen bedrooms. I think they should reflect the personality of the teenagers who inhabit them. Nothing is sadder, in my view, than a nascent punk

rocker imprisoned by a Design Nazi mom in a room swathed in toile.

Accordingly, I gave Sara free rein to make her own decisions—well, mostly. (If she didn't prevail, she always had a second chance to execute her vision in her bedroom at her dad's.) And I took the design of her room very seriously. I called Phillip Moody, an interior designer I'd consulted in the past. (He had great taste, a sense of playfulness, an appreciation of a real world budget, and, most importantly, he listened to his clients—even if they were only fifteen years old.)

The room (an enclosed, out-of-the-way 6' x 10' space at one end of the main level of a New York-style loft off Queen Street West in downtown Toronto), had 16' ceilings, but almost no floor space, so Phillip suggested that we build up, and sketched a raised platform bed with three large pullout drawers beneath. Because Sara was theatrical, he proposed turning the bed into a stage, by draping a lush velvet curtain above—an idea that I loved, but that Sara nixed because she felt it would be overkill.

On the other hand, she wanted black walls. Well, of course she did; she was a teenager. But there I pulled rank, arguing that while I knew her species was nocturnal and cave-dwelling, there was a fine line between a cave and a dungeon—especially when the room had almost no natural light. (Its window directly faced the brick wall of a neighboring house.) Fortunately, she agreed to compromise on a sultry midnight navy, complementing with accent walls of tomato red and lemon pop yellow.

The platform bed was built and painted navy. At Ikea, we found a retro modern birch veneer bureau with lime-green lacquered drawer fronts and cool metal hardware. Scouring the local retro shops, we discovered a rose-coloured '50s arborite kitchen table that gained a second life as Sara's desk. Above it, we installed floating Ikea shelves, on which she placed her treasured artifacts: a Pee Wee Herman doll, a Chia Pet, Clabber Girl tins, vintage post cards, and Dudley Do Right drinking glass. She found a vintage record player. I found a pink '50s ceramic table lamp. She hung framed retro B-movie posters on the walls, including one classic for *Creature From The Black Lagoon*.

We had a duvet cover sewn of lime green cotton velvet from the fabric stores on Queen West, and accessorized with pillows encased in leopard print fun fur and velvet zebra print.

Then Sara announced that she wanted a mannequin. I'd learned to indulge these impulses, so we toured the neighborhood store fixture shops, and spent a fascinating afternoon talking to a mannequin-besotted clerk who knew the arcane history of each one in the store—including the history of the models who had posed for them. But at \$300 a pop, they didn't come cheap, so the deal was that Sara had to pay with her own money—which she did. We brought the bald, naked lady home, where she stood, strikingly posed—and often costumed—at the foot of Sara's platform bed.

But the mannequin was just a warm up, really, for the original Westinghouse stacking washer/dryer from the '50s in pink Cadillac pink, with fishbowl doors, that turned up one Saturday afternoon, as we drove past one of those second-hand appliance stores on Queen West.

“Stop the car!” Sara shrieked, as we passed by.

It was an utterly superfluous purchase in every way. It had no practical use. It was a nightmare for the movers to lug up the stairs. And in a room with no floor space, it was, as Sara puts it, “a completely useless space taker upper.” But buy it we did, and I have never regretted the decision.

It was an objet d’art. Sara loved it. And it made the room. What’s more, every time I walked in and saw it towering there, it stood as a monument to my daughter’s singularly eclectic sense of style. (She may well have been the only teenager with a Westinghouse washer/dryer in her bedroom.) In fact, I think it’s fair to say that you could draw a straight line between that idiosyncratic artifact and the wall of vintage lockers that now adorns her LA apartment.

I realize that mine is not necessarily the path that every parent would choose in decorating a teenage bedroom, but I heartily recommend it. Rather than douse those feverish adolescent impulses, I’ve always thought it best to channel them creatively, rather than see them erupt in more problematic ways. Anyway, as every parent knows, adolescents are primitive creatures. Letting them roam

freely in their natural habitat, I figure, is really just self-preservation.

When Sara moved into her Toronto condo a few years ago, she called me excitedly to report that she'd just found a fantastic deal on a vintage chandelier that the antique store owner had agreed to re-wire and polish at no extra cost.

“You're going to love it, Mom,” she said.

But I knew that already.

