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MAKING A HOUSE A

home



With a mix of antiques, flea market finds, and sturdy kids' furnishings, designer Sasha Emerson helps a Los Angeles family create charming spaces for living.

By Kathy Henderson • Photography by Ray Katchatorian



BRIGHT HOUSE Seth Swirsky serenades his wife, Jody Gerson, and sons Luke and Julian in their sunny living room, furnished with reupholstered vintage pieces and collectibles.



“We want our home to feel warm, comfortable, and real.”

VINTAGE FINDS

An antique cabinet holds books and stereo equipment (above). Seth’s uncle collected the framed butterflies in the 1940s. A subway sign anchors the entrance to the dining room (right). Julian admires his dad’s baseball memorabilia (far right).



A home with kids should be safe and welcoming, and there’s no need to sacrifice style in the process. “A wonderful family home reflects the dreams, interests, and personalities of the people who live in it,” says

Sasha Emerson, a Los Angeles-based interior designer and mother of three daughters. Known for chic, colorful rooms filled with vintage furnishings and collectibles, Sasha emphasizes that children as well as adults love being surrounded by keepsakes.

The designer met a pair of kindred spirits in Jody Gerson, a music publisher and movie producer, and her husband, Seth Swirsky, a songwriter and the bestselling author of *Baseball Letters* and the new book *Something to Write Home About*. After several years of renting and house-hunting, the couple was thrilled when they spotted a 1930s Spanish-style home on a winding street in Beverly Hills. “We knew it was right the minute we walked in,” says Jody, the mother of Julian, 8, and Luke, 8 months.

Seth, the owner of a museum-quality collection of baseball memorabilia, shares Sasha’s belief that family decorating should be personal. “We wanted our home to feel warm, comfortable, and real, and to reflect who we really are,” he says. Adds Jody, “The house is designed to be livable with kids; nothing is off-limits to Julian and his friends.”

Sasha took note of the couple’s love of antiques, bright colors, books, and heirloom art pieces. She scouted L.A.’s flea markets and stores like *Obsolete* in Venice, CA, for treasures such as an old subway sign and nesting alphabet blocks. An orange glass-front cabinet that once graced a general store in South America now houses books and electronic equipment and stands near a vintage sofa covered in orange velvet, a surprisingly kid-friendly fabric when treated with anti-stain sealant. “Your sofa fabric should complement the colors of your accessories and collections,” says Sasha, who’s constantly on the lookout for unusual fabrics and remnants.

Rather than totally renovate their ’70s-era kitchen, Jody and Seth gave it a new look by painting the cabinet panels burnt orange with apple green and lemon yellow accent panels chosen by Philippa Radon of Creative Paint Techniques. They replaced a wall of drawers with bookshelves and a seating nook





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RETRO CHIC
 Brightly painted panels give the kitchen an instant lift (above). A comfy seating nook (top right) invites guests to sit and chat. Luke's nursery includes a daybed for relaxing with Mom (right). The cushions on the daybed match the glider rocker (far right).



featuring stretchy velour slipcovered cushions. “Everyone ends up here when we have a party,” says Jody, “and Julian loves to hang out while we cook.”

After Luke's birth, Jody and Seth were ready to rethink their boys' rooms. Sasha worked with Philippa to choose a restful bluish green for the nursery, which includes a daybed with pillows for family relaxation. Cowboy fabrics blend with stripes and plaids, and framed train pictures adorn the walls. “I always try to create kids' rooms that are compatible with the look of the rest of the house,” says Sasha.

Julian's bedroom is outfitted with a '40s Monterey-style dark wood dresser and matching desk that Sasha spotted in a secondhand furniture store, plus a linoleum “rug” that's perfect for games. “When I design for kids, I often think of dorm rooms, which are cramped and yet include a bed, dresser, and work area,” she says. “The challenge is to deal with space limits and still make the room fun.”

Built on several levels, the Gerson-Swirsky home includes several short staircases covered with nonslip carpet runners and outfitted with safety gates. One long wall holds framed photos of grandparents and other relatives. “We wanted our home to have a sense of history, with photos, books, and decorative pieces that have a story behind them,” says Seth. “You don't have to spend a lot of money to achieve that. There's a magic about this house that appeals as much to Julian as it does to Jody and me. I don't think we'll ever move.” ➤



Read about the winners of *Child's Kid-Friendly Home Contest* at www.child.com/web_links. To enter this year's design contest, turn to page 168.



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MIXING OLD AND NEW
Julian's bedroom reflects his love of music, games, and all things Lego (he built the Statue of Liberty and Yoda, top right). A wall of family photos graces the staircase (right).



WARMING UP A ROOM

To create kids' rooms with personality, interior designer Sasha Emerson offers these tips:

SCOUR FLEA MARKETS “I believe children should live with great-looking furnishings that have a history but aren't so expensive that if they get scuffed up, it's a disaster,” Sasha says. In addition to twin beds and small-scale dressers, she looks for quirky lamps and light fixtures like Julian Swirsky's nautical sconce (left) and unorthodox storage pieces such as school library display shelves.

PLAY UP YOUR CHILD'S INTERESTS When one young client told Sasha, “I wish I lived at the beach,” the designer chose a blue and green color palette drawn from the little girl's collection of sea glass. Sasha's own daughter displays a collection of funky globe-shaped banks in her room.

CONSIDER UNUSUAL ARTWORK SOURCES “I'm always on the lookout at garage sales for children's books with beautiful covers or graphics that can be framed,” says Sasha, who found pictures of trains for Luke Swirsky's nursery in an old book. “I've also framed scarves, book jackets, tinted postcards, old greeting cards, and antique wrapping paper, and I like to hang antique game boards.”

LOOK FOR WAYS TO REUSE VINTAGE ITEMS Sasha turned a striped box from a surf shop and a trunk from a '20s automobile into toy chests for Julian. “If you train your eye, you can find paintable pieces that are sturdier and cheaper than something new,” she says, adding, “I always urge people to hold on to their family heirlooms and find ways to recycle and enjoy them. It's wonderful for children to live in a home that reflects their family's history.”

