

A room with a view

FROM FURNITURE AND SOFT FURNISHINGS THROUGH TO WALLPAPER AND ART, DESIGN-LED KIDS' INTERIORS ARE AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR PRODUCT AREA FOR CHILDRENSWEAR INDEPENDENTS TO BRANCH INTO. CWB SPEAKS TO THREE RETAILERS WHO, TO VARYING DEGREES, STOCK KIDS' INTERIOR PRODUCTS TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT THIS GROWING MARKET SECTOR.

Bobo Kids

29 Elystan Street, London SW3. www.bobokids.co.uk



Children's interior store Bobo Kids was opened in 2008 by long-standing friends Niloufar Bakhtiar-Clignet and Julie Hamon. The idea for the business was motivated by the two owners' inability to find distinctive, inspirational and unique furniture pieces for their own children, instead finding only lifeless, plain white ranges when it came to homeware and accessories for kids.

The women have sourced an exclusive interiors offering for their shop which, among other things, is designed to allow parents to harmonise the look of their child's bedroom with other living spaces in their home. Interiors make up 90 per cent of the stock and include products from brands such as Oeuf, Laurette, Bopita, Theophile & Patachou, Maison de Vacances, Non Jetable and AirDeJe. As well as established names, the owners work hard to unearth talented designers and small companies making unique furniture for children. In terms of product itself, there's everything from cots, bespoke beds, desks wardrobes and shelving units to vintage pieces, art, rugs, wallpaper and a wide range of bed linen. The entire collection is available in-store, with stock spread over the Chelsea Green-based two-floor premises.

"With the Bobo Kids collection, we wanted to offer pieces with a touch more style and, by doing so, encourage children to become more interested in contemporary interior design, art and fashion," says Hamon. "The collection is designed to cultivate young people's tastes, offering everything from modern furniture with adult appeal to more fun options such as decorative stickers and play rugs."

Not surprisingly, the women note the logistics and transportation of the furniture as one of the main challenges in stocking interiors but, by working closely with suppliers and delivery firms, they can ensure products arrive on time and in good condition.

Plans for the store include new and exclusive brands being added in September and a Bubo Kids online shop, due to launch soon. The business is also developing an interior design service, which is proving popular. Clients visiting the Chelsea store are given a personal one-on-one meeting to discuss their design requirements and, within 48 hours, someone from the team visits the client's home to take measurements and photographs of the room. Bobo Kids then creates a three-dimensional bespoke bedroom design, incorporating pieces from the company's product portfolio.

Three Potato Four

44-45 Newington Green, London, N16. www.threepotatofour.co.uk



Established in October 2008 by Genna Savastio, Three Potato Four is an example of a children's boutique, which harmoniously merges the sectors of children's fashion and interiors. Savastio has worked hard to achieve her unique offering and create a look for her shop that appeals to both adults and children. As a result, the store, which comes complete with an integrated kids' hair salon, draws customers from far and wide to its doors.

"The look is vintage and nostalgic with old, classic Fisher Price toys scattered everywhere," says Savastio. "The fixtures and fittings are a mixture of recycled scaffolding planks, old wood from my dad's back garden, vintage furniture and a chandelier I picked up along the way."

It's soon clear from looking at the store's brand portfolio and the interior products it stocks, that Savastio has a soft spot for local designers as well as the bigger name brands. One of her bestsellers, for instance, is local designer Clare Beaton. Savastio commissions Beaton to create fabric collages, proving to be extremely popular with customers as decoration for kids' bedrooms and as special gifts. Another local designer stocked by the store is Chloe

Owens, who produces owls from vintage fabrics, and local mum Alex Craig, who supplies Three Potato Four with height charts decorated with birds. Alongside the local designers, there are also more widely known brands such as Blafre and Lale available, the latter specialising in vintage-inspired products such as bags, suitcases, quilts and bean bags. Other key brands with a strong presence include Belle & Boo and Donna Wilson. For lovers of true vintage product, there are classic vintage toys on offer, including many Fisher Price items which, although intended as store decorations, often get sold to pleading customers.

While for some childrenswear retailers, interiors provide a small outlet for growth in terms of add-on sales and gift purchases, for Savastio it has always been a key element of her business, bringing customers to the store who wouldn't visit if she just stocked clothing. That said, Three Potato Four also includes a strong childrenswear offer that includes brands such as Aravore Babies, Bobux, Bakker Made with Love, Christina Rohde, 4 Funky Flavours, Olive and Moss, Milibe, Kik-Kid, Fub, Angel Face, Hatley, Smafolk, Tip Toey Joey and Lille Barn.

Funky Living

Unit 5, Bloomfield Avenue, Belfast. www.funkybedrooms.co.uk

Prior to opening her Belfast children's interiors store Funky Living, owner Caroline Dillon set about doing some serious research into the kids' interiors market. Having progressed in her career from an NVQ assessor in retail through to head of business development, she had the business acumen to get started, but was realistic about the challenge ahead. Dillon spent months speaking to mums, liaising with Skillsmart Retail (the Sector Skills Council) and analysing other shops before trawling through the statistics. Among other things, figures revealed that almost 22,500 babies are born each year in Northern Ireland, half being within a 30 minute drive from where she planned the Funky Living store to be located. The business proposal looked good on paper and Dillon decided to take the plunge, opening her store in March 2007.

In terms of interiors brands, Funky Living carries furniture and soft furnishings from Bopita, Lollipop Lane, Babyface, Kidsline, Win Green, Izziwotnot, Baroo, Nature's Purest, East Coast, Hiccups, Bloom and Saplings. Room accessories are provided by brands such as Wallies, Powell Craft, RJB, Stone, Mungai Mirrors and Lankakade. Over the years, the offer has branched out to also include younger children's clothing, maternitywear and prams, but bigger changes have recently been underway.

With challenges such as operating with low profit margins and competition from bigger chains – including the internet – to contend with, Dillon is more than aware that, to stay in the game, she needs to keep evolving and tailoring the business to her customers' needs. This awareness has resulted in a recent re-branding of the store – the official launch is this month – from its previous name Funky Bedrooms, to



Funky Living, which better reflects her developing offer.

"We've just re-branded to Funky Living with a mix of kids' interiors, gifts and homeware," says Dillon. "New interior brands include Pacific Lifestyle, Aimby, Helensgate, Gisela Graham, Koziol, Silea and tableware from Salt & Pepper. Around 90 per cent of the offer is interiors, but that will change to more like 70 per cent as we introduce more gift lines and branch out to adults."