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How Green is Your Nest?

Why – and How – Expectant Parents are Going Organic in the Baby's Room



By Brenda Rees

For many parents-to-be, creating a nursery is more about making a healthy space for the tiny newcomer than about color schemes and character themes.

Green-minded moms and dads are decorating walls with low- or zero-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints, buying untreated wood cribs and opting to use glass bottles and nonplastic toys, transforming the nursery into a natural and chemical-free zone.

“We see a lot of parents having a great awakening when they are planning for their baby,” says Christopher Gavigan, president of Healthy Child Healthy World, a nonprofit L.A. organization that advocates creating healthy environments for children.

Gavigan notes that when parents-to-be research green options for the nursery, they are also learning how to transform their entire homes. “That [green] knowledge trickles into all aspects of home and garden,” he says. “It doesn’t just stay in one room.”

Laura Forbes Carlin created a chemical-free nursery for son Matthew and owns an L.A.-based consulting service with her sister, Alison Forbes, to help other like-minded parents.

The Quest for Safer Choices

When her youngest daughter, Daniella, had serious allergic reactions at home, Ilana Makovoz looked high and low for resources and was disappointed with selections at traditional health food stores and big chains.

“The problem is that ‘organic’ is such a buzzword these days,” says the Sherman Oaks mom. “The reality is that there are no government regulations for organic nonfood products. You have to really examine what you’re buying.”

Makovoz did her research and ended up using milk paint in the nursery (“it comes as a powder and you mix it up yourself”), installing air purifiers and stocking the medicine cabinet with only truly natural remedies.

Putting what she has learned to use, Makovoz and her husband, Edward

Olshansky, recently opened up the Green Nursery, a San Fernando Valley store offering only pure organic items that she personally has tested.

Green Guides and Gurus

Creating an Earth-friendly nursery can be a complicated endeavor, but consultation services stand ready to show parents the way.

"[My consultants] are my organic mommy gurus!" says Beverly Hills mom-to-be Stephanie Scott about the baby nursery consulting team of Laura Forbes Carlin and sister Alison Forbes. "I really rely on their expertise."

Expecting her first child this fall, Scott contacted the Los Angeles-based duo, founders of the Art of Everyday Living® home and lifestyle consulting service. The sisters helped Scott choose sleeping arrangements and select nonplastic toys, baby lotions and other items.

The Forbes sisters only recently started doing nursery consultations because folks who read their 2006 book, *The Peaceful Nursery: Preparing a Home for Your Baby with Feng Shui*, were clamoring for individual help. The book was written after Laura's first son, James, was born.

"We wanted to make the room as dust-free as possible because he has such bad allergies," Laura says. "That started us all down this path. It's a shift of thinking because you just can't go to the local [department store] and pick up something quick and easy. Every item – from sippy cups to floor coverings to even baby bath tubs – becomes a process."

Living More Fully

Some parents are hiring consultants even after baby has become a toddler. Hollywood mom Erika Ackerman hired Irvine-based Lisa Beres who, along with husband Ron, operates the Green Nest

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“We didn’t go nuts with a redesign but added some things that were important for Ruby, who was about 1-1/2 years old at that time,” says Ackerman, who found healthy paints, an organic mattress topper, an air purifier and bath balls that take chlorine out of bath water with Beres’ help.

Getting a Green Night’s Sleep

Because babies spend so much of their time sleeping in their cribs, an organic cotton or wool mattress is one of the best investments for your developing infant, say health-conscious experts.

Author and green nursery consultant Laura Forbes Carlin remembers buying a regular crib mattress when she was expecting her first child. “I put it in the closet for a while,” she recalls. “When I opened the door, I got this big whiff of varnish and realized that the mattress was off-gassing like crazy. I thought, ‘This can’t be good for tiny lungs.’”

Typical mattresses are filled with polyurethane foam and treated with flame-retardants, then covered with materials treated with water-, stain- and wrinkle-resistant chemicals. This can be an amazing source of indoor air pollution.

Today, however, the market is opening up for manufacturers bringing old-

A former interior designer, Beres became a certified baubiologist (a building biologist who studies how buildings impact life and the living environment) after struggling with chronic fatigue and illnesses that she would later discover came from indoor chemicals and pollutants.

“So many people accept their deteriorating condition, take pills or drink coffee

fashioned mattresses back into vogue. One such company is Arcadia-based Vivetique Sleep Systems (www.vivetique.com), specializing in all-organic mattresses, crib mattresses, comforters and pillows.

President Steve Carwile bought the Crown City Mattress Company in

Pasadena in 1981 and learned first-hand how the company had been making traditional cotton beds since 1917.

“They weren’t called organic back then,” he says. “That was just how beds were made.”

Carwile decided to take business in a more natural direction. He began selling organic cotton beds in 1992 and later struck a deal with 200 sheep ranches on the West Coast to be the suppliers of his

organic pure wool stock.

Still, as with most green items today, price can be a factor. Cost for a 100-percent organic baby mattress can run from \$350 to \$700. So Vivetique and other companies also offer organic mattress toppers filled with hemp, wool or cotton. Baby toppers cost \$120 to \$180.



Crib mattresses can be a major source of volatile organic compounds (VOC). Some green parents are turning to those made from organic cotton, like this one from Pasadena-based Vivetique.

to just stagger to get by,” she says. “We should all try to live fully each day.”

Babies whose green-minded parents give them a healthy start have the most to gain. Gavigan of Healthy Child Healthy World is excited to put all his work knowledge to personal use when his first child is born this fall.

“I’ve talked the talk and now I get to

walk the walk,” he says. “I’m glad my wife, Jessica, and I have so many choices on how to make our home nontoxic, natural and holistic. There are more great opportunities to come in the future as well.” ♦

Brenda Rees is an Eagle Rock mom, L.A. Parent’s calendar editor and the resident organic expert.

RESOURCES

On the Web

- **Green Home** – www.greenhome.com – This environmental store and resource center offers product information, home testing equipment rental and service referrals based on your ZIP code.

- **Green Nest** – www.greennest.com – Look here for product recommendations for home, pet, baby, nutrition, pest control and cleaning as well as advice on how to eliminate toxins from your living environment.

- **Healthy Child Healthy World** – www.healthychild.org – Here’s practical information on environmental toxins, the damage they do to children and how to get rid of them with healthier alternatives. Sign up for a weekly newsletter of tips.

Books

- *The Peaceful Nursery: Preparing a*

Home for Your Baby with Feng Shui, by Laura Forbes Carlin and Alison Forbes, Delta Publishing, 2006. Through color photographs and diagrams, the authors help readers to imagine and create a nursery that is beautiful and sensible.

- *Spirit of the Nursery (Spirit of the Home)*, by Jane Alexander, Watson-Guption Publications, 2002. An overview on how to turn baby’s room from ordinary to special using creative lighting, color and comforting scents ideas.

DVD

- *Not Under My Roof!: Protecting Your Baby at Home*, co-hosted by Olivia Newton-John, Kelly Preston and others, Children’s Health Environmental Coalition, 2001. Celebrities discuss the health risks to children from toxic exposures in the home and offer alternative ways to eradicate those chemicals.

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