

Room to Play

Interior designer **Neela Woodard** infuses a Montclair home with stylish whimsy and grownup comfort.

THE OWNERS OF THIS TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY, CENTER-HALL COLONIAL IN Montclair certainly wouldn't have been the first new parents to have their living space morph into a playroom. But, instead of a gradual surrender to toys, bouncy chairs, stuffed animals, and picture books, this couple decided to embrace the needs of their toddler by fashioning a playroom right in the center of their home. To execute their unconventional plan, they turned to West Orange interior designer Neela Woodard.

"Since the homeowners have an eat-in-kitchen, they felt they didn't need a formal dining room," says Woodard. "The concept was that the space could be 'de-toyed' and tables brought in, if they wanted to use it as a dining room."

Woodard enjoys the challenge of customizing creative solutions for her clients. "Design should be personal. My job is to facilitate what clients want their home to be—even if they can't articulate it." Often people know what they *don't* want, but not what they *do* want, she says. "They don't always have the vocabulary to talk about design because it's so visual. Transitional may not mean the same thing to me as it does to you." In order to interpret her clients' wishes, Woodard encourages them to start by pulling pages of favorite rooms out of design magazines to help determine their preferences. "I don't want to design something for you in my taste," says Woodard. "I want to apply my general aesthetic to what will function and feel good for you."

Living room and hallway:

In the living room (right and below right), the homeowners wanted Moroccan flavor with a clean, modern aesthetic. Woodard used subtle wall colors to allow the rich, red recessed wall and jewel-colored furnishings and accessories to pop. The layout needed to accommodate an awkward doorway, so Woodard created two well-balanced areas: one for conversation and one for reading and relaxing. In the hallway (below center), Woodard takes her cue from a piece of the homeowner's artwork, framing it against pale gray walls with an orange-cushioned bench by Oly Studio placed below. Overhead, a capiz-shell light fixture by Oly Studio lends a fanciful touch.



Playroom/ dining room:

When turning this once-traditional dining room into a toddler-friendly play space, designer Neela Woodard took her cue from the Birds and Butterflies wallpaper by Schumacher. "The client was wildly in love with the pattern," she says. Neutral wall coloring unifies the molding and built-ins and visually raises the ceiling. Modular floor tiles by Flor create a colorful carpet that follows the angles of the room. The elegant crystal chandelier elevates the space whether it is being used for dining or recreation.



BY DEBORAH CARTER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRISTOPHER WOOD



About Neela Woodard Design

In 2004, after enjoying a successful career in publishing, Woodard was ready for a new challenge. "I took stock of what I was very good at,"

she says. Her list—creative, artistic, good at coordinating projects, and very social—led her to enroll in the New York School of Interior Design. After working at several well-known Manhattan design houses, she opened her West Orange-based firm in 2007. Going into design was "the best decision I've ever made," she says. "I love getting to know clients and helping them create spaces they love coming home to."

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