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landestine midnight feasts in bunk beds, creating dens at the bottom of the garden with fallen branches and some old tarpaulin, and the occasional, longed-for reward of staying up past your usual bedtime to watch something on the single family telly. Once so thrilling, these wholesome childhood adventures today sound nothing short of archaic.

Time was, we would kick the kids outside and tell them to play on the street until teatime. Now a seemingly hostile outside world, coupled with a sea change in the amount we are prepared to spend on our offspring, has fuelled an extraordinary, often exorbitantly expensive and sometimes downright OTT phenomenon: the rise of children's luxury interiors.

"More and more parents are indulging their children with dedicated spaces to live out their fantasy worlds," says Morgan Dudley, the founder of Alchemy Property Management, based in central London. "Playrooms are no longer a few square feet cornered off from the family dining room.

"Now they can be two storeys high, with swings or cocoon beds that hang from ceilings, wardrobes that lead to secret passages, indoor jungle gyms, treehouse activity zones, climbing walls

Toy storey

Six-figure treehouses, playrooms the size of a house: Emma Wells finds out just how far parents will go to keep their little darlings happy

The Landers, right, created a 1,000 sq ft basement for their son, Leo, 3. His bedroom is also customised



Julian Andrews

SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL

Watch a video on how to create a Moroccan-themed Beatrix Potter children's bedroom, on tablet or at thesundaytimes.co.uk/home/video

and how much paraphernalia you buy your children is not the key issue," says Dr Richard Woolfson, a child psychologist. "It is about the impact things have on family relationships and whether a child is being isolated.

"Face-to-face integrated family time is what counts, and maintaining connections, so parents shouldn't be afraid of buying their children nice stuff. There are always ways to manage materialism and show children the value of things by getting them, when they are old enough, to contribute their own pocket money."

Viki Lander, who runs the architectural interiors firm Ensoul (ensoul.co.uk), says many of her clients — who generally have budgets of between £250,000 and £1.5m — are looking for practical ways to live, striking a balance with private and separate children's space, and often adding value to their home along the way by creating dedicated extensions or basements.

"For people with young children, the toys can be kept out of the adult living areas, and you can be incredibly creative in your designs," she says. "We've just put in light fittings that look like woodpeckers sitting on a branch in a treehouse we built for a toddler's playroom. Or you could use ceiling lights that look like balloons.

"Wall art is always a winner, picturing Paddington Bear or Winnie-the-Pooh,



and slides. And with themes from submarine to fairy-tale castle, modern luxury kids' bedrooms — often up to 1,000 sq ft or more, and filled with top-of-the-range furniture and games — can exceed what most adults dream of for themselves."

We could blame Princess Diana. "She adored her children and she loved style, so she was probably one of the first people to adopt the trend," says Lucinda Croft, a member of the founding family of Dragons of

Walton Street, the upmarket design firm behind the sumptuous nurseries of Princes William and Harry. She is now on speed dial for any self-respecting pregnant celeb or royal, and the firm is on the fourth floor of Harrods, in Knightsbridge.

Its bestselling items include a £3,295 handmade luxury Moses basket, which features French chantilly lace and hand-cut glass crystals — simply add a personalised coronet. Clients with serious cash to splash should consider

the bespoke hand-painted Walton Park doll's house, with 15 rooms and a real marble entrance hall, for sale with a guide price of £22,500. And, should you feel you are being overindulgent, 10% of the sale price goes to charity.

So how much is too much, too young? Even if you have an unlimited budget, don't you risk turning your child into an overcoddled ingrate? "There are certainly new levels of wealth today, but how much money you have



DIGITAL

How to create a Beatrix Potter on tablet or at homevideo

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These state-of-the-art treehouses in Surrey were given a hi-tech spec costing £100,000 - each

What should we expect for the next generation of pampered tots? Indoor big wheels, mini football fields and racetracks with model sports cars controlled by phone

your child's favourite pop star, sportsperson or animated character, or perhaps a scene from their favourite film."

Older children, Lander says, are getting games rooms for table tennis and their collections of instruments, and big televisions for gaming and watching programmes the oldsters don't. They also provide valuable extra space for sleepovers.

"Parents spend a lot more time with their kids today than they did 30 years ago," Lander says, "so it's not about not spending time together, whether they have their own dedicated space or not. We spend time with our son in his."

At their four-bedroom home on Wandsworth Common, southwest London, Lander and her husband, Mike, 51, a smart-home technology expert, have created a 1,000 sq ft basement under the garden for their son, Leo, 3. It has a hand-carved indoor treehouse and a glass wall looking into the space from a state-of-the-art gym, so she can watch him while she's on the treadmill. "We have a bespoke glass safety gate so he doesn't constantly have access to all the toys down there," she says.

Leo's bedroom is in the main part of the house, but is no less luxurious: it has a Sonos sound system, a hand-painted bespoke mural (Winnie-the-Pooh), an ensuite and an inspirational quote from Dr Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* in the hallway outside.

"It's not about money," Lander insists. "It's about being creative, understanding materials, and, most important, taking the time to work out how you want to live as a family."

If you don't have the budget to carve out a toddler basement - the Landers spent about £350,000 on excavation, structural work and fit-out - why not try making your existing space more open-plan and flexible? Think about creating living areas that accommodate a work/homework area for adults and children, and a kitchen and dining space for the whole family, with a TV/relaxation/play/games zone so the kids can hang out while you're cooking.

Lander suggests low-level sofas, shelving units - for marking out areas while keeping a sense of open space - and floor-to-ceiling fixed glass panels, which provide boundaries without shutting anyone out. And make use of the innovative new lino floor products on the market to create beautifully patterned wet and dry sections of rooms; visit muraflor.com for inspiration.

You may run the risk of feeling like a helicopter parent this way, but at least you'll be able to keep a watchful eye on your older kids' internet activities. The Get Safe Online initiative has revealed that more than a third of parents feel they have no control over their children playing online games, and is urging them to set up control software, as well as to monitor activity.

That said, it's worth thinking carefully before you start knocking down walls, lest your offspring start to tyrannise you. "For some time, the fashion with smaller London houses has been to open them up as much as possible," says Saul Empson, director at Haringtons UK, a central London buying agency. "But there has been something of a backlash against this, as what looks marvellous on the architect's drawings tends to become a pain in the proverbial to live with.

"Some of our neighbours knocked their living room, study, kitchen and dining room into one long space. In practice, this means there is never a situation when you can have any privacy from your children, short of sending them to bed." One supper, Empson recalls, was ruined by the sound of the kids at the other end of the room, watching *How to Train Your Dragon 2* at top volume while bickering over popcorn.

Other families have opted to hedge their bets, creating an entirely child-friendly home. When Kathleen Crapp, 49, and her husband, Nicholas, 52, bought six-bedroom Sunnyside, in Croydon, east London, in 2006, their daughters, Elise and Catherine, were 10 and 6. They decided to think of the 5,000 sq ft property, which is within walking distance of Kenley train station, as a "Montessori" house.

"We designed each room with bright colours to make children feel welcome and at ease to express themselves, placing books and games in almost every room, then adding fun elements," Kathleen says. "They had a theatre room with a stage, as well as a disco ball, hardwood floors and mirrors - the girls loved performing."

"As they grew up, it evolved into their GCSE room, where they could revise." The garden was also designed with a secret "hobbit hole", a trampoline and a fire pit. The Crapps are now selling up for £2.1m (01883 840183, hamptons.co.uk).

So what should we expect for the next generation of pampered tots? Indoor big wheels, mini football fields and racetracks with model sports cars controlled by smartphones will soon be *de rigueur*, and underground Alice in Wonderland-themed tunnels connecting children's bedrooms are the latest trend from Manhattan.

If all else fails, you can always turn to technology: last year, the home automation firm Crestron transformed two luxury Blue Forest treehouses in the grounds of a Surrey home into media and games rooms, with an Xbox One, a film server, Sky HD, high-speed broadband and a multiroom sound system - along with a fireman's pole - at a cost of £100,000 each. Well, that's Christmas sorted.



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