

teen DECOR



■ Function follows form for teens, tween furniture market

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IF TEENAGERS' bedroom sets were actual teenagers, the Princess Bed Set of yesteryear would be the kid that no one sits with in the cafeteria. The treacly pastel bedding, the elaborate twisted faux gold headboard, the castle lamp: ostracized.

Over in the cool corner, though, rubbing elbows with the jocks and the preps, is the bed with a surfboard for a headboard. A side table whose top supports a sleek metal lamp and whose sides unfold to reveal a hidden storage area for hundreds of CDs. An area rug with overlapping blotchy flowers in bold colors like berry blue, cherry red and lemon yellow. Metal storage bins which recall the look of the traditional gym locker that hold stacks of Teen Vogue, or perhaps Thrasher.

Blame It on the inescapable home decorating shows that wallpaper today's television schedules: The teenage bedroom set has grown up. To appeal to the teen and tween set, furniture providers are creating models that are aesthetically pleasing to teens through color, texture or veneer. At the same time, the products are extremely functional, providing teens extra space for storage or display. All told, it's proving to be a gold mine for the furniture industry.

That's quite a statement, considering the market has only recently been tapped. San Francisco-based Zocalo just came out with five collections for teens called the Z Generation, and PBTeen, the clear leader in the market, is actually just a toddler since it only launched 21 months ago. And yes, that PB stands for Pottery Barn, the hegemonic company under the Williams Sonoma umbrella.

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TEEN MARKET: The PBTeen Surf Collection (above) has elements similar to those in a house the company outfitted for "The Real World" TV show. Other fun designs include Pura Vida, featuring "My Mirage" Canopy (right). Zocalo adapted its Milano desk for teens; the CD cabinet doubles as a side table (far right).



Teen, tween furniture market finding its niche



FIT FOR A TEEN: These designs from Zocalo's Cherry Hill (left) and Montana Lodge collections get their inspiration from the company's adult lines.

"We were the first to have a dedicated assortment for teen merchandise," says Leigh Oshirak, spokeswoman for PBTeen, which currently sells only by catalog and online. "It was a similar launch to Pottery Barn Kids. There was a void in the market. With all the do-it-yourself stuff, home makeover shows and the popularity of that whole genre, we realized the teen group was a major group that was loving making choices for their rooms. When we met with people from the Trading Spaces' TV show, we realized how big teen support was for that show."

It's amazing, upon reflection, that it took so long for teen-oriented home decor products to come on the market. Sure, there have been furniture collections made "for kids," but really, those matchy-matchy sets were made for the parents buying them for the kids. Those pieces in no way allowed self-expression.

Even back in the stone age – the '70s – teen magazines like Dynamite would regularly showcase ways to personalize a room: Make a pillow out of that old "Keep on Truckin'" R. Crumb logo T-shirt! Recycle your denims into cool curtains! Keep your room neat by turning your old shoeboxes into storage spaces for your 8-track tapes!

Still, it's shocking how fast teenagers have caught on to the home decor craze that also grips their parents. In a less health-damaging way, it feels a bit like a big cigarette company that uses cartoons to appeal to kids in hopes of "startin' 'em young." Start the kids off with the slick PBTeen catalog and when

they're all grown up, they'll graduate to the even slicker adult version.

The PBTeen catalog may be, in fact, the most tangible barometer of the teen market's success. The first catalog had 60 or so pages. The latest one has 92. That's an increase of more than 50 percent in product.

Zocalo got a taste of the market's potential, too, at last month's San Francisco Mart Winter Market 2005. At the show, Zocalo introduced five Z-Generation collections to wholesalers: Cherry Hill, Milano, Sterling Park, Cinnamon Bay and Montana Lodge.

Two standouts were from the Milano collection. A maple wood desk with flared legs has a pullout extension that would work well for a computer keyboard or an extra storage spot for magazines. It retails for \$299. Alongside the desk was a CD cabinet, which retails for \$249, with storage for nearly 200 discs and which can double as a night stand.

"We sold a ton of those things," says Zocalo marketing director Danny Olivas. "It's an untapped market that people are ready to grab onto. People aren't as apt to grab onto something like a pink princess set that a grandparent would buy. They want something unique and fashionable."

The furniture is indeed designed to appeal to teens, who are notoriously finicky. What's refreshing, though, is that Zocalo and PBTeen are approaching the market in different ways. When Zocalo, a 10-year industry veteran, initially thought about growing its business, its marketers toyed with the idea of juvenile furniture:

whimsical and colorful.

While that works for PBTeen, it wasn't the right match for Zocalo, a traditional, smart and savvy-looking brand. Instead, the company took its five best-selling lines, each of which had hip finishes like those maple ve-neers in the Milano line, and adapted them.

"We don't want to do wacky colors. We want to be fashionable, we want to be current," says Olivas. "We follow the trends in fashions. Home furnishings are just a couple years behind. If I adapt my paint palette in the showroom to what Urban Outfitters did six months ago, by the time the line comes out, I'll be right on."

There are some common denominators among teen home decor items, though. Texture is big – like the metal locker-desk from PBTeen that retails for \$452, and Zocalo's newest designs, debuting in April, that incorporate aluminum and rubber.

A point-counterpoint between storage and display is also key. An ultimate example of that might be PBTeen's Switch-It Bed, whose twin size retails for \$699, and has built-in cubbies in the headboard and rolling trundle drawers beneath the mattress.

"For teens, it's all about storage and showing off stuff that you want," says Olivas. "Teens want to show off stuff, parents want them to hide it if it's a mess."

Even more compelling than the designs, however, may be the actual marketing to the teens. While Zocalo, as a wholesaler, doesn't have to pitch directly to teens, PBTeen does, and does it well.

In a major coup, the company

landed the contract to decorate a San Diego house for the granddaddy of TV reality shows, "The Real World," a year ago. A home right next to the water, the house was decked out in PBTeen's surf motif.

The PBTeen Web site, also done well, is a sight to behold. While it is an e-commerce site, it's also a hang-out for kids. Colors pop from the screen. Images are animated. A question and answer corner helps kids customize their rooms, and a bulletin board lets them post their messages, most of which start with "Dear PBTeen" and end with something like "Love, Katie." In the postings, most refer to the PBTeen catalog as their favorite "magazine" which isn't a surprise because the catalog is much more buffed out and offers more tips than a regular Pottery Barn catalog.

And if there's any question of the appeal of all this to kids, just ask Rosie, an eighth-grader who's posted a note and a picture of herself astride a motorcycle on the PBTeen Web Site.

"My family is in the process of getting a new house. And for the first time I get my own room," Rosie writes. "I have been saving all your catalogs and have been getting really excited about choosing different color schemes and neat accessories for my room . . . I want to be an interior designer and decorator when I grow up and by looking at your catalog I get some really neat ideas."

Start 'em young, oh yes, start 'em young.