

(THIS PHOTO)

Alison Hui of Babu, here with son Jack, loves the minimalism of the white sheets in her range of baby linen: "White looks good forever – I'll never move to coloured sheets."

INNERchild

THE DEMAND FOR DESIGN-SAVVY CHILDREN'S FURNITURE IS GROWING AS PARENTS INSIST ON STYLISH PIECES FOR EVERY ROOM. SARAH CATHERALL INVESTIGATES THIS TREND

PHOTOGRAPHY by Matthew Williams and Paul McCredie



furniture. If you work professionally, you're used to having nice things. You get pregnant and look at nursery options – we saw cutesy, frilly, frothy baby designs. Just because you're pregnant doesn't mean you've lost your sense of style."

Keziah reluctantly shifted out of her designer cot when she was old enough – but the transition to a bed was as simple as removing the mesh sides of the Kiwaka One cot. Resembling a boat in design, the cot becomes a toddler's bed, with the sides able to be pulled out to extend into an adult-sized single bed. "So, when you turn 13, you don't feel as though you're sleeping in a toddler's bed," says Catherine.

At \$1800 for a cot, or \$2500 for the cot and bed kit, it's a long-term investment in a child's bedroom. Kraka Design plans to begin exporting its range this year. The company, along with a growing number of others in New Zealand, is increasingly changing the way that parents think about children's furniture. Sold on-line (www.krakadesign.co.nz) and through Eon Design Centre in Auckland, Kraka Design has just launched the Kiwaka Mo cot – a cheaper option, lower to the ground, with a white-painted finish. The company's wardrobe has a cute circular hole through which children can play peek-a-boo or stage a puppet show, while the piece acts as a room divider. Furniture can be mixed and

BABY MUST-HAVES

(RIGHT)

The Evolution chair, from \$325, from Outer Edge, see www.outeredge.co.nz for orders and stockists.



(LEFT)

Babu's woollen cot blanket, \$130, set of four wash cloths, \$17.60 and bassinet blanket, \$55, see www.babu.co.nz for stockists.



(ABOVE)

Wikid's storage trolley converts to a blackboard – \$470, available in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.



Kraka Design's latest model, the Kiwaka Mo, is a low-to-the-ground cot which "grows" into a toddler's bed. From \$1200, see www.krakadesign.co.nz for stockists.

"PEOPLE ARE BUYING THE EVOLUTION CHAIR BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT A PILE OF PLASTIC JUNK AT THE DINING TABLE"

matched, adding to its versatility – for example, the changing table slots on top of the bookcases.

Designer Clare Athfield and industrial designer Natasha Perkins launched their Wikid brand of children's furniture two years ago, when Kraka was looking for bedroom tables and wardrobes to accompany its cots. While Kraka has gone on to develop its own furniture range, Natasha says the philosophy behind the Wikid range is "not to insult kids by giving them furniture in the primary colours". The furniture is the younger sibling of the pair's Urban Dwellers range, aimed at the growing apartment market. "We always knew that the Urban Dwellers range could be tailored to children. It's scaled to fit children's requirements," Natasha says.

Modular-based units can be interchanged and added to as a child's needs change. Wikid's bedside table in natural timber has a paua-shell handle, while a storage trolley comes with a lid painted in blackboard paint, making it a dual purpose item – and a big hit at the kohanga reo of Natasha's four-year-old son, Ishmael.

To date, most of Wikid's children's range has been sold by word of mouth, but it will be released this year in three stores: Red House, Christchurch; REM Design, Auckland and Furniture Works, Wellington.

"This is the sort of stuff that kids could eventually take flating. The blackboard trolley could eventually be a coffee table in an 18-year-old's flat. It's designed to be long lasting," says Natasha.

With a designer cot in your child's bedroom, you may want to dress it in stylish linen. Enter Alison Hui, an Auckland mother with a background in nursing and medical sales, who designed a range of upmarket baby bedwear and accessories following the birth of her son, Jack. In 2002, she launched her company Babu, which makes a range of designer baby bedwear and accessories using natural, chemical-free cotton designed in minimalist style. "I was looking for lush, durable fabric sheets for Jack and I couldn't

find any. So, I decided to make the sort of linen that made a mum feel that she was putting her baby in something luxurious and fantastic," she recalls.

Alison had specialised in asthma and allergies as a nurse and was concerned enough about New Zealand's high cot death rate to create sheets that promoted safety, as well as design and functionality. Her Auckland home is decorated in a minimal, contemporary style and, while kids' clothing seems to be getting brasher and brighter, she provides white baby linen that reflects her personal decorating taste. Waffle blankets, bibs and baby wraps are in neutral colours and are sold in about 50 stores in New Zealand and two in Australia. "You can't beat white. I'll never move to coloured sheets because white looks good forever – we wanted a colour that didn't go out of fashion," she says.

While Jack has grown out of his Babu cot sheets and is now in a king-single bed, babies whose parents can afford to pay \$140 for a cot set are, according to Alison, having dream sleeps. "A baby spends so much time in a cot, so you want something soft and secure."

For parents seeking a stylish child's chair to join their contemporary collection at the dining table, a Hamilton-based company, Outer Edge, has designed an alternative to the standard highchair. The Evolution chair is made from Australian hoop pine ply and is designed to grow with the child – by shifting a couple of steps, the chair accommodates a baby who can be strapped in at full height; shift the steps down and a 10-year-old child can sit at the family dining table. Not only does it look stylish but Outer Edge owner, Sue Edmond, comments: "We wanted something that was design-oriented. People are buying it because they don't want a pile of plastic junk at the dining table or in the kitchen."

Priced from \$325, the Evolution chair comes in a range of stylish colours and can be purchased by mail order, or through a handful of shops such as Kiwi Clan Baby Chair in Auckland. Says Sue: "It's very good for kids who need to sit at the table to do their homework. But I also heard of a five-year-old who had never eaten a full meal because he couldn't reach the table. As soon as his parents bought one of these chairs, he climbed into it, sat at the table and ate all his dinner."

The proof of the pudding – or the design – is indeed in the eating. **H&E**




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DESIGNTREND



When Catherine Beard gave birth to her daughter Keziah four years ago, the Wellington marketing consultant searched the shops for a stylish cot. She didn't want her daughter "behind bars" in a standard colonial-style cot with drop sides and was looking for nursery furniture to suit the contemporary furnishings of her home in Wellington's eclectic Newtown.

Catherine and her friend Jenny Weenink, a Wellington architectural designer, designed a unique cot with soft mesh sides, launched in 2001 as "Kiwaka One". Their children's furniture company, Kraka Design, was born that same year and, as Keziah has grown up, she has trialed the company's growing range of furniture – a funky collection of wardrobes, desks, sidetables and bookcases.

Children's bedrooms are evolving from the frills, fluff and racing cars of yesterday into stylish rooms, filled with contemporary furniture and accessories. Parents with designer homes want their children's rooms to be stocked with furniture that reflects the rest of their house, sparking a local production boom as designers create beds, wardrobes, kids' linen and special chairs for little people.

Says Catherine: "Parents had little choice when it came to quality

(ABOVE)
Design company Wikid's storage trolley also becomes a blackboard and is often pressed into service at the kohanga reo that Wikid's co-owner Natasha Perkins' son Ishmael [four] attends.