

Decor Score: Bringing up baby â€¦ safely and stylishly

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: Until we had our first baby two years ago, I never knew how hazardous a home could be. Everything I read is full of warnings, such as how the crib railings have to be spaced just so. Even stuffed toys carry "do not" labels. Now we're redecorating our living/dining room, and my playgroup friends tell me to watch out for the cords on the shades and blinds because they can strangle a child. Maybe you don't talk about safety issues in a design column, but I thought I'd ask anyway.

A: And I'm glad you did. I believe that "pretty really is as pretty does" and that all furnishings for a home should be functional and comfortable. Comfort includes safety, as the home furnishings industry itself believes. Hence, you have lead-free paint, upholstered sofas and chairs that smother cigarette cinders, and, yes, set standards governing the spacing of baby crib bars (2 3/8-inches apart) so the Wee One's head can't get wedged-in.

Dangling cords on window shades and blinds also pose hazards to both children and pets, who might get caught and hanged in the loop. Here, too, the industry has seen and solved the problem.

TOUCH AND GO - New cordless Roman shades open any way you like them. CNS Photo courtesy of Levolor.

A number of blinds makers offer products that operate by remote control instead of manual cords. Point and click and your window coverings go up and down. Hunter Douglas also makes Break-Thru cords that pop open instead of tightening (www.hunterdouglas.com/safety.jsp.)

Just recently, Levolor, another major manufacturer of window coverings, introduced ready-made roman shades that are totally cordless. Just touch to adjust. The shades operate top-down or bottom-up, and come in a load of sizes (up to 144 inches wide) and plenty of different colors and patterns, like the striped number that livens up the handsome bath we show here. See more at www.levolor.com

Bottom line on home safety: we all know where most accidents happen (think 28,000 deaths and 6.8 million injuries in a typical year). Since an ounce of prevention is worth that proverbial pound of cure, you might seek the wise advice of the Home Safety Council at www.homesafetycouncil.org/safetyguide.aspx

Q: What goes with blue-and-white toile? I am doing my guest room over, based on a blue-and-white toile bedspread I inherited from my mother. Will a blue-and-white stripe work on the walls? What about the windows? I can't find fabric to match the spread.

A: There's good reason why toile (aka "toile de Jouy," after the town, Jouy-en-Josas, near Versailles, where it

was first printed in 1760) is so popular. Not only is it a classic, toile takes beautifully to almost all geometric patterns. As long as the background colors match - toile is traditionally printed on cream or white linen or cotton - you can team it with stripes, plaids, checks, even all-over florals that repeat the main color, traditionally blue, red, green, black, and sometimes yellow.

Best to my eye, you can also team toile with itself: I love the look of total toile immersion, the same pattern used everywhere, from windows to walls to furniture. But don't fret because you can't match your bedspread. Find a check in the same color and use it for a bed skirt and throw pillows. Then, you might want to repeat the check for your curtains. Or introduce a stripe. You could also stripe the walls: a number of manufacturers offer coordinating fabric and wall coverings.

One logical source for authentic toiles is the French company, Pierre Deux (www.pierredeux.com). To celebrate their 40th anniversary, Pierre Deux is introducing two new toiles, one inspired by the amorous paintings of Fragonard and Boucher, the other based on a design created in 1785 by painter Jean-Baptiste Marie-Huet that features flora, fauna and figures from around the world. In August, look for a special tote made from Pierre Deux's four famous toiles. Part of the sales profit will benefit children around the world through the Save the Children Foundation.

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