

Decor Score: Found in the attic - a magical, fun living space

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We're hoping to have a foreign exchange student come spend the next school year with us. "Us" means two teenage girls and a 7-year-old. The girls say they are willing to give up their room and move to the attic, which is kind of dismal at the moment. It's also small, two beds will take up all the space. Maybe you have some ideas on how to make it work as a bedroom for two?

A: Nice girls, your two daughters. But I'll bet that the whole truth is that they love the idea of living on top of the house. An attic room can be magic, and not just for those with legs young enough to climb up. I've always smiled at the vision of writer Vita Sackville West, ensconced high in a tower on her Sissinghurst estate (now owned by the National Trust of England). From her attic, so to speak, she could look out over her famed gardens as she wrote.

ATTIC LIVING - Sacrifice a closet, gain a bed "room"™ in an attic. CNS Photo courtesy of 'Making Room' by Wendy A. Jordan, courtesy of Tauton Press. Not as grand but also inspiring, the attic aerie in the photo we show here offers ideas you might adapt to your own upstairs. The homeowner has taken advantage of the slanted attic walls, usually given over to storage. In this case, the space is just deep enough for a built-in bunk bed, and long enough to save a sliver for a small closet on each end. Under-bed drawers offer more storage. The reading light at the head of the bed is another civilizing touch.

A final pointer: attic windows are usually smallish (unlike the generous windows in the photo, which we borrowed from a smart book called "Making Room," by Wendy A. Jordan, The Taunton Press). With limited natural light, lean on white and light colors that will help brighten the dark at the top of the stairs.

Q: I grew up in the Midwest and my parents' home always had wallpaper. I have fond memories of the flowers in my own bedroom, the teapots on the kitchen walls, and the "exotic" oriental scene in the dining room. I know they must have hung the papers themselves but I never learned how. Now it's like learning to drive in mid-life: I'm almost afraid to try. Any suggestions?

A: Two: Never ever watch that old "I Love Lucy" rerun where she tries to hang wallpaper with disastrous - and very funny - results. That sitcom scared everybody, most especially the wallcoverings

industry itself. Today, in fact, only a little over 7 percent of all the walls in American homes get to wear wallpaper, we're that afraid still.

My second bit of advice: forget Lucy. Dive in. Do your homework. It's easy to get reassurance and tips from the pros. For example, the Wallcoverings Association offers on-line how-to-hang visuals and advice (www.wallcoverings.org).

Wall coverings manufacturers are also finding ways to overcome your fear of hanging. One new and reassuring idea comes from Chesapeake Wallcoverings: "Easy-Match," they call their patented system. The wall coverings come with "match points" printed right there on the surface. All you do is line them up between panels, smooth the pre-pasted covering on the walls, then sponge off the directionals. See more at www.cheswall.com.

Wouldn't Lucy have hated "Easy-Match." It would have ruined her show.

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