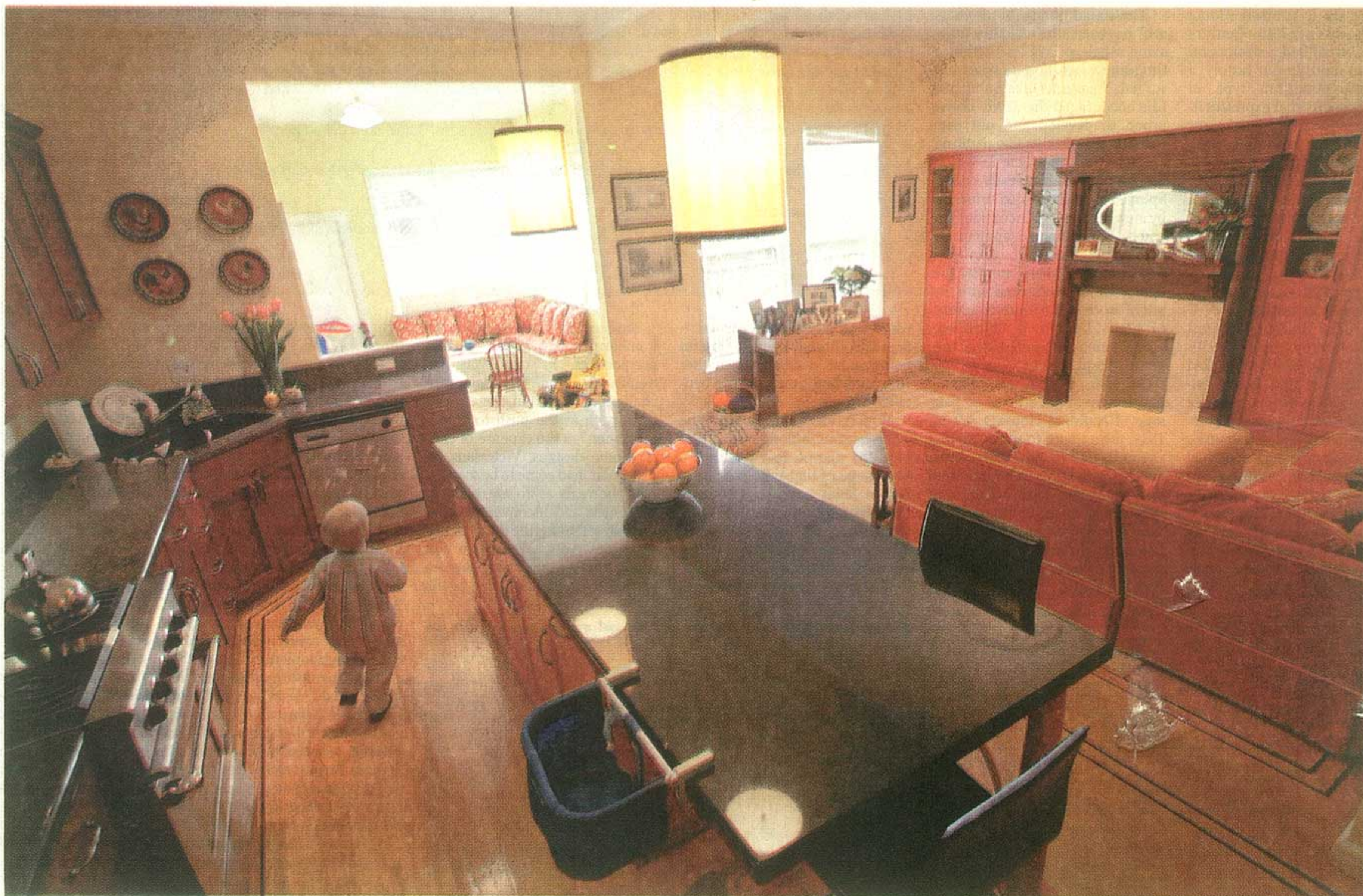


HOME

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& Garden

Section G



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ROOM FOR PLAY

HOME
IMPROVEMENT
SPECIAL SECTION

For two Bay Area families, home improvement meant rethinking room labels to make kids' space a priority

By Mary Jo Bowling
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

When Bay Area families feel squeezed for space, many build an addition. Two San Francisco families used a different tactic: They found the space they needed by creative thinking and careful planning rather than building. They both needed room for kids to play and they both hired Jeannie Fraise, an interior designer who's not bound by room labels.

An example is this San Francisco house. It's the home of a busy family of four: Mom, Dad, a 2-year-old and a 2-month-old. The problem: The family felt that the home's design was driving them apart rather than bringing them together. In the evenings, the 2-year-old son played in his small bedroom while the parents relaxed or watched television in a guest bedroom that had been converted to a media room. Both rooms were too small and too dark for

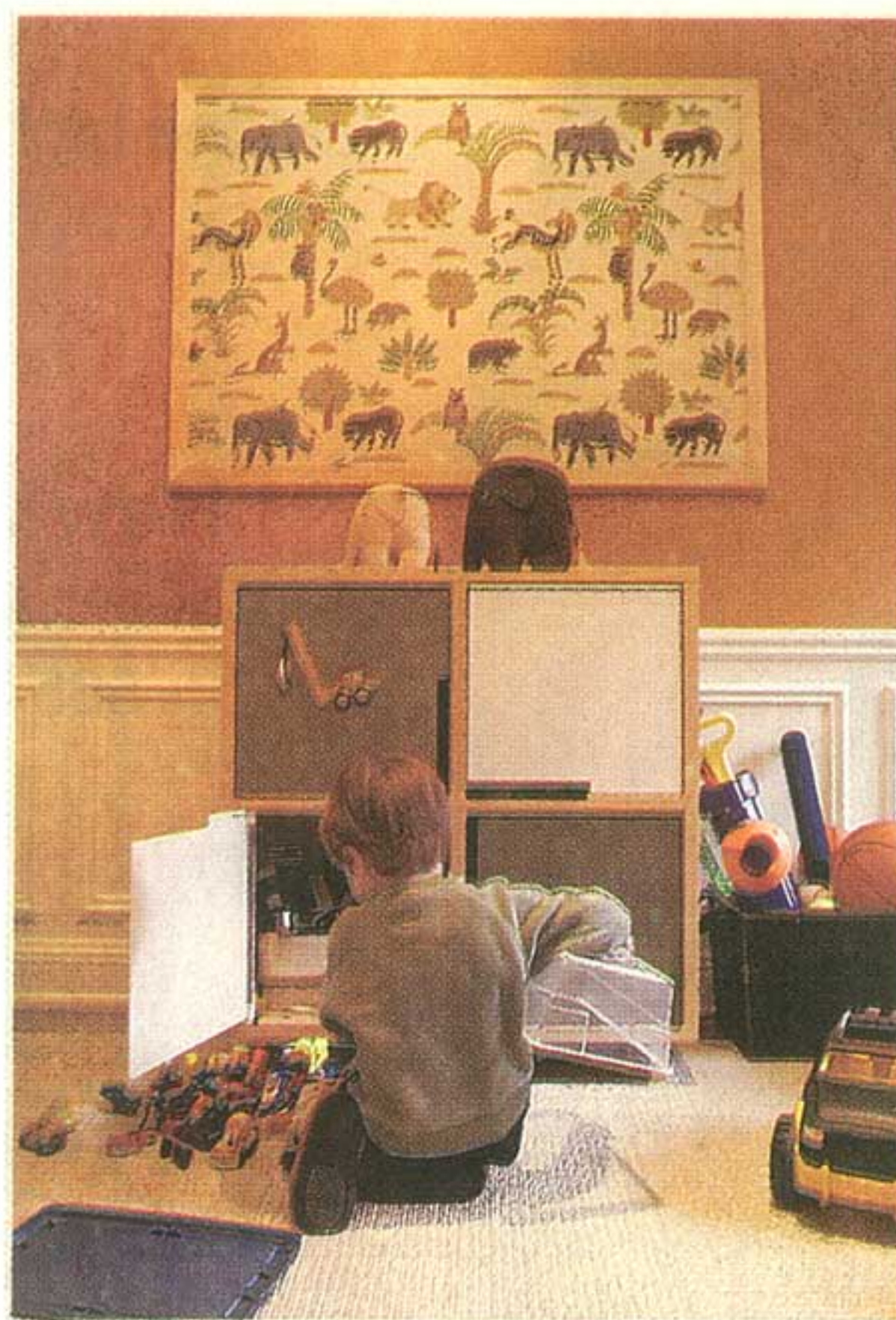
these purposes. Meanwhile, on the first floor, they had a formal dining room and living room they rarely used. It was time for a reality check.

"They had a second child on the way, and they wanted to make the house more family-friendly," Fraise says. "They decided to make the dining room a playroom and the living room a family room."

Fraise removed the dining room table and chairs. Now the family eats and entertains in an enhanced breakfast nook adjacent to the kitchen. To make the former dining room kid-friendly, she covered it with soft Flor carpet tiles, painted it a bold pumpkin orange and divided it into four play zones. "Even though this is a kid space, it had to be somewhat sophisticated," Fraise says. "It's the first room you see when you enter the house, so it had to look good."

Looking good means looking uncluttered, so each play zone — art, TV, music and train table — has its own storage. The art and music areas make use of existing built-in cabinets. Once the home of dishes

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One San Francisco family carved out play space by opening up small rooms into one large kitchen/family room, above, and turning the utility porch off the kitchen into a playroom with banquette, below.



A second San Francisco family solved a similar play-space crunch for their two young children by turning the little-used formal dining room, left, into a playroom. Since it's now the first room visitors see, it had to be kid-friendly and still look sophisticated — and uncluttered. Toys now find a home in Blu Dot cabinets.

Rethinking room labels made space for kids

► PLAYROOM

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and linens, now the cabinets hold art and music supplies. The upper shelves hold decorative kids' items. Fraise installed a grid of cork and chalkboard squares on the wall above the art table, making a place to display artwork and papers. "Giving them space to draw and color gives them room to be creative," Fraise says.

Fraise staggered small shelves for storage and display throughout the room. "They can keep photos and toys on them," she says.

In the TV and train table zone, low Blu Dot cabinets store toys and books. The sleek, modern pieces weren't necessarily created with kids in mind, but their simple, graphic shapes and uncomplicated cabinet doors are perfect for little ones. Plus, they are low enough for smaller people. "I think it's really important to give kids storage that's functional and easy to use," Fraise says. "If they can't use it, the toys end up being all over the room rather than put away."

The TV is flanked by plush, attractive floor pillows, an easy-chair equivalent for youngsters. They make a comfy place for kids to relax and watch videos or play the guitar. To come: a smaller-scale chair that fits both kids and adults. "It's important that everyone have a comfortable place to sit," Fraise says. "Even though this is a room for kids, Mom needs a place to sit while reading books or helping them with a project."

The former formal living room is now a family room, but it's so pretty, its new role is practically undercover. The same things that make it sophisticated are the things that make it perfect for a family hangout. The Ultrasuede-covered sofa is dark, stain resistant and easy to clean. The cushions on the rattan side chairs are covered with cotton that's lovely but tough. Each cover is washable and zippered for easy removal. "My client asked me for something really comfortable and durable," Fraise says. "Comfortable doesn't have to mean big, overstuffed sofas with rolled arms. Comfortable can be deep cushions that look elegant."

What makes it a family room is the new flat-screen TV that hangs across from the sofa. New curtains and shades allow light control for viewing. Given that the family room is across from the playroom, parents can relax and watch TV while keeping an eye on the kids. Because the fabric is sturdy, it's also the perfect place for the family to watch movies together while sitting on the sofa and eating popcorn.

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The second family design problem Fraise tackled is in a flat occupied by a couple with children ages 2½ and 6 months. The back of the unit was divided into three small, hard-to-use rooms: a kitchen, family room and utility porch. Fraise solved the problem by taking down the walls between the rooms and making one large, open space.

The utility porch, a feature found in many older San Francisco buildings, once served as the laundry room. Fraise designed a new closet for the laundry in the space. The rest of the area is now the dedicated-kids' play space. A built-in banquette with cushions makes a great place for kids to sit and read or be read to. There's storage underneath for toys. A



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The former formal living room, which is across from the playroom, is now a comfortable family room with stain-resistant sofa and chairs with removable cushions.



Kids' storage areas, such as in this banquette, must be easy to use.

small table in the center is for arts and crafts. The end cabinet on the kitchen island, just a few feet away, holds paints, crayons and markers.

The new Provencal-red kitchen island, added after the walls came down, also has shelves for cookbooks and kids' books. Existing cabinets are used, but Fraise replaced hardware to better mesh with the traditional lines of the Edwardian flat. In the now-larger family room, cabinetry added around the existing fireplace serves multiple purposes: It provides cover for the TV set, storage for DVDs and the like and display space for family china. "This is where everyone hangs out now," Fraise says. "Now someone can be cooking in the kitchen or hanging out in the family room while the kids are playing in the play area. They can see and interact with each other."

E-mail freelance writer Mary Jo Bowling at home@sfchronicle.com.

Resources

Materials used in the dining room turned playroom/living room turned family room:

Playroom

- **Walls:** Benjamin Moore Butterscotch
- **Light fixture:** Galbraith & Paul, www.galbraithandpaul.com (available through design professionals)
- **Storage units:** Blu Dot, www.bludot.com
- **Art table and chairs:** Offi, www.offi.com
- **Chairs:** Room & Board, www.roomandboard.com
- **Star pillow:** Lotus Bleu, www.lotusbleudesign.com

Family room

- **Family room walls:** Benjamin Moore Baby Turtle (50 percent on walls, 100 percent in bookcase, 25 percent on ceiling)
- **Sofa:** Patricia Edwards, available at Partridge Associates, (415) 431-1896, (available through design professionals)
- **Chairs:** McGuire, www.kohlerinteriors.com (available through design professionals)
- **Shades:** Conrad, www.conradshades.com (available through design professionals)
- **Valance:** The Roman Shade Co., www.romanshadecompany.com

Materials used in the kitchen/family room/playroom

- **Cabinetry and island:** Nova Designs Builds, www.novadesigns.com
- **Red paint:** Benjamin Moore Poppy
- **Banquette fabric:** Osborne & Little, www.osborneandlittle.com

Designer

Jeannie Fraise, Lotus Bleu — Art & Interior Design, 327 Hayes St., San Francisco, CA 94102; (415) 861-2700; www.lotusbleudesign.com.

— M.J.B.

Making a space child-friendly

Jeannie Fraise thinks that limited square footage doesn't preclude having room for a child-dedicated space. "In this area, we don't necessarily have huge rooms that can be turned into playrooms," she says. Her solution for her clients is to create play spaces that work hard and have multiple functions. "A lot of my clients who are mothers work or work part time," she says. "Having a comfortable space where they can spend time with the kids is really important."

Here are Fraise's tips for creating a great playroom in any room:

► **Make room for storage.** She suggests systems that are uncomplicated and easy to access and use. "If storage is difficult, nothing will be put away and you will just have a big mess," she says.

► **Make a color and material palette that goes with the design scheme in the rest of the house.** You may not have the room, or you may not want, to have your child's play area removed from the hub of the house. To make it aesthetically compatible, choose colors and fabrics that work for kids and adults.

► **Select fabrics that are tough and easy to clean.** Having to be ultra careful around precious fabric is no fun, and really not practical, for kids.

► **Choose furniture that will work for all ages.** For example, the Blu Dot furniture that Fraise has used works for a child when he's 2 or 20. Choosing furniture that will "age" with your child is a wise investment.

— Mary Jo Bowling