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DIY Nation: Four Bergen homeowners tackle home projects with their own two hands

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The Faders of Wyckoff created this colorful playroom for their two small children, ages 2 and 4. (Photo by Anthony Bianciella)

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BY JENNIFER L. NELSON BERGEN.COM

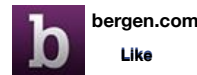
When it comes to interior design and renovation projects, everything in your home should reflect you – and there's no better way to capture your family's essence than by slipping on a painter's mask or tool belt and opting to do it yourself.

Widely known as part of the "DIY" movement, embarking on a home project on your own can prove immensely rewarding. Just ask these Bergen County residents, who have done everything from complete bathroom renovations on the cheap to transforming a storage room into a vibrant, engaging playroom for little ones – and all it took was a little creativity, bargain shopping and elbow grease.

IT'S PLAYTIME

After several years of using an extra room in their Wyckoff home for storage, Jodi and Jon Fader decided it was time to use the space more wisely: as a playroom for their two children. "Since they're still so young," Jodi says, "I wanted them to have a place to play that was on the first floor and close to the kitchen."

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their son, Charlie, 4, and daughter, Addison, 2. After several visits to stores and online retailers like Ikea, Land of Nod and acarpets.com, the Faders ended up with a variety of kid-friendly furniture and storage pieces to help keep toy clutter to a minimum.

"We even put up shelves to display their artwork," Jodi says, "so that we could all actually see and appreciate it."

They painted the walls in a green horizontal stripe pattern and then began the hunt for decorative, functional pieces that would satisfy their children's unique interests. Those included a train table, a baseball chair, a street-themed carpet for their son's cars or alphabet decals, and an arts-and-crafts table for their daughter. The Faders' finished DIY design kept function in mind; the age-appropriate toys are stored within easy reach of each child so the kids can play to their heart's content while mom makes dinner or takes care of other responsibilities.

"If you think about what your children are interested in and make that your design scheme," Jodi says, "you can find lots of great pieces that they'll enjoy and mix it in with functional furniture like shelves and toy benches to help keep things neat and organized."

LOVE WALL

Edgewater resident Vanessa DeLeon knows it doesn't have to be Valentine's Day to celebrate your relationship. For your favorite four-legged friends. That's why she and her boyfriend, Bobby, put their creativity to good use to create what the couple affectionately refers to as a "Love Wall" – a collage of memorabilia collected throughout the duration of their relationship, from framed photographs to shadow boxes containing ticket stubs to wooden letters spelling out their initials or favorite quotes.

"We had this huge blank wall and really didn't know what to do with it," DeLeon says. "We thought about commissioning an artist or putting up wallpaper but didn't want to commit ourselves to a particular design."

Instead, they opted for a can of paint and got to work collecting items that could serve as a visual representation of their relationship, including plenty of mementos related to their two Cairn Terriers, Fendi and Gucci.

"It's definitely a conversation piece," DeLeon says. "And the best part is that we're always replacing or adding new items. It's constantly evolving, just like a relationship."

An interior designer, DeLeon says the love wall is an easy and fun DIY project that anyone can do, whether you're celebrating a couple, a family, a new baby or even your employees in an office space.

"It's the perfect home project," she says. "Anyone can do it, you can use any wall and there are so many unique ways to customize it. It's a fun, inexpensive way to make a big statement in your home."

SHOWERING WITH STYLE

Though Hillsdale residents Jacki Tate, a color consultant, and her husband, Adam, who owns a furniture assembly business in Hillsdale, are quite possibly the ideal couple for DIY projects, the renovations they completed in two of their bathrooms are easy (and inexpensive) to replicate.

"With just a few minor changes," Jacki says, "you can really make an unbelievable difference."

The Tates felt the bathrooms' old-fashioned décor – think dark paneling and green floor tiles – were in desperate need of an upgrade. Like most DIYers, their goal was to keep costs

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learned how to avoid the cost of ripping up the floor tiles and replacing them. Instead, they opted to apply stick-on tiles that closely resemble real ceramic and to use pre-mixed grout, in addition to removing the wallpaper, painting the walls and adding new window treatments.

The couple brought the second bathroom up-to-date by painting, removing the shower doors and installing new light fixtures, which they painted to suit their design choices.

"Honestly, a can of paint makes such a huge difference," Jacki says.

As for the finishing touch, the couple commissioned their daughter, Maya Faye, 7, to create some original paintings, which they have since displayed in frames from Ikea to use as wall art throughout the house.

"Art is always an easy way to personalize your home," Jacki says. "And instead of sticking your child's artwork on the fridge, you can turn it into decorative pieces for any room in your home. We're truly a DIY family."

BACKYARD BARBECUE

There's no shortage of DIY projects in Michael Eichman's Paramus home, from bathroom remodels to building custom spice racks. Among his favorite projects, however, was the installation of a built-in barbecue area for the outdoor deck. This past summer, Eichman chose and installed cabinets, a refrigerator, new stonework, a marble counter top and a built-in grill to transform his backyard deck into an outdoor kitchen.

Though he works in construction, Eichman says homeowners will find a wealth of advice and assistance to complete DIY projects at retailers like Home Depot and local hardware and building supplies stores.

"You have to do your homework," Eichman says. "You can't just grab stuff from around the house and throw it together. That includes taking the time to measure everything and having a blueprint – if you build something and it doesn't fit, you're in trouble."

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