



MURALS

creating a timeless fantasyland

BY ANN BARR

Photos courtesy of Wendy's Walls, www.wendyswalls.com

We've all looked at pictures of custom painted murals, seen them transform a simple nursery into fantasyland extraordinaire, and dreamed of creating such a world of dreams for our own new arrival. But what happens to all that art when the snuggling newborn isn't such a newborn? Will a mural be too permanent?

Susan Robbins, a professional muralist in Saugerties, NY, says that this is a very common and valid concern, considering the investment that the average custom mural can be for new parents. However, Robbins says that she often makes suggestions to her clients that help ensure the murals she paints will be loved for years to come, not just a few months. "I also suggest to my clients that if there is a possibility they will be moving from the home, that I paint my mural on a canvas attached to the wall," she says. "This allows them to take the mural down when they move, and take the art with them to their new home." This can also help your new homebuyers feel more at home if they have, say, cats or iguanas instead of children.

Robbins also emphasizes that most murals are appropriate for a good part of a child's life, even if you might think the theme is too juvenile. One of her most popular baby nurseries includes characters from the Mother Goose nursery rhymes painted throughout the room with the words to one of the rhymes written on the wall. "You would be surprised at how long children are really pleased with this theme for their room," says Robbins. She adds that changing the linens and other décor can make the room appear less baby-like as your baby grows. "There are also lots of jungle themes that can be unisex and last for years," says Robbins. "Another good one to consider is insects because they work for both sexes and your child can actually grow into that theme."

Tim and Elisabeth Eaton of Beaux Art Studios in Katonah, NY, say that they have been called in to integrate pictures from children's favorite books into existing murals, making the artwork, in effect, grow with the child. They add that changes like this can be done easily and inexpensively, and make the room infinitely special for your child. "When we talk to adults who had murals

painted in their rooms as children, they have so many fond memories of their rooms," says Elisabeth. "There is just something so precious about that level of personalization."

If you can't envision even one wall, let alone the whole room and ceiling painted with a living storybook, the Eatons say that you are not alone. "Many people have a hard time imagining what the finished product will look like," says Tim. "Don't be afraid to ask your artist for a drawing that will help you get a better picture in your mind, and also don't be afraid to splash some colors on the wall to see what you like. But in the end, don't be afraid to leave the details up to the muralist."

The ABC's of Murals

When it comes to putting the mural together, much depends on what you and your artist have decided works best for your design. But most muralists draw sketches that you are allowed to collaborate on, and those sketches are transferred to the walls, at least in some rough form. This allows you to finalize furniture placement and make any last-minute decisions. Remember, small details will all be worked out later, trees can miraculously grow new branches, and even fairy tale characters can move slightly to the left. This is paint, not concrete.

Robbins says that it usually takes her between five and ten days to complete a mural, depending on the level of detail. "I've also done some murals where I worked longer than ten days," she explains. "This is where your budget plays the most primary role." The artist will be working within your budget, so be very clear about what you want to achieve within these constraints. A written contract is also a very good idea, as well as all other precautions that you would normally take when hiring any contractor or artist.

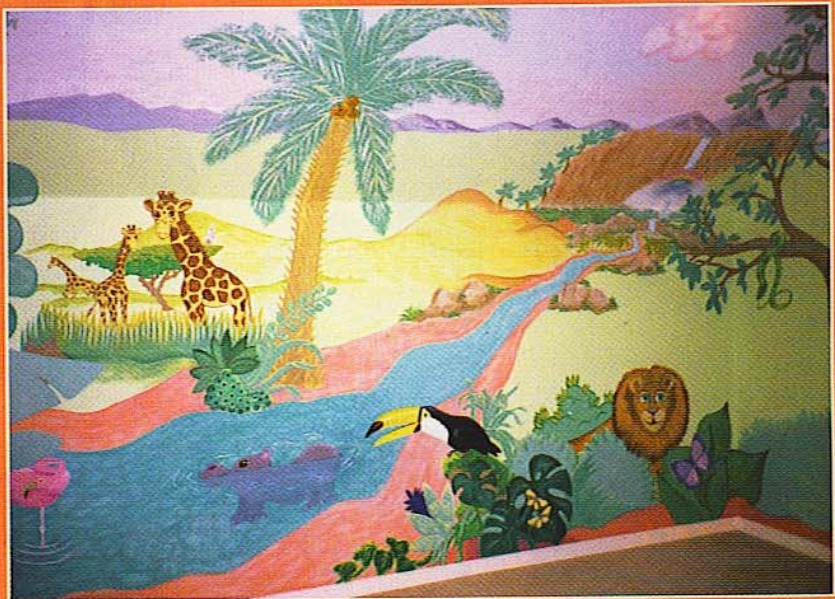
"I almost always work within a budget," says Robbins. "To simplify things and keep costs down I may paint just one wall and use less detail."

Tim Eaton says, "If you paint the entire room, including the ceiling, that is obviously going to be more expensive than just painting two or three of the walls. But we understand budgets and can always work out a plan to give the client a product that they will be happy with within their design budget."

Both Robbins and the Eatons commonly come back year after year to some rooms to add details or work on additional walls. "If the budget only includes one wall every few months, then that's how I'm happy to work," says Robbins. "Parents should not be afraid to call a muralist because they feel their budget is too small to achieve the look they desire."

Elisabeth Eaton says that to keep costs to a minimum, they concentrate on just one wall and continue the theme in small amounts on the remaining walls, which tie the whole room together. "Also, depending on your furniture placement, it may not be necessary to have a lot of detail on every single wall," she adds.

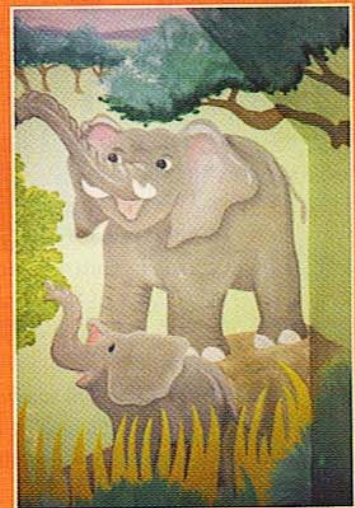
So how much can you expect to pay for a mural? These muralists



estimate that depending on your area of the country and the level of detail you would like the muralist to paint, you can expect to pay approximately \$1,000.00 per wall for the average mural.

Benefits of Murals

One benefit to a hand painted mural, says Robbins, is its staying power. "When your child's room is hand painted, your family will not tire of that room. It's not the same as [how] you tend to tire of a picture or furnishings, or



certainly as with other decorations." She explains that because the work is done by hand, you will see new things every time you study the work, and the room will really become timeless.

As an example of how lifelike and enchanting murals can be, Robbins cites a humorous example of a pond that was just a little too well painted, placed on the back of a little girl's door. The pond had a fish in it, and the child was constantly behind the door, trying to play in the water. "The mother called and asked me to move the pond," laughs Robbins. "She couldn't ever get into her child's room without risking injuring her. She was always behind that door."

Not only are murals beautiful, at their very best they can inspire your child and even be educational. You can incorporate an introduction to language skills by stenciling a literary quote or parts of a favorite nursery rhyme on the wall. Teach letters, numbers, or the parts of a tree... it's really all up to you. Murals can even be layered with several meanings, or created with cultural heritages in mind. In other words, your mural can be almost as special as that little bundle who will enjoy it. ■