

## DESIGN

# A Mother Finds the Beauty in Having a Dressing Table of One's Own

By ANNA LANE

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I'm not one of those women who can naturally make time for herself. Even during the long stretch of years before I had children, I rarely allowed myself enough time to get ready in the mornings. There was always work that needed to be finished, or dishes to be done, or a *New York Times* article just begging for my attention, thereby ensuring that I consistently found myself half-groomed and entirely frazzled. Motherhood, and the all-consuming nature of it, exacerbated this problem to an extreme. The demands of my son, followed by the birth of his sister just 18 months later, coupled with work, running a household, and connecting with my spouse, meant that I had little to no energy left to expend on myself.

When I was pregnant with my first child, seasoned parents loved to tell me that once the baby arrived I would never again have uninterrupted personal time. I sensed that my friends got some secret amount of joy out of telling me this, as if letting me in on the private password to the parenting club. I, of course, assumed that I would be different, that by some miracle of divine parenting I would still be able to enjoy plenty of alone time while simultaneously raising a human being.

Once my son arrived, and I began the day-to-day task of caring for a small, extremely demanding creature, I quickly learned that I was not going to defy the odds and maintain the lifestyle of a childless person. I was completely consumed with the feeding and (not) sleeping habits of my son, so much so that my personal grooming habits, along with the level of filth in my home, might very well have warranted a visit from the health inspector.

If my outward appearance showed the chaos of having two babies in quick succession, my home, and specifically my bedroom, did as well. What had once been the peaceful retreat for two busy, child-free professionals now looked like the "As Is" section of Babies "R" Us. Baby gear topped every available surface, a too small, spit-up stained rug covered only half of the floor, and mismatched furniture – the good stuff having long been appropriated for two nurseries – created a grim atmosphere. When the only thing being stimulated in your bedroom is your depression, it's time to make a change.

I cajoled a friend, who also happens to be an interior designer, into helping me maximize my space and my limited budget, and she suggested that I begin my bedroom re-do with the addition of a dressing table for myself. At first I dismissed this idea. A dressing table? For a woman who never even gets to pee alone, let alone put on makeup? But as I began to cull through all of the junk that had accumulated in my bedroom over the last three years, I noticed that everything belonged to either my kids or my spouse. Other than a small dish with the word "wife" painted on it, there was no proof that I existed in my own bedroom. It was time for me to, quite literally, make some space for myself in the landscape of motherhood.

So the junk went out and the dressing table went in.

The day that I put the dressing table together, and stocked it with all of my cosmetics, was the first time that I'd taken almost an entire day to do something for myself since I'd had kids. The simple tasks of cleaning my makeup brushes and tossing out expired eye

shadow felt ridiculously thrilling, because I was doing it just for myself. No one was forcing me, or waiting for me to finish, or interrupting me in the middle of it, and in those few hours I felt as though I'd finally gotten a small piece of myself back. After everything was neatly arranged I just sat in the chair for a few minutes, and reveled in the beauty of having a true space of my own. It's not fancy by any means, just a simple white table with a glass top and a narrow drawer, but it's what it symbolized – that there was space for just me inside the all-consuming world of motherhood – and that I was finally taking a step to recognize that.

I was worried, initially, that the novelty of having a dressing table would wear off, and that after a few weeks it, too, would get buried under piles of detritus that didn't even belong to me. It's been almost a year, and that hasn't happened. The table has maintained pride of place in our bedroom, and has even taken on a sort of sacred space aspect for everyone in our family. My children, who are not known for leaving things alone, have yet to terrorize my julep cups full of make-up brushes and lipsticks. My husband has so far managed to keep himself from littering the surface of my vanity with crumpled up receipts, and even I have restrained myself from turning it into a repository for the never-ending pile of clean laundry.

Having a dressing table has turned me into the type of woman who takes the time to put herself together before leaving the house. I relish the few minutes I get to myself each morning – probably not even 10, if I'm being realistic – to put on some makeup and run a brush through my hair. Sometimes I simply use the time to drink my coffee in peace under the guise of "getting ready," and I feel no guilt. There will be plenty of opportunities throughout the day for me to put myself last, but that doesn't mean that my outward appearance needs to reflect that.

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