

PET-FRIENDLY DECOR

MAKING THE PET AREA THE CAT'S MEOW

BY CARON GOLDEN

Are you among the 38 percent of U.S. households with a dog or 25 percent with a cat? According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than 48 million households have dogs and almost 32 million have cats. That's a lot of food and water bowls, leashes, toys, beds, litter boxes and fur. A lot of fur.

Many pet owners may look around their homes with all their fur kids' decidedly unstylish paraphernalia cluttering living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms — and shrug. But for those who are remodeling or renovating their living spaces and want to elevate the “I'm a pet owner” look, there are plenty of ways you can create a beautiful, pet-friendly home.

But, let's start with a caveat. If you have a puppy, wait. Really, wait. The last thing you want to do is install gorgeous hardwood floors and purchase expensive new furniture, even with protective fabric, only to have your teething, not-quite housebroken pupster work her magic on the floor, the cushions or the coffee table.

And, of course, the other crucial thing to keep in mind is that no matter how dog friendly the material, it's up to you to train your dog or cat how to behave in your home. Otherwise, you might as well buy (stylish) baby gates to keep them from destroying areas you worked so hard to create.

A few years ago, Darcy Kempton, founder of Simply Stunning

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GAIL OWENS PHOTOGRAPHY

A bathroom remodel by interior designer Michelle Strausbaugh includes a cabinet designed to hide the cat litter box.

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Spaces, was asked by Petco to design its nationwide chain of Pooch Hotels that were later bought by Wag Hotels. She said that the durability of everything is hugely important, but it also has to be safe for the pets.

Flooring is one of the biggest considerations, Kempton said. She advises installing tile or luxury vinyl if you've experienced scratching on wood floors. However, if you are set on hardwood floors, there are ways to keep them beautiful. Designer Maria Vasapollo of Sublime Spaces — who co-owns Top Notch Pet Furniture with her husband, Mike Good, a wood craftsman — explained that because the top coat of the floor gets scratched, make sure you have a good layer of clear coat to protect the wood. If it does show scratching — and dark woods are the biggest culprits — it can be buffed out and reapplied later.

"And there's tile that looks like wood," she added.

You'll want to avoid wool area rugs because they are hard to clean, said Vallerie Dalrymple, a student at the Design Institute of San Diego who designed a pet-friendly living room for a friend with a dog. She's a fan of layered jute rugs.

"I like layering area rugs. The living room project I designed had two layered jute area rugs," Dalrymple said. "If there is a stain, you could always move them around. But removing stains from jute rugs is easy. Place a towel over and under the spot and apply pressure to remove it."

Dalrymple also installed a white credenza that holds dog treats, blankets and other dog necessities. A wicker basket holds the toys.

"I believe design shouldn't make things harder. It should make things efficient," she said.

Efficiency for pet-friendly design extends to necessities such as litter boxes for cats.

Michelle Strausbaugh of Reveal Studio had a client with a cat who used an enclosed litter box in the bathroom. Strausbaugh knew the couple were unhappy



GAIL OWENS PHOTOGRAPHY

Interior designer Megan Siason created a water station in a laundry room cabinet for two large dogs. "It offered a much cleaner, tidy look," she said.

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GAIL OWENS PHOTOGRAPHY

Interior designer Michelle Strausbaugh added a nook to the kitchen island that serves as the feeding station for the cat.

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stepping on the litter that Kitty shook off her paws, so when they decided to remodel their condo, Strausbaugh installed a vanity with the litter box inside. The cat's entrance was on the side by the toilet, and a cabinet door that mirrored the drawers on the other side of the vanity opened in the front with tile under the box for easy cleanup.

Megan Siason of M Studio Interior Design got creative for a client's two large dogs in a new upstairs laundry room, creating a water station in a cabinet with a drawer below that stores dog treats.

"They previously had their dogs' water bowls in the master bathroom, and since we had the opportunity to re-create both spaces, decided the laundry room was the perfect location for them, and by incorporating this into the cabinetry, it offered a much

cleaner, tidy look," Siason said.

Another way to get creative is with pet furniture. Big-box store dog beds and crates can be an eyesore, but you can invest in custom pet furniture, like that made by Good, whose Top Notch Pet Furniture also creates elegant cat trees and covers for litter boxes.

And, of course, there is the issue of fabrics, both for those pet beds and, more important, human furnishings. Fortunately, fabric companies like Crypton, Sunbrella and Perennials have lines of durable and beautiful soft goods. Kempton suggests selecting colors that are similar to the color of your pet's coat to hide shedding. And go with upholstery pillows that have zippers so the fabric can be cleaned. Pretty, washable throws are always a good idea to have on couches and chairs. It's much easier to launder them than clean an accident on a sofa cushion.

Dalrymple shared tips for selecting the right materials for pet-friendly design:

- Flooring: When picking

flooring, Dalrymple usually leans toward an eco-engineered wood. "It's now much more convenient for the consumer, as many of the floorings already come coated and sealed to help protect from scratches."

- Fabric: Woven fabrics and those with texture and pattern are great for pets as they can mask stains and not make the pet hair as noticeable.

- Sofa materials: Dalrymple highly recommends olefin as it is stain resistant and scratch resistant, thanks to the tight weave. Microsuede is another upholstery material that is easy for picking up pet hair and has great stain absorbency but may not be as highly desirable, and it is not as trendy right now. Certain types of leathers (the higher end) will last in your pet-friendly home and will fare well because they can be easily wiped and they wear minor damage well. They look better with age and start to get a distinct look. Top grain leather can handle surface scratches. Think of it as adding character.

- Rugs: Jute rugs are a great choice as they are easy to vacuum and extremely durable with pets, so they will last a long time. It's easy to remove almost any kind of stain from jute without the need of professional attention. Another option is indoor-outdoor rugs. They are chew and scratch proof.

- Dog beds: Dalrymple recommends a Sunbrella material that is water-resistant but also soft to the touch that will be comfortable and soothing to your pet. A slipcover form is best. That way you can just throw it in the wash when needed and the whole bed won't get misshaped. For the filling, memory foam is comfortable and holds its shape the longest, regardless of the size of the dog.

"There is the misconception that you can't always have the nicer things in life such as furniture, flooring or rugs because you have a pet," Dalrymple said. "But actually, all it means is you just have to pick out the right ones."

Caron Golden is a San Diego freelance writer.