

## RealEstate

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THE FIX  
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# Dogs, Cats and Great Interiors: You Can Have Them All

Designers with their own four-legged roommates offer advice on pet-friendly style.

PETS CAN BE good for your health, have a positive effect on your psyche and even improve your dating game. But having a furry family member can wreak havoc on your furnishings.

Even if they don't use the sofa as a scratching post or chew your baskets to bits, pets invariably come with accessories like dog crates, litter boxes and other potential eyesores. Loose fur, dirty paw prints and unfortunate accidents are equally inevitable.

When our Labradoodle, Rocket, arrived on the scene this year, my family soon learned that certain materials are irresistible to teething puppies. After he began gnawing the sides off the sea-grass baskets in our living room and ripping chunks of hair out of the cowhide rug in our home office, we realized some changes had to be made. Chew toys and training helped, but rolling up the rug was the easiest fix. Still, what to do about the hulking dog crate in the kitchen and the assorted chew toys scattered around the living room?

For advice, I talked to designers who have dogs and cats of their own about how to create a pet-friendly home without sacrificing style.

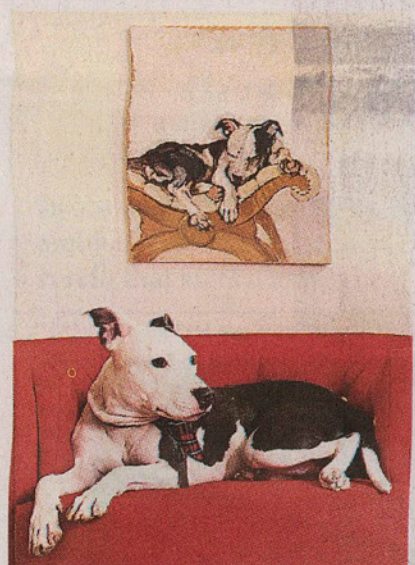
**CHOOSE TOUGH FABRICS** "Durability and clean-ability go hand in hand in my book when it comes to designing a home with pets," said Abbe Fenimore, founder of Studio Ten 25, an interior design firm in Dallas.

Ms. Fenimore, who has two dogs (a German shorthaired pointer named Ivy and a Brittany named Caddo), recommended using outdoor fabrics on indoor furniture. Leather, which can be wiped clean and doesn't snag, is another option, although if you have a cat, it is vulnerable to scratching.

The decorator Bunny Williams, who grew up in Virginia with a father who raised beagles, opts for performance fabrics like those made by Schumacher and Perennials. "There have also been so many improvements in the performance fabric space," she said. "Schumacher makes a performance velvet in every shade imaginable. It's mind-boggling what these fabrics can withstand."

For antiques or upholstered pieces, she offered another solution: faux-fur throws that can be washed or changed. Erick J. Espinoza, the creative director at Anthony Baratta Design, swears by synthetics and wool felt, which he used for a club chair after adopting Quinn, his 3½-year-old rescue dog.

"Felt is like steel," he said, noting that he chose the color red because it tends to wear



ERICK J. ESPINOZA



ABOVE AND BELOW, ANNIE SELKE COMPANIES



Clockwise from left: Annie Selke's basset hounds on her Lyric Paisley rug; a Bunny Williams throw; Bunny Williams's rescue dogs, with a faux-fur throw; a built-in dog bed designed by Karen Ferguson; wicker baskets for toy storage; red wool felt is a go-to for Erick J. Espinoza, and Quinn.

well. "All you need is a good felt brush, and you're set. Spills usually bead up on the surface for a while, and if you're quick to dry it up, you'll never know anything happened."

**BUY CHEAP RUGS** Because there are so many ways pets can soil a rug, you should "look for inexpensive options," Ms. Fenimore said, "that will stand up to dirty paws, shedding and heavy wear."

Natural-fiber rugs like sisal or sea grass can be a great option, she noted, as they are affordable, neutral enough for most spaces and can be tossed without too much guilt once they begin to look worn. (Though you might want to start with a small doormat if you are bringing home a puppy with a propensity to chew.)

Annie Selke, who named her rug company Dash & Albert after her two dogs, makes indoor/outdoor rugs that can be hoisted or washed down.

But no matter which rug you select, Ms. Fenimore said, be sure to use a nonskid pad underneath. "We all know what happens when the doorbell rings and four paws are running at full speed around a corner and over a rug."

Runners on wood stairs are also a good idea, both for your pet's safety and to prevent wear and tear.

**COVER UP THE CRATE** There is really no hiding a dog crate, that bulky cage often used to keep dogs safe and secure when no one is home. Your best bet is to cover it with fabric that coordinates with your décor.



REID ROLLS



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That is what Mr. Espinoza did after moving his crate from room to room, eventually settling on the bedroom as the least obtrusive spot. "I went to B&J Fabrics, near Times Square, bought some fabrics, and whipped up a crate cover using every memory I could conjure up from home economics," he said. "It's minimal, practical, unimposing and dry-cleanable."

For those of us who are not quite as handy, made-to-order covers can be found on Etsy; they generally roll up to allow ventilation.

If the crate is small enough, tucking it under a bench or desk can also help conceal it — something that works for cat litter boxes as well.

"In my foyer, I have a large bench that is usually used as a seating area for putting on and taking off shoes," said Ashley Darryl, an interior designer in Manhattan, who has a Brussels Griffon named Madison. "Underneath it I placed our dog's cage, so all you see is the door sticking out when it's ajar. It's not only easy access to put Madison in every day when I leave, but it's inconspicuous and doesn't ruin the aesthetic of the space."

**USE FAUX FLOWERS** "When it comes to houseplants and pets, we'd recommend keeping your pets away from plants, whether they're toxic or not," said Michael San Filippo, a spokesman for the American Veterinary Medical Association. "Certainly poisonous plants, like certain types of lilies, daisies and azaleas, pose a much bigger threat than nontoxic plants, like roses, bamboo or baby's breath. But eating any plants can cause stomach upset and illness. For the benefit of your pets — and your plants — keep plants out of the reach of your pets, if at all possible."

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has a comprehensive list of plants that are toxic to pets on its website.

**MAKE YOUR PET YOUR MUSE** "Consider the color of your pet's fur when deciding on a color scheme," said Karen Ferguson, director of interior design at Harrison Design, in Atlanta. "That way, the inevitable shedding is less obvious," she said, "and maintenance a bit easier."

Ms. Ferguson, who has two cats, also matched her living room drapes to her cat tower. When she has company, she said, she simply tucks the cat tower into the drapes: "It totally disappears."

**CONSIDER BUILT-INS** For a seamless look, some pet owners have custom-made pet beds and dog crates built into their homes. In the last five years, Mark P. Finlay Architects, in Southport, Conn., has created about 15 built-in pet features for its clients, from an integrated pet bed tucked under a kitchen peninsula to a built-in doggy den with ornate black-metal gates opening to a hallway and mudroom. The firm's clients don't want their pet accessories "to look store-bought," said Mark Finlay, the owner. "The pet space should look just like the rest of the room."

His advice to anyone creating a pet built-in? "Don't go over the top with the size and features of the space — keep it simple and easy."

Ms. Ferguson, of Harrison Design, said her firm has designed "pocket doggy gates, like a child-guard gate, that tuck away into the wall." That way, she said, "the gates allow owners to comfortably contain the dog while entertaining, and the gate disappears when not in use."

For her own pets, she designed a built-in litter box. "When I moved into a smaller town home with two cats," Ms. Ferguson said, "I created a private kitty-box area with a hinged door and an automatic-cleaning box."

She added, "None of my guests had any idea where the cats' litter box was."