

Dog-Friendly Design Tips

Well-chosen furniture can make dog homes stylish yet practical.

Sally Deneen

You'd like your home to look like something out of Architectural Digest, but the metal dog crate and smelly, oversized dog bed detract from the décor.

Don't despair. Drag those pieces to another room and opt for stylish substitutions, such as furniture designed with dogs in mind. Or you could follow a trend favored by Julia Szabo, who shares her New York City home with six dogs and fashionable slip-covered furniture.

"The trend is for dog lovers to share their furniture with pets, not spend extra on separate, dedicated pet furnishings," says Szabo, author of "Animal House Style: Designing a Home to Share with Your Pets" (Bulfinch, 2005).

Either way, "having a dog and a pretty home is possible," Szabo assures. "It's become [easier] with so many furniture manufacturers keeping easy, gracious living top of mind."

Here are some ideas to stay stylish with well-chosen pieces of furniture:

Dog bed or ottoman? Pet Revolution's Stacker dog bed is designed to blend in with modern furniture with its square shape and micro-suede, machine-washable, reversible cover (www.startrevolution.com). Or, you can make your own dog ottoman with plywood, canvas, polyurethane foam, and polyester batting, as described by HGTV at <http://tinyurl.com/2pmsha/>

Incognito pet pieces. Holden Designs' slick pet bed is curved like a horse saddle and made of bent plywood with a walnut finish. Eye-catching, it seems more like an accent piece or a bare-bones footstool. It lacks any cushioning, so a soft blanket can add comfort for your dog (www.designpublic.com).

Upholstered dog chairs. Some visitors may think they're for small children. Charles Keath's 21-inch-tall Posh Pet Chair looks like a traditional comfy chair with a hardwood frame and microfiber upholstery. Only the dog image embroidered on the seatback provides a clue to the contrary (www.charleskeath.com).

Pet-friendly people furniture. Designer Christopher Morse of Pet Revolution says his company is about to mass produce a human sofa designed with pets in mind. Previously only custom-made, the sofa features interchangeable cushion covers that zip on so that hair-plastered fabric can be removed quickly when the doorbell rings. "In 30 seconds you could change all your covers — zip on, zip off," Morse says. Beneath, a waterproof material protects foam cushioning, so liquids can't penetrate.

Szabo also suggests checking other manufacturers' sofas and chairs that come pre-slipcovered with machine-washable, durable fabrics. "It's not hard to find designer furnishings that are pet-friendly," Szabo says. "You just have to know where to shop, because the best-looking, best-performing items won't be marketed as 'designed with pets in mind.'" Her tip: Anything that's child-friendly will also be pet-friendly.

So, you don't have to pay big bucks for designer pet furniture. Szabo's message: Share sturdy human furniture with pets — and don't give up your dream of transforming the living room.

"I have six dogs and a home that's been photographed in the Los Angeles Times," Szabo says. "If I can do it, anybody can."

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