

# Order in the house

HOW TO HAVE A NICE HOUSE AND DOGS, TOO.

by Naomi Kane

photos by Trina Koster

Decorating with dogs in mind can be an exciting creative process. In some cases, the choices we make to accommodate the dogs turn out to have other benefits. Some people I know built a house and included a dog-washing station at one of the entrances: tiles to shoulder height, a drain in the

floor and a shower on the wall. They wanted a handy dog-washing area, but they found that the shower had all sorts of other uses and could be a good feature for any home, not just one with dogs. So when renovating your house, don't hesitate to think outrageous dog-pampering stuff. You'll discover that the raised bathtub you put in for the dogs works really well for washing other things that are too big

for the sink. The ramp you put in so the old dog could get onto the porch is convenient for the dolly with six bags of dog food, rolling suitcases and crates, bundle buggies full of groceries and your mother-in-law with the bad knees.

## Canine considerations

There are several things to bear in mind when decorating with dogs in the house.

Most dogs have tails that wag and they don't notice when their tails make a clean sweep of everything on a coffee table. And some dogs – brace yourself, this is shocking – have been known to steal the occasional piece of food! So unless your dog is much shorter than a coffee table, you might want to look at other options for your coffee and cookies. Side tables are useful since they can be pushed up against a couch, making them less likely to be knocked over by big dogs. When you get rid of the coffee table you'll be amazed at the amount of space that is available for the dogs to lie down while still giving you room to walk around. If it looks too open and barren, add a







nice rug or a large ottoman or both. Unless your dogs are very small, stay away from little pedestal tables or plant stands; sturdy furniture with four legs is best.

Dogs have been known to stampede to the door when people come to visit. Avoid draping fabric on tables since dogs are guaranteed to drag the whole thing to the floor when they jump up and run to meet your guests. Scatter rugs take on a whole new meaning unless they are properly secured to the floor. Nothing short of gluing or nailing them in place will really keep them from slipping, but there are several products that will help, such as rubberized webbing, double-sided tape and sticky rubberized sheets that you can cut to size.



Just because you have dogs doesn't mean you can't have a collection of precious antiques. Glass-fronted cabinets and display tables with glass tops allow you to show off pieces without getting them dusty or endangering them. There are beautiful shelves and decorative sconces that can be hung on walls above dog height for displaying treasures like pictures of your dog, or china figurines of your breed – which inevitably brings us to dog art. Simply type "dog art" in your favourite search engine and you'll be inundated with prints, paintings, photographs, sculpture, jewellery, crafts and more. If you like dogs, chances

are you'll like pictures, garden ornaments and sculptures of dogs, too. Dogs look so good on so many things, from oil paintings to shower curtains, and each piece would look perfect in that special place in your home. Each person has their own sense of style; some people think less is more and go for the subtle approach, while others go with the dogs-on-everything school of design. There is no wrong way to decorate. If you live in it and you like it, then it's right.

## Coordinating your doggy's duds

Dogs need a surprising amount of furniture and accoutrements of their own: beds, bowls, leashes, coats and toys, to name a few. Typically, dog beds seem to be made from the last decade's fabric ends and remnants in all the wrong colours and patterns. If you're reupholstering or ordering new furniture, get extra matching fabric for your dog furniture so that it looks like part of your house instead of an afterthought. Pillow shams or duvet covers are a great way to cover up; they come in just about any colour and can be washed and changed easily. Dozens of web sites offer everything from discount dog beds (usually pillow-



like bags) to custom-designed furniture for the pooches of the rich and famous. If you gave up on the whole dog-bed idea and just let your dogs on the couch, then washable throws or slipcovers will keep your furniture protected and you can change them when you want or need to.

Crates come in a limited selection of colours and take up a huge amount of space. I'd rather designate a dog room for long-term confinement than have crates cluttering up the place. A dog room can be any room with all the things the dogs need to be safe and comfortable, including escape-proof doors and an easy-clean floor. If you really want to go the distance, you could decorate for the dog instead of yourself. There is dog furniture that is just like the stuff made for humans, only smaller. You can put up pictures that are in the dog's visual spectrum, fill the room with toys, put Lassie and Rin Tin Tin movies on continuous loop.... You think I'm joking, but I'll bet somebody has already done it! The dog room can be used for other things and need not be ugly; it can be a functional room in the house that is also dog-proof.

When you must have crates around, make them do double duty. I'm always putting stuff on top of crates; with wire crates, things fall through or get pulled through by puppies, and the stuff on plastic crates falls over because the tops aren't al-



## We asked designer Sarah Richardson...

**DIC:** What is the biggest mistake you have seen dog owners make with their decor?

**SR:** Not being realistic about their lifestyle and the impact their dogs can have on their decor. If you have dogs that shed and your dogs are allowed on or near the furniture, you should select fabrics that are smooth and won't attract hair (this rules out velvet, ultrasuede, chenille and brushed cottons). The best choice is a smooth twill, which brushes off easily. The most practical choice for upholstery is slipcovers (a tailored fit made from prewashed, preshrunk fabric that can be easily, and frequently, washed). Luxurious pillow fabrics are also a no-no – silk and dog slobber are not the best of friends.

Floor surfaces are another area of concern. I always recommend using natural stone such as slate in kitchens and entryways for homes with big dogs (who, in turn, have big, wet, dirty feet). The slate doesn't get slippery when wet, it doesn't show the dirt like some ceramic tile, and is the least-expensive natural stone available.

**DIC:** Is there any single item or feature you think no dog owner's home should be without?

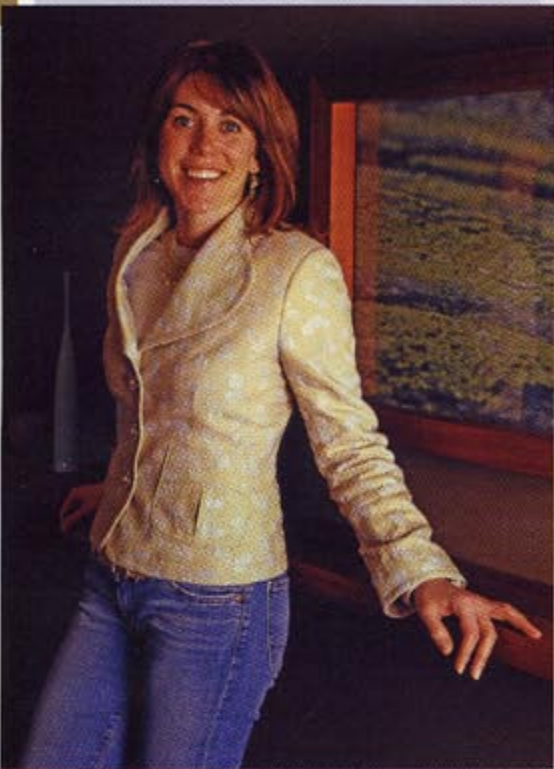
**SR:** A great vacuum, and lots of comfy, stylish dog beds. Dogs love to be part of the action, so they never seem happy with a single dog bed tucked away in a discreet corner.

**DIC:** What are the best fabrics for furniture (assuming you let your dogs on the furniture)?

**SR:** If you have dogs on the furniture, it's important to choose fabrics that are not only practical and easily cleaned, but cost-effective. Keep in mind that upholstery fabrics are not a life investment, they are a temporary solution that will wear over time. I try to select guilt-free, inexpensive fabrics (under \$20 a yard – there are lots available through Designer Fabrics: [www.designerfabrics.to](http://www.designerfabrics.to)). All of our furniture in the living room is covered in oyster-coloured twill, linen and velvet (because our dogs don't shed). The twill cost only \$6.99! The reason I still like light colours with animals is because I want to know when the fabric is dirty – disguising it with a dark colour is not an option for me. Even with light colours, I find it easy to keep the furniture clean when my mom's black Border Collie/retriever comes to visit – the hair comes right off with the vacuum.

**DIC:** What flooring would you recommend? And what would you tell clients to avoid at all costs?

**SR:** I recommend natural stone such as slate for high-traffic areas. Be careful of less durable, less expensive temporary solutions such as laminate floors. I think sanded-on-site hardwood (as opposed to prefinished) floors are the best choice if you are using wood. Stay away from a very dark stain, which will show the hair and claw marks, in favour of a rich mid-tone, such as Jacobean by Minwax. We have Jatoba wood floors (Brazilian), a very dense hardwood; they stand up beautifully with dogs. Douglas fir, cherry and pine floors can really



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show the wear and tear with dogs. It's also good to get the flooring installer/refinishers to add an extra coat of urethane when they're doing the floors – it's easier to do it at the beginning, rather than needing to refinish again.

**DIC:** Dogs seem to love Venetian blinds because they can poke their heads through the slats to see out. Besides leaving your windows bare, what would be a good dog-friendly window covering?

**SR:** Who can blame a dog for wanting to look out the window when left at home? I leave all the drapes in our house open so 'Finny' and 'Molly' can sit and see what's going on. Window coverings fall in the same category as upholstery fabrics for me – they should be washable, durable and relatively inexpensive. I like full panel drapes that hang to the floor (but don't drag on the floor) and I like them to be operational (not fixed small side panels that have no purpose). The purpose of drapes for me is to create a cozy private space in the evening, and allow lots of light in during the day.

**DIC:** Redecorating and/or renovating can be stressful for homeowners and dogs. Do you have any recommendations to make this process easier for your clients' pets?

**SR:** Move out during the renovation. Be practical about what you are doing and the mess involved. It's unfair to leave pets at home during the chaos of renovation while you are off at work. I try to discourage clients from living through a renovation because it takes longer and costs more in the end.

**DIC:** Did you make adjustments in your home decor to accommodate your dogs?

**SR:** They think they are human, so it would be pointless to do too much, but when we renovated we installed stone floors in the lower level by the entry so that dirty, wet dogs can come in and not get the upstairs covered in mud. We also designed the shower in the guest area to double as a dog shower with a bench, open-concept design and hand-held shower. The wall is fully tiled so that when the dogs shake it doesn't wreck the wall.

We installed heated floors in the kitchen, which are cozy for us – and make a great place for them to lie down in the cooler months. We created a feeding area with a wall-mounted cabinet so there is space for a big galvanized bin of dog food to slide underneath (when renovating a kitchen, it's a good idea to think about adding cupboards, bins or pullouts for big bags of dog food, grooming supplies, dog toys, etc). There are no areas in the house that are off-limits for the dogs, and the flow and plan of the house is open and uncluttered to allow lots of room to play.

**DIC:** You have your own line of furniture. Do you foresee adding scaled-down items for pets?

**SR:** Yes, we'll likely start offering some dog-bed ottomans (*sarahrichardson.com*) to lure dogs off the bed and onto their own super-comfy spot.

ways flat. People joke about turning crates into tables, but when you really think about it, you might as well formalize what you do already and make it 'stylish,' as well as useful. Attach a piece of melamine or stone countertop to the top and you have an instant table, or cover it with a cushion for an instant ottoman.

Of course, if you have the resources, building crates to look good and also serve as functional furniture would be even better. A couple of crates on the market are making an effort. Bow Haus makes an ultra-modern circular crate/table for small dogs and another company offers a wire crate that looks like a giant wicker trunk.

## Picking pet-friendly materials

Dogs track in dirt, spill water and, in general, show no respect for a clean and orderly house. You can choose upholstery to hide as much hair and dirt as possible, and install floor coverings to minimize dirt travel, but with a little forethought, you can make your house dog-friendly without giving up style.

Earth tones for floors are the first step; whatever floor covering you choose, the colour should match the dirt your dog tracks in. Tile is impervious to everything, but it is cold and hard on joints, so dog beds and area rugs are a must. Hardwood floors are warmer but can be slippery and dogs, especially large-breed puppies and elderly dogs, can do damage to joints and ligaments when their feet slide out from under them. Carpeting is ideal flooring from a safety and joint perspective, but oh man the dirt! A combination of floor coverings looks good and will allow your dog to have the traction it needs while you have a stylish room that is also easily cleaned when dog stuff happens. Oriental carpets wear like iron, look fabulous almost anywhere, and dirt, hair and stains disappear in them.

With wall colours you have a bit more leeway, but darker colours are generally better than pastels. Choose colours that complement your dogs so you can enjoy the sight of them in the room. Paint colours that clash with the dogs will not make you happy, and being happy in your home with your dogs is what it's all about. ●