

The Washington Post

AT HOME

LIVING IN STYLE

FALL

2006



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Real Creature Comforts

BY JOYCE GEMPERLEIN

Never mind onyx bathroom countertops, walk-in closets, six-burner ranges, good school districts and being within walking distance of a Metro stop. When Sara Todd was looking for a new home, creature comforts for her four-legged children, Rufus and Tazzie, were the only things on her mind.

Todd, an attorney at Fannie Mae who recently moved here from Columbus, Ohio, bought a house in Chevy Chase because it has a very high fence around the backyard, a doggie door and room in the basement to install a dog shower. It is near a section of Rock Creek Park where, Todd has been assured, “the dog people have taken over.”

“I have no shame when it comes to my dogs,” says Todd. We are a similarly shameless nation.

U.S. consumers now spend \$39 billion (and rising) on furry, feathered, finned or scaled family members, according to the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association. The bulk of this money is laid out for pet care, food and toys – for which choices multiply daily, including Gucci dog beds, hand-beaded cat collars, organic snacks and (it had to happen) Pupperware Parties and pooch day care.

Uncharted is the amount of additional money people spend on what could be called “hardware” — pet-friendly architecture, renovations and home furnishings that makes animals either comfortable or tolerable.

There are signs that a pet ethos is creeping into architecture and home decorating. In New York City and San Francisco, for example, well-known architects, such as ARQ Architects, and interior designers have collaborated in the construction of structures for the American Society Against Cruelty to Animals and other pet adoption groups.

Although many architects and decorators in the Washington area say they yet haven't seen signs of a stampede, they concede animals are already stakeholders in the design of landscapes, flooring, plumbing, furniture and even painting walls.

And why not? At the Posh Pooch, a pet store in Bethesda, there's a market for \$50 strings of freshwater pearls

to soften the facial features of, for example, a female Rottweiler. Surely, then, there will be more and more customers for

Crypton, an upholstery fabric that resists stains, spills, odors and bacteria (as in: urine, drool, poop, hair-ball throw-up and mud) wrought in designs by William Wegman, he of the soulful Weimaraner photographs.

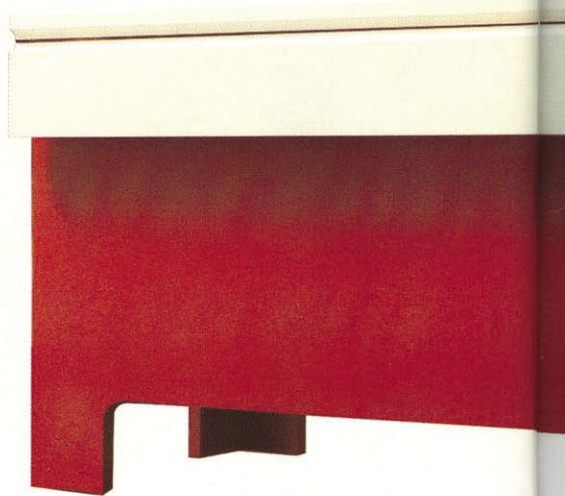
Or, if people are willing to buy a \$320 cat “pod” (a bed/scratching post) partially made out of corrugated cardboard from the online shop Barker & Meowsky, A Paw Firm, it's not a stretch to imagine that they care enough about the members of their household who clean themselves with their tongues to use low VOC (volatile organic compound) paint that touts itself as scrubbable. And, if their pets are aging, build ramps instead of steps?

Representatives of design-build firms in the Washington area say that, as a rule, the incorporation of pet features in a structure is most often at the suggestion or insistence of a client. Pet housing and decorating requirements aren't yet embedded in the local industry, they say.

Here and there, though, contractors and decorators are taking the lead.

An hour does not go by that a dog on a leash does not pass by the Tilden Lane home of Gianna and Bernardo Vallefucio of Vallefucio Contractors, a high-end custom tiling firm in Rockville.

Inspired by this, the couple earlier this year created a dog shower in a house that they renovated to sell near their own home. The shower, which has a wall-mounted fittings that can be handheld, is a stone mosaic of tumbled noce and travertine and is in the laundry/mud room.





Matt Kramer of Kramer Architects in Bethesda says he has designed lots of dog showers in mudrooms, but recently put a “pet-friendly vestibule” in the house of a client who owns a St. Bernard. Eschewing the type of off-the-rack dog doors sold in pet stores, Kramer’s design centers on a set of doors that are measured to fit the resident dog.

“The dog comes in the first door, but then he has a second dog door to go through. In this way, cold air doesn’t come in in the winter and go out in the summer,” Kramer says. The trimmed-out entries are also on an incline to accommodate arthritic older dogs.

The architecture firm of G.P. Schafer, which specializes in classical and traditional country houses, did a project in upper New York state for a client whose dog hated to have his toenails clipped and as a result had destroyed hardwood floors in a prior house. Schafer installed cork floors through the family wing of the house because cork doesn’t show scratches the way conventional wood floors do.

Julia Szabo is the author of “Animal House Style: Designing a Home to Share With Your Pets” (Bulfinch Press).

Oregon design studio Compressed Pattern devised the Kattbank, above, a bench that is built around the kitty litter box. Entry is on the side, and the interior has a plastic grid walk-off area to contain stray litter, plus air vents. In the 48-inch length (fits one litter box), the lacquer bench, in any of 14 colors, is \$1,750; the 60-inch bench is \$1,875. At www.kattbank.com.

Prestige

