

SMILE

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Stylish and Pet-Friendly Décor

By Cheryl Lo-Lien Tan

Having pets doesn't mean your home can't be stylish, says Kari Whitman, a Los Angeles-based interior designer.

Ms. Whitman, who currently has two dogs, Madison and Lucy, and has owned cats and rabbits, likes homes in which pets are welcome in every room. "With the right materials and the right training, you can have both beautiful furniture and also dogs in the house," she says.

When creating animal-friendly interiors for clients, the designer chooses fabrics for sofas and chairs with care, avoiding velvets and other fabrics that show dirt or hair. For couches, Ms. Whitman favors fabrics such as chenille, pleather, Ultrasuede or cotton blends. She doesn't shy away from treating them with Scotchgard. If you fall in love with silk or velvet, use it on decorative pillows, she notes.

Consider your pet's color when designing a room so that stray hairs will blend into the décor. "If you have a black dog, have black finishes; with a white dog, have white finishes," she says, noting that printed fabrics work well to camouflage hair, too.

Ms. Whitman likes to drape "beautiful throws" in Ultrasuede or faux fur on one side of a couch or a bed. "Your dog will gravitate toward that throw," she says. Its hair will be contained on an item that can be removed for guests.

Tiles make pet-friendly floors because of their resistance to damage and stains. Ms. Whitman likes wood, too, but she avoids high-gloss finishes, which will show scratches from pets' nails. Sometimes, she picks woods that have some texture, so that scratches won't be as visible. Often, she'll have a matte protective coating put on a wood floor to guard it from pets' nails—as well as high-heeled shoes. Floor tiles that resemble wood, such as those made by Ann Sacks, are a good option as well.

Ms. Whitman says wallpaper can be tricky to clean. "There's tons of paint that you can use that you can just wipe with a wet rag," says the designer. She is leery of thick rugs, which are hard to clean and could be havens for fleas.



Interior designer Kari Whitman, in her home with her dog Madison, suggests pet owners consider couches in fabrics such as Ultrasuede, chenille and cotton blends. Wood and tiles are good flooring options.



If you have a puppy that's going through a chewing stage and gnaws on chair legs, avoids furniture with cloth-covered legs. Wooden legs can be wrapped with pleather or veneers that resemble wood.

When buying dog beds and other pet furniture, Ms. Whitman advises going with pieces that match the room's décor, rather than cutesy pieces. "I wouldn't want little doggie paw prints all over a sofa in my house, so I wouldn't want it in a dog bed either," she says. Sometimes, Ms. Whitman will buy extra fabric when having a couch made, using the surplus to upholster a matching dog bed.

Also, "if you have an old armchair that you love but don't know what to do with, cut the legs down to an inch off the ground and make that a chair for your dog," she says.

The litter box is a perennial challenge for cat owners. Ms. Whitman suggests products that clean themselves, have built-in fans to lessen odors, and don't look like traditional litter boxes. Instead of putting the litter box in a bathroom guests might enter, "keep it in the corner of a closet in a room or a guest room that you don't use that much," says Ms. Whitman.

She will sometimes cover the sides of a litter box so it blends in better. "You want people to think it's not there," she says.

For larger pets, you should space out the furniture to accommodate their size. "Avoid tight corners," she says. "Make sure the coffee table isn't at the same level as its tail or when you set wine glasses down you're going to have wine all over the place."