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# Raising the Bar on Pet Décor



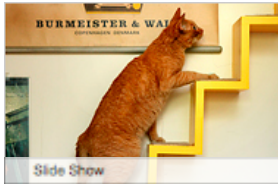
Ko Sasaki for The New York Times

In Toru Hirose's living room in Kobe, Japan, his basset hound, Marco, has a hidden snack bar, restroom and nap space. [More Photos »](#)

By SONIA ZJAWINSKI  
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THERE was a time when pets were pets. They had bowls and beds, and that was about it. Then something changed.

## Multimedia



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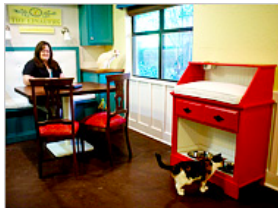
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Ben Sklar for The New York Times

Kristi Linauer of Waco, Tex., converted a secretary desk into a pet feeding station. [More Photos »](#)

As Kristi Linauer, a Waco, Tex., interior decorator, put it: "Pets have become family members. We love them like children, so people are naturally drawn to anything that gives our pets a special place in our homes."

For some animal lovers, that means not just buying aesthetically pleasing pet supplies, but creating their own animal-friendly design solutions to complement their human-centric décor.

Amy Britton, an interior designer who owns Artisan Kitchens in Osterville, Mass., on Cape Cod, said that more of her clients are asking her to include amenities for their pets as part of their renovations. One example is a kitchen island with alcoves for food and water dishes, drawers for leashes and treats, and roll-out storage bins to hold bulk kibble.

"People are trying to do a better job at planning everything out and accommodating the whole family, pets included," Ms. Britton said.

Keeping pets happy helps prevent unwanted behaviors, said Kate Benjamin, who runs the blog Moderncat in Phoenix and recently created a line of cat products, like artfully shaped scratching posts. "Integrating pet-friendly design into your home makes for a more serene environment for both you and your pet," Ms. Benjamin said.

For Kim Johnson, who runs the home-design blog Desire to Inspire in Ottawa, Canada, that meant installing a small door in the hatch leading to her basement during a kitchen renovation, so her cats could get to the basement-level litter box as needed.

"I hate it when designers say you shouldn't decorate for your pets," Ms. Johnson said. "If I didn't, my cats would be miserable."

## Table for Three

Mrs. Linauer, the decorator in Waco, Tex., shares her 834-square-foot condo with her husband, Matthew, 36; a dog, Boo; and two cats, Powder and Peeve. When Boo began eating out of the

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Bill Hilgendorf and Maria Cristina Rueda turned their Brooklyn apartment into a bright playground where their two cats, Miles and Attilia, can get indoor exercise. [More Photos](#) »

cats' bowls on the floor, Mrs. Linauer, 37, tried putting them on the kitchen counter.

"I know some people don't have a problem with that," she said. "But I just envisioned their little paws digging through the litter, then getting up on my kitchen counter, and that was disgusting."

Then she had an inspiration: a few months earlier, a neighbor had given her an old secretary desk. Mrs. Linauer realized, after seeing a feeding station online, that she could turn the desk into something similar for her pets.

She removed the hatched door, the bottom drawers and a shelf inside, then cut out three holes large enough to nest stainless steel dishes in — one on the top shelf for her cats and two at the bottom, for her dog and for a shared water bowl. To top it off, she made a

foam-and-down cushion with a zippered cover.

The project took two weekends and \$80. Friends have asked her to build another, but for now, Boo, Powder and Peeve are dining and snoozing on a one-of-a-kind.

### A San Francisco Menagerie

"When I tell people how many animals live in my tiny space, they always think they're going to walk in and be overpowered," said Kasie Maxwell, 39, who shares her 660-square-foot Bernal Heights home in San Francisco with her partner, Ron Love, 40, and a dog, a cat, three doves, three turtles and one goldfish.

A home with such a menagerie might be expected to look like a scaled-down Petco, but Ms. Maxwell, who owns an online holistic pet supply store, and Mr. Love, who works in finance, have managed to maintain their style.

"I hate how pet stuff looks," Ms. Maxwell said. So instead of buying a pricey aquarium for their 40-something Reeves turtle, Martha Mayhem, she bought a 150-gallon galvanized-steel livestock tank. The makeshift pond serves as a home for the turtle and a room divider that separates the couple's bedroom from the living room.

To make tank cleanups easy, Ms. Maxwell kept decoration to a minimum, with basic rocks, an ultraviolet lamp and simple plants.

The other two turtles — a pair of three-toed box turtles — live in a redwood pen the couple built in the backyard. A cedar aviary Ms. Maxwell designed is on the other side of the yard, with a thermostat-controlled ceramic heating element to keep the doves warm (one of them suffered injuries under the care of a previous owner and gets cold easily).

Inside, the couple's 12-year-old Great Dane, Ben, rests his achy 160-pound frame on a custom-made bed.

"It's always been a big deal finding bedding that's got enough structure for a Great Dane's weight and joints," Ms. Maxwell said. "A lot of people will buy twin beds or a baby mattress."

She and Mr. Love tried a few foam beds, but found that they compressed under the weight of Ben and his sister, Minna (who died recently). So Ms. Maxwell sought help from her friend, Susan Schroder, who owns Cushion Works, a custom maker of cushions and pillows in San Francisco.

The corner dog bed she helped make has lasted three years and is a stylish solution for their small space. Made of high-density foam, it has a pet pad insert that acts as a pillow top and a zippered flax linen cover that can be removed and laundered.

### A Temple for a Hound

Keiji Hirose, an architect in Kobe, Japan, has a firm called Fauna+Design specializing in residential design that takes into account the needs of animals. Recently, he completed a renovation that included accommodations for a basset hound.

With limited space in an 808-square-foot condo, the client, Toru Hirose (no relation), wanted dog supplies in one place, hidden from view but accessible to his hound, Marco. Also, the apartment is on the 15th floor, so he wanted an alternative to taking the dog for a walk.

Mr. Hirose's solution was a wall-to-wall cabinet in the dining room that hides a dog crate on the left and a stainless steel tray with urine pads on the right. The open space in the middle is an entrance and a place for food and water bowls. Cabinets above hold dog food, treats, bedding and training pads.

“How you plan a house influences a dog’s behavior and spirit,” Mr. Hirose said.

**Thinking Outside the Litter Box**

When Sue Golmanavich, 63, a teaching assistant, and her husband, Joe, 64, a semi-retired information technology specialist, began a bathroom renovation at their home in Osterville, Mass., they asked Ms. Britton of Artisan Kitchens to include a litter box for their cat, Aslan, in the design.

The three came up with a plan to conceal the box in a cubbyhole in the wall, and the rest of the bathroom was planned around it.

The small space was lined with galvanized sheet metal to make cleanups easier, and the joints were soldered to ensure that accidents did not soak into the home’s wood frame. When it was time to build out the bathroom’s ventilation system, Ms. Britton expanded it to include an exhaust vent in Aslan’s lavatory.

The addition was planned early on, so the cost was negligible, Ms. Britton said, adding less than \$200 to the renovation. “As with anything with design,” she said, “pre-planning is critical.”

**Upward Mobility**

“When I had cats growing up, they were always able to go outside,” said Bill Hilgendorf, 30, who lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Maria Cristina Rueda, also 30. “We felt a little guilty having our cats confined to a relatively small apartment space.”

A late-night cat food commercial inspired the couple, who are furniture and graphic designers, to build a bright yellow staircase that runs along one wall, over a doorway and above the stove, where it meets the kitchen cabinets. The piece — made from a four-by-eight-foot panel of fiberboard, cut into seven-inch-wide strips with remnants of industrial carpeting on top — took a weekend to build.

“We wanted to make something that was a design element, but didn’t take over the space,” Mr. Hilgendorf said. “We painted it yellow, because we wanted it to be an architectural element. But it’s also very narrow, so it doesn’t encroach on the room too much.”

They weren’t sure if their cats, Miles and Attila, would actually use it, he said, but it didn’t take long for them to turn the addition into their own personal jungle gym. “At night they do this loop,” he said.

“They run up and then jump down onto the refrigerator and chase each other around.”

A version of this article appeared in print on July 22, 2010, on page D8 of the New York edition.



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