

AT HOME

GOING TO THE DOGS

BY BUZZ McCLAIN

REMODELERS KEEP PETS IN MIND WITH RENOVATION PROJECTS

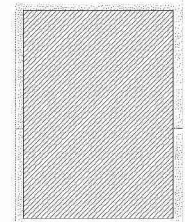
Everyone in the family had input when it came time to invest in a significant remodeling of their home. The kids picked the playroom colors, Mom made sure no wires hung from the new flat screen TV and Dad insisted on a six-burner stove for the kitchen. They also made sure the builder incorporated features for one of their family members that typically gets left out of the plans.

The Irish setter.

The idea wasn't to pamper the pooch with plush pillows on a custom bed. The new features would be detail elements that make

life for the family at-large more convenient — the feeding, bathing and in-and-outing of the dog would be easier to accomplish — and any expense would be considered an investment in time saved in the long run.

And that's how BOWA Builders, which has an office in Middleburg, came to install a special shower for the setter during a home remodeling project. It's a dedicated area inside the garage, consisting of a hand-held shower, a low-positioned on-off handle for easy reach, a low curb to contain the spray, and a four-foot high tiled backsplash decorated with whimsical hand-painted accent tiles depicting canines (setters, of course) at play.



The pet additions are not surprising these days. Remodeling for pets is a trend that's on the rise, **BOWA** President Josh Baker says. How the dogs, cats and other domesticated pets fit into the family lifestyle is now standard when it comes to planning a remodel.

"Inevitably the discussion with the client at some point goes to the pets being part of the family and how they interact with the rest of the family," he says. "They want to know what we can do as part of the design to incorporate their interaction with the pet. Where they eat, where they sleep, egress, access, security, cleanliness, clean up — the homeowner wants those interactions addressed."

Before, installing prosaic pet doors was about the extent of any consideration for dogs and cats. But they were primitive solutions consisting of an opening cut into an exterior door covered by a plastic flap that invariably refused to keep out cold air despite the magnetized catch at the bottom.

These days a pet door is likely to be electronic. Plexidor Pet Doors makes one that opens via a "collar key" the pet wears. The key

is actually a waterproof, shockproof RFID chip, which doesn't require batteries, and multiple pets can have access to the same portal. As they get close to the door, the heavy-duty plastic door automatically slides up to let the pet in, then slides down once the pet has cleared the opening (there's a safety built in to prevent pinched paws from closing doors). The doors are a vast upgrade to previous iterations as they are energy-efficient and secure.

The bottom line, Baker says, "is the interaction with the pet is important to the family, and the improvements need to make it a positive." An electronic pet door does just that.

The possibilities for pet home improvements are vast and varied. We asked several designers from here and elsewhere to offer tips that make life easier for pet owners and their animal companions. Here are some ideas that represent true thinking out-of-the-(litter)box.

- Litter boxes are the unending conundrum with cats. Where do you place them to be discreet for you, but still accessible for your cat? "Try remodeling your laundry room to have a kitty litter cabinet," says Robin Baron of Robin



PHOTO COURTESY OF PLEXIDOR

AS FIDO APPROACHES, HIS COLLAR SIGNALS HIS PLEXIDOR DOOR TO SLIDE UP, LIKE A MINI GARAGE DOOR.

Baron Design in New York. "Leaving one frame open and clean for an entrance, have the litter box nestled sideways inside the cabinetry. A hidden cubby would also work for a doggie bed as well."

- If putting a pet shower on the floor isn't an option, make a sink more accessible. "On one of the last projects we completed, we added a stainless steel doggie wash basin in the garage that incorporated a ramp for the dogs to walk up into the basin," says Michael Menn, a remodeling architect in Illinois. "In another, we incorporated a very large sink in the laundry room that doubles as a dog washing sink."
- Use only semi-gloss paint in pet areas, reminds Christopher J. Grubb, president of Arch-Interiors Design Group of Beverly Hills, Calif. "Semi-gloss is easy to clean. And a faux finish creates a pattern that isn't susceptible to dirt." Similarly, use vinyl wall covering or a durable wallpaper, both of which wipe up with glass cleaner, and accent pet areas with "human" touches such as wainscoting. As for colors, "have as much fun with color as you want but if you have a pet who sheds a lot, try and keep the color scheme one that matches as close as possible to your pet's hair color."
- If your home remodel includes adding an island counter to your kitchen, "why not extend the length and have end drawers for your pet goodies?" Baron asks. Besides the handy storage, "you have just created a nook underneath to install a floor box for food and water bowls."
- What about something for the birds? Greg Miedema, Remodelers Chairman of the National Association of Home Builders and president of

Dakota Builders in Tucson, Ariz., says his firm recently completed a "wet room sort of area" for a homeowner who raises love birds. The project included a large skylight for maximum sunshine and a glassed-in area within a living area. The brilliant addition? A drain in the glassed-in area for easy clean-up.

- Grubb suggests letting your imagination run when it comes to accessorizing. "We have literally had a client take a fire hydrant and put it next to their dog's bed as a touch of whimsy," he says. "Have fun with accessories that make you and your pet smile."
- If your remodel incorporates a staircase, "a great idea is to carve out




THIS WASHROOM CABINET DESIGNED BY MERRY PRODUCTS ALLOWS KITTY HER PRIVACY AND CLEVERLY DISGUISES HER LITTERBOX, WHICH IS HOUSED INSIDE. THE CLASSICALLY DESIGNED CABINET IS AVAILABLE IN WHITE, ESPRESSO AND WALNUT TO MATCH ANY WASHROOM STYLE.



PHOTO BY ROGER TURK, NORTHLIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

beneath it to make a special pet palace," Baron says. "You can get creative with the doggie door sized opening; use die-cut shapes for a princess feel, or maybe lush red-draped curtains like an elaborate theater. Add plush bedding and food and water bowls inside to give your little one its own room."

- Consider the flooring material when designing a pet-specific space. "Tile is best. Whether it is vinyl tile or porcelain tile, it's easy to clean, and there are even porcelain tiles that look like wood," Grubb says. "If you want a true wood look, a product like Pergo will suffice. Keep the grout lines tight. And if you really want to pamper your pet, radiant heated floors are the ultimate luxury. In the summer, the tile is cool and dogs like to lie on it to stay cool."
- "There are lots of options for area rugs," Grubb adds. "One is 'artificial lawn.' Many pet owners use an outdoor artificial lawn as area rugs. It's functional and they rave it can easily be hosed down and hung to dry. An outdoor area rug as well can be a nice accessory and is easy to clean."
- Is a double-sided fireplace part of your renovation? Baron has an idea that's for the birds. "Rather than a fireplace between two rooms, why not join them with a two-sided birdcage? You can create a custom cage to house your feathered friends and still match your décor. Maybe curly wrought iron or sleek minimalist chrome; the possibilities are endless. In fact, you could install a fish tank instead and showcase your collection of tropical fish." 

FUNCTION DOESN'T HAVE TO CRAMP YOUR STYLE WHEN IT COMES TO PET DOORS. HERE, IRONS BROTHERS CONSTRUCTION OF WASHINGTON STATE CREATED A SEAMLESS CAT DOOR IN A SLIDING GLASS PATIO DOOR.