

Introduction



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE The significance of the family dog is reflected in these studio portraits taken between 1850 and 1910. It is interesting to note that photographers commonly used furniture as a prop for posing the dog.

Photos from the collection of Nancy Chwiecko

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

We love our homes and aspire to make them as comfortable and responsive to our needs as we can. Much of who we are is wrapped up in them. Increasingly we also desire to share this environment with our beloved dogs. It is estimated that upwards of 45 million US households now include one or more dogs. The challenge is to create an environment that fosters harmony with our dogs while respecting the different needs of people and pets. The fact that human and canine needs are generally compatible has been the basis for thousands of years of happy coexistence. But, the dog's role has changed. Today it is commonplace for our dogs to live in our homes, something that was highly unusual just 50 years ago. Dogs may have been provided with regular food and shelter in a barn, shed or dog house but they were rarely invited to share the comforts of our homes.

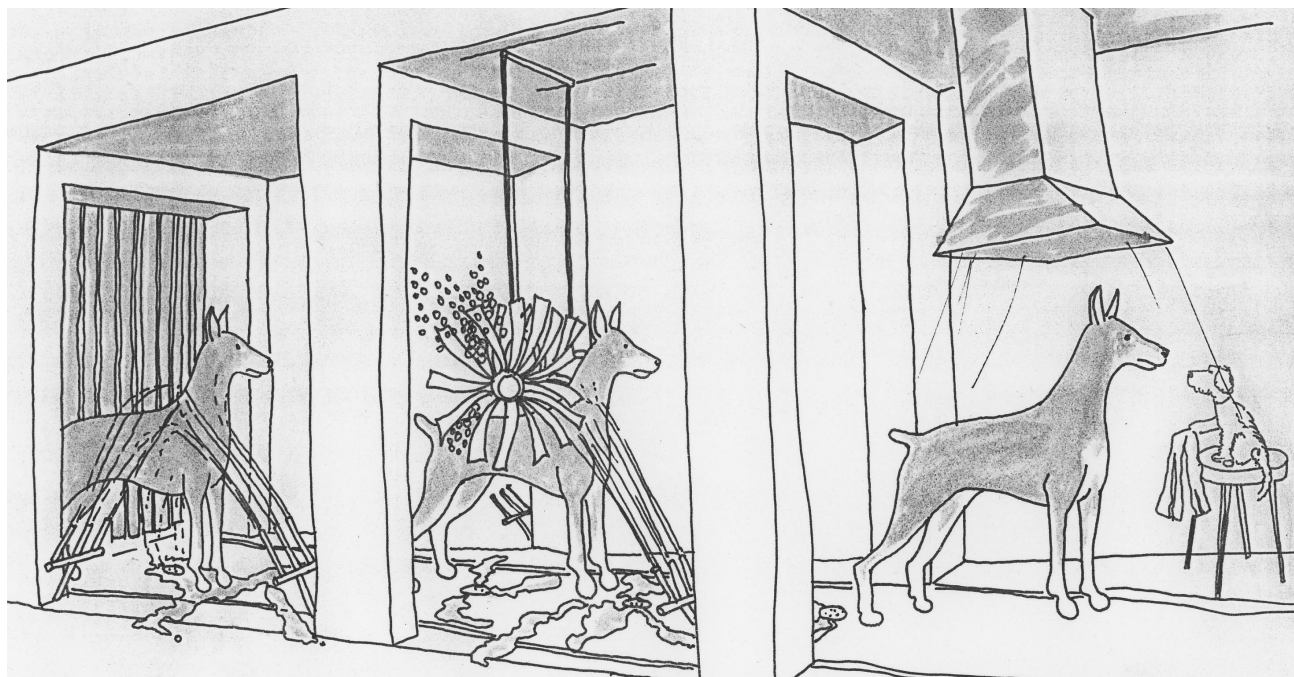
Today, dogs have moved into our lives on a very intimate level. They sit on our furniture, cuddle up in our beds, use our bathtubs, and sometimes dine at our tables. No longer the privilege of diminutive lapdogs, your Golden Retriever Molly or Rottweiler Max shares these comforts as well. Contracts from breeders, shelters and rescue groups routinely stipulate that dogs must be housed indoors, and from a cultural standpoint, treating your dog like a family member has become a sign of enlightened, compassionate ownership.

This change has led to better understanding of the human/canine bond, but it has created an entirely new set of co-habitation issues. We dream of living in perfect harmony with our pets, but dogs stubbornly cling to the idea of being dogs. As much as we love them, they shed, chew, mark territory, track in mud, and show no interest in the aesthetic or hygienic aspects of home design. A dog may patiently cooperate to have his feet wiped and dried before entering the house, but there is no sense in hoping for the day when he will perform this chore on his own in order to spare the new carpeting.

Many novice owners fondly imagine a peaceable kingdom with their pets politely sharing the comforts and amenities. This vision usually undergoes a drastic revision when reality clashes with imagination. Puppies have a knack for making that happen sooner rather than later. Trying to strike a balance between a puppy's curiosity and exuberance and your desire for an orderly home can lead to a radical reevaluation of ideal home design. This ideal home might have stainless steel furniture and concrete floors with a drain in the middle. The dog might enter the house through the canine equivalent of an automatic car wash for a rinse and wash cycle, then move to the next chamber to be dried, brushed and fluffed. There would be no chance to shake water everywhere and muddy paws would never touch the door frames, the windows or floors.

Wait a minute; this is starting to sound an awful lot like a kennel or a zoo! As a rule, dogs are quite adaptable and, since the time we dwelled in caves, they have been content as long as they are in our company. But living in a kennel is not the choice of most dogs or humans.





Should we design our homes to look like a kennel? Or a car wash?

BENEFITS OF DOG OWNERSHIP

Dogs will unquestionably modify your home environment. Is it worth it? Most dog owners would respond with an enthusiastic yes without hesitation. In the past 20 years numerous studies have confirmed the positive impact dog ownership has on human mental and physical health.

DOGS:

- can help lower blood pressure
- increase social interactions between humans

DOG OWNERS:

- have lower cholesterol levels
- especially the elderly, cope better with stress and are less lonely
- have a higher one-year survival rate following heart disease
- feel more secure and less afraid of becoming a victim of crime
- are more apt to engage in regular exercise
- who suffer from life threatening or chronic disease show a reduction in stress and depression and improved ability to cope

CHILDREN

- with dogs adjust better to serious illness and/or death of a parent
- with dogs learn compassion
- exposed to dogs during the first year of life have a lower frequency of allergies and asthma

Even without these documented benefits, many of us choose to share our homes with dogs simply because we relish their company.

GETTING IT RIGHT FROM THE START

Working with a professional can open up a world of design possibilities and innovative solutions. However, they are trained to evaluate these issues from a human perspective. It's up to you to critique their suggestions for feasibility in a home with dogs. Take the time to make your needs clear but always back this up with your own research and decisions. Someone unfamiliar with living with dogs can easily underestimate your needs or assume that you are exaggerating when you request certain design features.

For instance:

- Even small dogs can wreak havoc on gates or railings if they are not securely anchored to a structural element rather than drywall.
- Railings may need to be installed with the rails closer together than even building codes dictate to prevent small dogs and puppies from squeezing between the bars.
- A designer may assure you that a particular surface is durable or "easy to clean". But that term is relative. It may be durable if foot traffic consists of two or three people on a daily basis. Eight, sixteen or more dog feet running across it may have a different effect. Be prepared to research materials and ideas.
- Designers may not be aware of potential hazards of materials or furnishings. For example window treatment cords, even those that are cut or separated can wrap around a dog's leg or neck.
- Designers may not be aware of dog behavior that could create issues or problems. If your Rottie tends to have strong guardian response, glass doors and large picture windows are not going to make life easier.

- In response to the growing interest in eco-friendly homes, many designers recommend replacing rugs or carpets with natural fibers such as cotton or sisal that are naturally dyed. While natural fibers sound better from an environmental perspective, unless they are organic, they will contain dangerous pesticides and processing chemicals. Natural dyes used to color them will run if they become wet.

See Resources for information on where to find an architect, interior designer or contractor.

HOME SECURITY

Dogs have protected hearth and home for thousands of years and this time honored reason is just as valid today. It doesn't matter what type of dog you have; or whether the dog has been trained for this job. Almost every dog will instinctively detect intruders and sound the alarm. Police, security experts and former burglars acknowledge that thieves routinely avoid homes with dogs and multiple dogs are most effective. A thief might consider subduing or diverting one dog, but very few will risk contending with multiple dogs. If you don't have the wherewithal to cope with five Dobermans, take heart. Two or three Toy Poodles are an equally effective deterrent.

EVALUATING PRODUCTS AND ELEMENTS

The importance of selecting appropriate materials, finishes, furniture and other interior products is critical to you and your dog's wellbeing. Interior products that are most appropriate will be compatible with your lifestyle, your environment, the type of home you live in, your family, pets and your job.

To achieve the most appropriate design solution for your home many criteria must be examined. They include cost, aesthetics, durability, maintenance, lifespan, health, safety, physical comfort, codes, regulations, and sustainability.

All of these criteria are easily understood, but a few of them jump to the forefront when sharing your home with a dog. Durability, maintenance and cost are probably high on the list of most dog owners. Health, safety and environmental considerations are increasingly important to dog owners.

Durability and lifespan are paramount considerations when designing a home with dogs in mind. Maintenance and cleaning might rank as the second most important criteria to dog owners. While many designers and manufacturers make claims about durable and maintenance free products, nothing lasts forever and everything needs maintenance. Dog owners appreciate elements that are easily cleaned, not easily destroyed, and look good for as long as they live in their home. Durable, long-lasting materials usually cost more initially, so it's important to recognize materials that will live up to their promise.

In recent years attention has focused on health and safety relative to the interiors of buildings. In the past most attention centered on fire safety and preventing injuries within the home. Fire safety is a big consideration because dogs may respond in unexpected ways to a fire. Inadequate home design also increases the odds that your dog might play a role in causing injuries like falling or tripping.

Sustainable design is a practice and philosophy meant to minimize our impact on the environment and to sustain the earth for future generations of all species. In order to be considered sustainable, designs should reflect a harmonious balance with the environment. For example building materials, finishes, furnishings and their by-products should:

- not deplete the earth's natural resources or endanger habitat
- be free of hazardous substances that are introduced into the ground, water or air
- result in minimal or zero waste
- not threaten or burden future generations (ex., toxic chemicals or excessive landfill contributions)
- be reduced, reused, and/or recycled

Many products are now certified as sustainable to help ease the selection process. And luckily, there are many guides available that help address these issues.

The Resources at the end of the book contains valuable information on where to find specific items or information found throughout the book. It is conveniently listed by chapter.