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DECORATING

## The doghouse? Hey, it's not so bad

These four-legged friends have taken over the big house, with designs that work for both owners and pets.

By Bettijane Levine, Times Staff Writer  
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LATE news in barkitecture: doghouses, even the classiest ones, may soon be passé. About 70% of America's dogs now spend more than half their time indoors, in the Big House — the family home, which increasingly tends to feature dog-friendly walls, floors, upholstery and perhaps a "Blue Boy"-style oil painting of none other than the family hound himself.

We're not talking about mere cutesy, decorative nods to the adorableness of dogs, but about substantial human commitment — and dollars — to safer, more comfortable environments. Such art and design celebrates the species that is at home with 43.5 million American families.

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Talk about creature comforts. A house in Culver City is being built from the ground up to ease life for a French sheepdog named Hobbes, a humongously hairy 6-year-old who's not too steady on his feet. Hobbes' owners, public relations consultant Joanna Brody and her husband, writer Thomas Small, say they've altered the architect's plans to include steps with a very gentle incline, almost like a ramp, because as Hobbes gets older, he won't be able to climb traditional stairs.

Their Venice architect Whitney Sander says, "Floors will be rough nonslip concrete instead of the polished finish we'd planned because Hobbes tends to slip around on anything smooth." The finish of a large interior wall, a major design element of the house, will be changed "so Hobbes' hair won't snag, which would be painful," Brody says.

The couple has named the house "Residence for a Briard," because, Brody says, "Hobbes is as important a resident as we are. He brings such constant joy. Anyone who knows us knows him. We take him everywhere. We've even taken him to France to see his homeland."

When landscape architects Bill and Abbie Burton remodeled their ocean-view house near San Diego, they decided to have no windows facing the street. Then they realized that their aged golden retriever would be deprived of her favorite pastime: watching cars go by. So they redesigned their massive, custom-made, steel front door, inserting a narrow window all across its width, exactly at dog's eye level.

These are obvious extremes and only for the well-heeled. But at many levels, the dog's status in the home is on the rise as relationships between pets and people become more intense.

Kari Whitman, an L.A. interior designer and founder of the dog rescue group Ace of Hearts, says young people starting out now seem eager for dogs in their lives. "I meet many who get their first dog as soon as they get their first apartment," she says, adding that previous generations waited until they were more settled.

As a designer, Whitman sees dogs that live the Hollywood high life. At the Malibu home of a well-known actor and actress, whose names she declines to divulge, Whitman says she recently installed "a huge outdoor tub with hot and cold running water, decorated with beautiful Mexican tiles. These people have two big dogs and want to bathe them outdoors in warm water on sunny days."

Dog portraiture is booming business in this new era of pets. The Internet and dog magazines such as Bark, the New York Dog and Hollywood Dog are awash in ads for portraitists who claim to capture the essence of an animal in oils or photos. Prices charged by top talent range from a few hundred dollars (for a photographic sitting) to the high, five figures for an oil. And sometimes the portrait of a pet is as priceless to its owner as an old master.

Tigerlily and Harvey Rosen, for example, have a Chagall and a pet portrait by Beau Bradford in their L.A. home. The portrait, which dominates the Rosens' entry, depicts their two now-deceased English bulldogs, painted in the manner of Frida Kahlo. For fees from \$2,500 to \$15,000, Bradford will copy your favorite painting by a great artist — Matisse, Monet, Van Gogh, Kandinsky, Warhol — and insert a likeness of your pets into its midst.

Noralisa and John Trott of Venice say they're totally dog-oriented when it comes to

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décor.

"Actually, the dogs and the dog art are the décor," says Noralisa, a doctor. "We're not much into furniture," says her husband, a lawyer. The couple rambles through art fairs to find dog art, has commissioned paintings and photo portraits of their own dogs and owns three silkscreens of Blue Dog, the imaginary canine repetitively painted by Louisiana artist George Rodrigue.

Actor and director Eric Stoltz displays art of his (and other) dogs throughout his New Mexico house. These days he's awaiting a portrait of his late Labrador retriever, Nestor, which he commissioned from the dog portraitist Roger Henry. "Roger visited us and got to know and spend time with Nestor before he died," Stoltz says. "That's an important part of the process of portraiture. And, of course, we have thousands of photos."

Why not just enjoy the photos and skip the fine art? "The idea is to permanently commemorate Nestor's life and all the joy he brought to everybody he came in contact with," Stoltz says.

Dog photographer Amanda Jones, 37, based in North Adams, Mass., says she's booked solid on weekend trips to 20 major cities around the country at which time she meets with dogs and their people, who've prepaid \$850 for a photo session weeks or months in advance.

During a weekend in L.A., one West Hollywood client was Amy Cotteleer, a partner in an events design company who showed up with her Jack Russell terrier, Wrigley, sporting a Chicago Cubs collar (which Jones removed for the session). She received proof sheets by mail a few weeks later. Cotteleer, 31, chose a photo of herself with Wrigley and one of Wrigley solo. "I love both," Cotteleer says, "and they're displayed pretty prominently in my home."

She gave smaller sizes as gifts to her mom, grandma and four siblings in Chicago and to friends and colleagues in L.A. "Wrigley has so many fans. He's been raised by a village. He goes to work with me every day. My clients ask to take him for walks. My crew hangs out with him. I've never had a real portrait done before. I took my first dog to Kmart for a photo."

Then there are those like New York design consultant Julia Szabo who are so enamored with the look of their pets that they try to duplicate it in the décor. Szabo says she once actually reupholstered her sofa to match her dog. "I covered it in Ultrasuede the exact same gingery shade as my pit bull, Pepper. I just loved his color, loved looking at him and couldn't get enough." The monochromatic meld of canine on couch became the cover photo for Szabo's 2001 book on interior design for people who live with pets, "Animal House Style: Designing Your Home to Share With Your Pets."

"I got a lot of flack when the book came out from people who thought the subject was silly," Szabo says. But no more. People are now looking for interior décor that works aesthetically for humans and practically for pets. Szabo, who recently commissioned a bronze bust of another pet, Sam, (by sculptor Jennifer Weinik), says "so many advances have been made in fabrics, paints and flooring just since the book came out, that it is now possible to design interiors almost impervious to damage from pets." These improvements weren't created with pets in mind but to solve all sorts of other commercial and residential problems. They just happen to work with animals.

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