

# Interior designer makes spaces chic, pet-friendly

**BY KERRY CLOSE**

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Barbara Van Voast is an interior designer and a pet owner. Until last year, those two passions didn't coincide.

That was, until a lot of her clients in the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., area began asking her questions about how to keep their four-legged friends from ruining their expensive decor. Their queries prompted Van Voast to start researching the topic, finding out about stain- and odor-resistant fabrics and furnishings.

"They don't teach you these things when you go to design school," she said.

Given the high demand from her customers, Van Voast decided to devote a division of her business to making homes pet-friendly. This area now makes up about 90 percent of her

business, she said.

"This was something a lot of my clients were really concerned about, so I decided to address it," she said.

One client asked Van Voast to redesign her living room with her pet beagle in mind. She chose a number of pet-friendly features, such as a high-tech sofa with fabric made to resist stains, moisture and odor.

But dogs and cats aren't Van Voast's only clientele. She has designed homes for clients with pets ranging from llamas to goats to chinchillas.

"A lot of what I do is preventing and covering up stain and odor," Van Voast said. "A lot of things don't change that much from dog to cat to any pet that has fur."

Van Voast also tries to be cognizant of household items that could prove dangerous to pets, such as

electrical cords, cords of blinds and pullout sofas.

"There's a lot of things people hadn't considered that could really hurt their pets," she said.

Van Voast, who has a golden doodle dog and a Maine coon cat, said she tries out her ideas in her own home.

"It's my own residential laboratory," she said.

Interior designers around the country are starting to take their clients' pets into account, said Nan Ruvel, an interior designer who lives in Chicago.

"I see more and more people who are not only interested in their home, but interested in their pets, and finding a happy medium between the two," Ruvel said. "I think if you're not thoughtful and respectful of a client who has pets, it's not going to be a good fit."