



PAUSE FOR Paws

By Nancy Paule Melone, Ph.D.
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Designing with Dogs (and Cats) in Mind: *How to Choose Pet-Friendly Flooring*

As Spring approaches, we often think of painting, remodeling and sprucing up the interior spaces of our homes. For pet owners this can seem like a choice between having a beautiful home or living with their pets. According to Marcia Melone, a facilities designer at Iowa State University, pet owners can have it all if they make their interior design choices wisely.

Marcia Melone, who has earned certification by the National Council for Interior Design Qualification, has designed facilities ranging from high-traffic student lounges, where fabrics, floors and walls must tolerate all sorts of public-space abuse, to high-tech veterinary medical facilities where surfaces must stand up to the rigors of emergency veterinary care and at the same time present an attractive, functional and clean environment for the animals and people they serve. Having owned Shetland Sheep Dogs, Border Collies and Siamese cats, Marcia has experienced firsthand the design challenges faced by most pet owners. Currently, Marcia and I are collaborating on a book focused on helping pet owners design pet-friendly, attractive living spaces. Here is a sneak preview of what you will find.

NPM: What pet-friendly advice would you give a pet owner wishing to replace the flooring in her kitchen, bath or entry hallway—the spaces that are the wet areas of the house, those most frequented by pets?

MRM: The pet owner is faced with three major choices when choosing flooring for these areas. These choices are color, pattern and surface texture. Each of these choices has ramifications for ease of maintenance, safety and attractiveness. Fortunately, the pet owner has a lot of choices nowadays because there are many beautiful product offerings that do not show dirt and hair, wear well, are easy to clean, and offer good traction when wet.

NPM: What is your advice when choosing a color for flooring?

MRM: First, avoid solid color tiles, either light or dark. Solid colors show any dirt that your dog (or family) tracks in from outdoors. Similarly, recall that animals shed continually and seasonally. No matter how well you clean your house, pet hair accumulates in corners and under cabinet toe kicks. Solid colors make hair and dirt all the more visible.

My advice is to select a tile with a basic midtone for the background color. If you think about it, most dirt is neither black nor white, it's something in between. Similarly, dog hair is often a combination of several colors, e.g., black and white with a little brown mixed in. Select a tile color that hides the hair of your breed(s), keeping in mind the previous advice.

NPM: If we should not choose a solid-colored tile, then are you saying that we should look for some pattern in the tile?

MRM: Exactly. Try to find a tile that has a subtle pattern or a mottled effect in the color. The pattern does not need to be very prominent, just enough to cover a small amount of tracking. Be careful to select a tile that does not derive its pattern from too much 3-dimensionality. Remember, the more indentations in the tile, the harder it will be to clean and keep clean. Instead, look for a tile that derives its pattern mostly from a variation in color.

The grout color that you choose contributes to pattern in tile flooring as well. With regard to color choice in grout, midrange colors do best in houses with pets. Light colors tend to stain easily and dark colors tend to chalk. Wide grout lines are difficult to keep clean, so keep them as narrow as your tile layer recommends. Once installed, grout should be waterproofed to protect it from staining. If after a while you see water penetrating the grout, you should re-waterproof it. It's not hard. If you are really worried about grout staining, consider using one of the newer epoxy grouts. Grout comes in sanded or non-sanded. Your tile layer will use the most appropriate texture for the job.

NPM: Dogs and water seem to go together. On certain flooring, water can result in dangerously slippery surfaces. What advice can you offer pet owners here?

MRM: Flooring safety (slip resistance) should be a major consideration for people as well as animals. All tile carries a measurement called the Coefficient of Friction (CoF), which represents a standard index of slip resistance of the tile. There will be two measurements for each tile, one when the tile is dry and one when it is wet. Pay attention to both measurements. The standard range for the tile usually starts below .5 to above .7. Tiles with lower numbers are more slippery than tiles with higher numbers. My advice is to never purchase tile that is less than .6 on the CoF scale. This meets minimum ADA requirements for a slip-resistant accessible route (.8 is recommended for ramps). Remember, many times your pet will have wet feet and that water transfers to the same floor on which you are walking. You need to keep safe so that you can keep your pets safe. ◀

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Nancy is a fancier of Bernese Mountain Dogs as a breeder, competitor and frequent contributor to breed publications. She serves on the BMDCA Breeder Education Committee and is active in canine health and research. A student in veterinary technology at Purdue University, Nancy is a member of Dog Writers Association of America, AKC, Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America, Westmoreland County Obedience Training Club and Three Rivers Bernese Mountain Dog Club. To contact Nancy, send an e-mail to nmelone@nauticom.net