



MiaCara dog bed.
miacara.com

LIVING THE PET LIFE

Pet furniture and accessory design has been steadily evolving, from tacky to seriously stylish must-haves

Words Donnay Torr

It is a truth universally acknowledged that if one is a cat, one must be in search of a cosy nook to curl up in. But as the popular series of “If I fits, I sits” cat memes illustrates, said cosy nook is often pretty unsightly. Street cats, purebreds and even the occasional leopard will forgo their dignity to prove that what a cat truly wants is a scruffy cardboard box (or bathroom sink, or old shoe) of her very own.

The same holds true for doggos. Dress them up in designer duds and groom them ‘til they sparkle, but they’d still give it all up for a stinky dead possum to roll in.

Thankfully, our pets don’t get to choose our decor. And their presence in our homes

doesn’t have to be a negative, aesthetically. Our predilection for treating them like royal members of our own families has led to a boom in accessories, and now there’s even adorable furniture options for pets that look and feel just like ours.

Does it matter that we’re more likely to find our Persian princess in the laundry basket than in her bespoke cocoon? No — because investing in stylish pet furniture is as much about humans falling in love with a beautifully designed item and making it part of their own living spaces as it is about pets planting their behinds in their new nests.

PRIMARY COLOURS BEGONE

Designers and creators who specialise in stylish pet furniture are usually pet owners, too, and use their skills and experience to solve challenges that many pet lovers face. Not only do they create solutions based on deep research into their furry end users, they also design items that suit a variety of interior styles and decor. Yes, there is life after the saturated colours and cartoonish shapes of the squeaky hotdog!

Italian brand Chimère Edition is the very antithesis of cheap and tacky. Founder and CEO Frédéric Stouls, along with co-founder and artistic director Marc Ange, create by-request pieces that grace sophisticated

**“KARL LAGERFELD’S BELOVED CATS,
KARL AND CHOUPETTE, WERE THE PROUD
OWNERS OF A GREY CHIMÈRE LITTER BOX”**

Okawa Furniture cat sofa.
okawa-kagu.net/neko

feature pet furniture



Chimère litter box.
chimere-edition.com



catissa.com

Dog Room.
madebypen.com



interiors; the late Karl Lagerfeld’s beloved cats, Karl and Choupette, were the proud owners of a grey Chimère litter box. The range also includes a birdcage, fishbowl, dog/cat “sofa” and rabbit/hamster hutch. The items can serve as an artistic or decorative touch to a room as much as a practical pet solution. Solid oak is a common feature — a design element that keeps the collection “close to nature”.

“Chimère will be a natural fit with people passionate about their pets and willing to treat them as their family,” Frédéric says, adding that the range will also be of interest to design lovers, who’ll buy the birdcage or fishbowl for decorative purposes.

Don’t be daunted by the thought of Lagerfeld kitty-endorsed litterboxes, however; ultimately, Chimère aims to keep its pieces comfortable for pets, and works with veterinarians to ensure this. Besides, even privileged pets are often anything but classy. As Frédéric says, “I can’t stop watching the Chimère fishbowl (housing goldfishes John and Jackie) when I’m at home, especially as Leonard (the cat) keeps on drinking water from it!”

David Haythornthwaite, designer at Furf Pets, stresses that pet owners should care about design because “design solves problems”. “Pets have their own unique needs,” he says. “Quality and design could meet those needs.

The way we see the world is that the needs of the pet should come first while fitting in with our needs, too. It’s not about finding the cheapest material and cutting corners — it’s about creating products that pets will benefit from that will also sit perfectly in your home.”

Industrial designer Jie Yan defines the idea of “high-end products” as well-designed pet furniture for a regular household, often more versatile and customisable than simply luxury. “People have moved from spending the minimum to solve an urgent or short-term problem (such as using a torn rug as a scratch pad) to paying for a cat tree made from scratch-resistant material and multifunctional modules,” she says.



Grégoire De Lafforest's Archibird cage console. gregoiredelafforest.com



Feeling inspired? Check out *Pet-ecture: Design for Pets*, with cat trees, concrete dog homes, luxury chicken coops, 3D-printed fish tanks and dog-shaped cat scratchers by such architectural and design greats as Kenya Hara, Sou Fujimoto, MAD Architects and Shigeru Ban. Phaidon, \$29.95.

Jie stresses that the social status of animals has changed, too. They've become family members and symbolic extensions of ourselves. We like to humanise our pets. "We call them our babies and consider ourselves their 'parents'. This means that we look for better products for our pets, just like we would care for our children: ergonomic beds, elevated dining sets, and stimulating toys," she points out.

Charming examples of our tendency to anthropomorphise our pets are the Raffine Cat Bed and Night Table created by Japanese designer Tateno Mokuzai. Scaled-down versions of real, human-sized furniture, these pieces were commissioned for a project run by Okawa City in the Fukuoka prefecture. Okawa City is home to more than 150 furniture manufacturers and is well known for furniture made from kiri, a light, strong type of Japanese timber. The feline furniture is made using the same techniques and skills as regular furniture.

PROBLEM-SOLVING DESIGN

Jie's graduation thesis project, Pupzzle, was designed for her Australian Shepherd Gibby in response to the crate-training challenges dog owners face. "Crates are one of the most important tools to train dogs to adapt to their family life, but it can be challenging to find one that works and expensive to replace." Jie's final concept posited a modular dog furniture system that combines plastic and metal, offering people the "option of customising their own ideal dog crate/house/bed, which can be readjusted depending on future needs".

Furf uses focused design to solve a very

particular problem: how to create a non-spill bowl that's also "aesthetically beautifully refined and functional", David Haythornthwaite says. "Growing up with pets and farm animals all around me, I'd often look at the pet products that were available back then and think that they seemed to be an afterthought. Watching our dogs approach their bowls and bump them and flip them over on the lovely new timber flooring of my parents' home, I thought, 'there must be a better way.'"

A lack of decent cat furniture kick-started Tuft & Paw in 2016, shortly after founder Jackson Cunningham rescued his beloved cat and muse Sanjay Peppers. "We live in a small apartment in an expensive city, so we don't have a lot of space and we didn't want an eyesore in our small apartment," he explains. Space is an important consideration for city dwellers, especially for the increasing number of people living in high-rise apartments who have to make the most of every centimetre. "There's arguably more room to get creative with pet furniture than human furniture," Jackson says, "because animals have interesting behaviour we can play with." Tuft & Paw's range of modern designs feature neutral colours and tactile fabrics, designed to "elevate pet furniture design so that it's taken seriously, instead of lowering standards just because it's for pets".

Angela Infantino, founder and director of Molly Barker, agrees. Her struggle to find classy dog accessories that suited both her dog, Molly, and her own personal style drove her to create her own. Molly Barker's low-key, bespoke products "represent an aspirational lifestyle", she says. "All our designs must be



chimere-edition.com



Clara outdoor hooded dog bed. wayfair.com

feature pet furniture

beautiful, innovative and functional for both dog and owner, and of the highest quality.”

MiaCara, founded in 2010 by Sebastian Zweig and his wife Barbara, let picky Labrador Cara’s dislike for her brand-new dog cushion guide them. “MiaCara’s philosophy is important to us: our products are characterised by a clear design language and unique style, as well as exceptional quality and choice of materials. We aim to inspire people to live a beautiful life with their pets without compromising in terms of interior decor.” The diverse range of products covers every aspect of a dog or cat’s life, from sleep to play to travel and more.

Ishat Garipov, founder of Catissa, kicked off her ingenious wall-mounted solutions to

save her felines from the attentions of her then four-year-old daughter. “She was a bit too attached to our cats! Cats do not like obsessive attention. They had nowhere to hide and they suffered very much because of it.” Ilshat’s designs focus on simplicity, functionality and the fact that “thanks to the applied design mind, these products look like part of the interior decoration and don’t spoil it”.

Goldtatz founder Achim Hochwald’s concern for the health of his Maine Coon Wim resulted in a range of wall-mounted niches, stepladders and “bridges”, giving cats plenty of space to roam and play without leaving the house. “I grew up in the country and when I moved to the city, my cat had no access to

the outdoors,” Achim explains. “He became lethargic and uncomfortable and his behaviour changed. Too little exercise, too little space — I had to come up with something!”

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

The best design solutions take into account an animal’s natural needs and tendencies. So given that their clientele can’t exactly provide verbal feedback, pet furniture designers face a tough challenge.

Tuft & Paw’s product designer and materials engineer work very closely with cat behaviourists and vets, Jackson says. “We also have a full-time cat researcher who helps us run experiments with cat owners to figure out



okawa-kagu.net/neko

“Materials are obviously extremely important when it comes to safety ... you don’t need to worry about humans licking their furniture!”

— Jackson Cunningham

home design 173



mogandbone.com.au

Chimère rabbit hutch.
chimere-edition.com

Bendo Woof bowl.
bendo.com.au

Goldfish John and Jackie in their Chimère fishbowl.
chimere-edition.com

important design questions, such as what type of materials cats like best.”

Striking a balance between the “user” (the pet) and the “customer” (the human) is also important. The dreaded cat litter box is a good example. Most humans want something small and discreet, while cat behaviourists recommend a large litter box with high walls for the cat. Ultimately, Jackson says, we need to figure out a way with clever design to keep both sides happy.

MiaCara adheres to the “form follows function” design philosophy in all things. “We create products first and foremost to meet the needs of the animal, and then combine it with an innovative, modern yet down-to-earth design. Our own dogs are always the first to test new products.”

Effective design solutions don't have to be elaborate, either, as Annabelle and Kristian Jamieson prove with lifestyle product brand Bendo's nifty take on pet food bowls. Inspired by Australian artist Tom Ripon's sculpture of

a full-size elephant made from bright fluoro pink painted chicken wire, Bendo reinvents many of the mundane wireware products we use in everyday life by powder-coating them in bright colours, or modernising and simplifying their design. “We saw an opportunity with our border collies’ pet bowls to create a simplified, elevated design that’s easy to clean,” Annabelle says. They had to carefully consider their target market, Kristian adds. “Certain pets have different needs and requirements to consider when designing products for them. A pet bowl for an Irish Wolfhound needs to perform differently to a pet bowl for a Chihuahua!”

KEEPING THINGS REAL

Given their end user, it makes sense that many pet furniture designers care about environmentally friendly materials and sustainable design practices. Molly Barker advocates supporting local manufacturers, for example, sourcing materials and ingredients for its grooming range from within Australia

where possible. They also have local artisans make their products, Angela says.

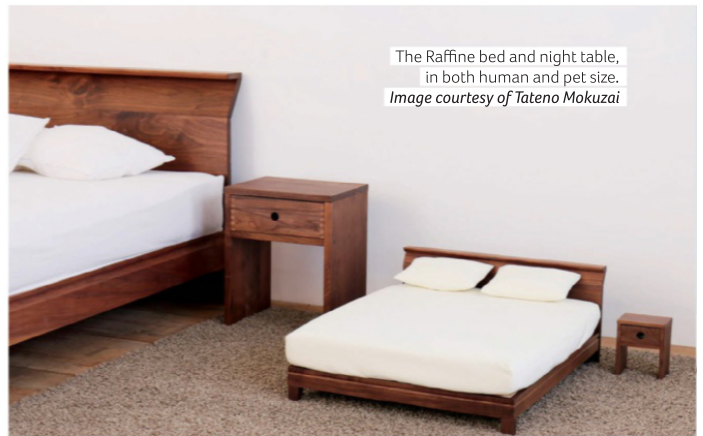
Mog & Bone's range of pet products are designed with comfort and useability in mind, business director Adele Sinclair says. “All our products are designed to optimise comfort for the pet. We consider how pets like to sleep, eat, walk, run and travel. We choose to use high-end materials for pet health and durability.”

MiaCara, too, has a strong focus on sustainability, while Goldtatzte only uses material without pollutants. “Never use cheap materials,” Achim Hochwald says. “Cheap sisal, for example, is often soaked with oils so that it's softer and easier to process — but these oils smell bad and can be harmful to cats.”

Wanderless Barkley creates unique, long-lasting dog beds with removable, machine-washable outer linings. “We use plant-based fibre to fill the beds, which, unlike other synthetic fibres, is biodegradable, naturally hypoallergenic and antibacterial,” owner Teeka Rahman says. “Pets get dirty and, unlike their



Cat in bed!
Image courtesy of Tateno Mokuzai



The Raffine bed and night table, in both human and pet size.
Image courtesy of Tateno Mokuzai



owners, don't care if they dirty their bed. We keep this in mind while designing."

It's important to remember that pet furniture is not just miniature human furniture, Jackson says. There are certain principles that need to be kept in mind when designing for pets. "Materials are obviously extremely important when it comes to safety ... you don't need to worry about humans licking their furniture!"

END GOAL? LOVE

What all those cardboard-box-loving cats are actually trying to tell us is that if we can come up with a container safe enough for them, they'll definitely pour themselves into it. If said container delights the human involved, so much the better! At the end of the day, classy pet furniture might beautify your home, but it's not the heart of a loving relationship with your pet. As Ilshat Garipov says when asked about her favourite everyday pet item, "Probably it's just my hand that scratches my beloved cats. Or the feeling of a warm weight on a blanket!" **HD**



The Bowie non-slip mat.
furfpets.com.au

"Thanks to the applied design mind, these products look like part of the interior decoration and don't spoil it"

— Ilshat Garipov

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PET DESIGN AS ART

Sometimes, an item of pet furniture transcends the mundane and becomes art. Constance Guisset, head of the Constance Guisset Studio of design, interior design and scenography, created the fascinating Duplex birdcage/aquarium as a case in point. "I worked a lot on illusions, in different projects," Constance says. "The idea of the birdcage/aquarium was to visually reunite two creatures that are usually separated by elements. I wanted to create surprise at all times, and dream."

A unique challenge of the design was finding continuity between the two pieces: "The two animals have to meet at eye level, so it was essential to find the right height. You also need to think of the wellbeing of the animals and the practicality of the piece." Duplex is, indeed, a piece that's a "springboard for the imagination".

Interior designer Grégoire De Lafforest's stunning Archibird cage console breaks the classic shape codes and is a nod to traditional cabinets of curiosities. It took three years to finalise the project, in collaboration with the cabinetmakers of Synapses. "I desired to create a birdcage for my home and wanted to recreate an 'ideal' and refined version of nature," Grégoire says. "Since this project is very conceptual and aesthetic, it requires daily maintenance if you want to keep birds in it. But all is planned for good functioning: access, space for water bowls and food."

