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pet age

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR THE BUSY PET RETAILER OF TODAY ... AND TOMORROW

A Backer Publication



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Briefs

The Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa opened a 32,000-square-foot resort-style facility for dogs, cats, birds and exotic pets in Los Angeles in October. The company also operates a facility in Cleveland, Ohio.

Best Friends Pet Care (Norwalk, Conn.) opened a luxury pet resort at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. The 27,000-square-foot facility features cat condos, dog suites and accommodations for pocket pets, plus a full-service grooming salon, two doggy day camp rooms and a private 25,000-square-foot dog park with water-play area and protected trail.

Camp Bow Wow (Boulder, Colo.) at press time was working to assist animals displaced by Boulder's Four Mile Canyon Fire. Donations can be made to the Bow Wow Buddies Foundation at www.bowwowbuddies.com.

NIP Programs, a division of NIP Group Inc. (Woodbridge, N.J.), launched PetPro, a new insurance program specifically for veterinarians, animal hospitals, shelters, pet hotels and dog day camps, rescues and adoption organizations, dog walkers, pet sitters, pet trainers, groomers and pet boutiques. Coverage includes veterinary expenses, recovery and rewards, veterinary license defense and coverage for volunteers and companion pets in a business's care. For details, visit www.petproinsure.com.

Out-U-Go! (Chicago) opened its seventh pet care location, and its second in the Boulder-Denver area.

Pet Sitters International (King, N.C.) is accepting nominations for its 2010 Pet Sitter of the Year Award through



Grooming areas that are visible through glass—such as the one at Healthy Spot in West Hollywood, Calif.—represent the consumer-driven trend toward more open environments.

Spa Designs Go Upscale

Some grooming salons are employing new amenities to deliver the immersive experiences pet owners have come to expect. By Allie Johnson

There are plenty of grooming salons that don't call themselves pet spas. But the ones that do—whether they stand alone or operate within pet boutiques, boarding facilities or doggie day care centers—tend to incorporate special design features worthy of the upscale name.

"Grooming used to be purely utilitarian, but now people are trying to expand and take it to a whole different level," said Sat Garg, principal of AkarStudios (Santa Monica, Calif.), who has designed two stores with pet spas for Healthy Spot—one in Santa Monica, the other in West Hollywood.

That shift is driven partly by customer expectations and changing attitudes toward pets. "People are expecting more and more from the whole pet grooming/spa experience," Garg said.

That mindset is reflected in the top

trends in pet spa design, as described by designers of pet care facilities and owners of pet spas.

Open Environments

It used to be that pet owners stopped at the grooming salon in the morning to drop off their pets, which were led into a back room and later emerged magically beautified. But now, pet owners want transparency—literally. That has led to a trend toward grooming areas that are either open or visible through glass.

"People no longer want to leave their dog in some room—they want it all to be out in the open, to see, to interact," Garg said. "There's a level of transparency involved."

That's why Garg created glass walls for the spa inside the second Healthy Spot location. It allows customers to watch groomers working on their pets—but,

thanks to a graphic circle pattern on the bottom part of the glass, prevents dogs walking through the store from seeing other dogs being groomed.

At Kiki's Pet Spa & Boutique in Brooklyn, N.Y., owner Saran Nurse created a giant picture window with a view into the grooming area, visible from the lobby. "The wall in front of the grooming area is orange—which is our logo color—so it's kind of like a picture frame for the window," Nurse said.

When owner/groomer Rina Stanley remodeled the building that houses A Paw Spa in Littleton, Colo., she made sure the grooming area would be open and visible from the front door of the spa. "We did open that up so there would be a clear view for the customers," Stanley said. "It's a great thing—people feel more comfortable knowing they're going to see me grooming dogs so they can see how I handle them."

Some pet spa designers are taking it a step further by creating spaces in which pet owners can relax while they watch groomers pamper their pets. For example, Bacon Group Architects (Clearwater, Fla.), which specializes in animal care facilities, is working on a pet resort and spa that will contain a café. "The idea is, you can sit down and have a cup of coffee or a pastry and watch your dog play at doggie day care or get finished on the clipping table," said interior designer Erin Pollard.

Memorable Themes

Distinct themes are hot right now—whether they are used only in the bathing area or are carried throughout the whole facility.

"I've been doing research and noticing a lot more pet spas are going with themes, and we wanted to separate ourselves from other themed grooming salons," said Gorette Perez, co-owner of Beautiful Tails Pet Spa in Stateline, Nev. Her 1950s-themed spa features a shiny black-and-white checkerboard floor, posters of retro pinup girls walking dogs and old vinyl records, with custom labels such as "Hound Dog Productions," as wall art. Perez plays oldies on the spa's sound system and even dresses in retro glam style to fit in with her theme.

Other spas employ themes in specific areas, such as the self-serve pet wash rooms. The DIY pet wash area at Kiki's Pet Spa & Boutique, for example, has palm

tree and water designs on the rubber-tiled floor and beach lounge chairs to evoke a tropical island vacation theme. The self-serve bathing area at A Paw Spa has a bath-time theme with real bathtubs, pastel yellow walls and rubber duckies.

Themes can add an element of fun and help make pet spas memorable, according to Perez of Beautiful Tails. "We get tons of compliments on the uniqueness and just the atmosphere—it's completely different," she said.

Luxury Amenities

Clients of pet spas expect to find the same upscale materials and amenities they'd find in the spas they themselves patronize. And many of the new pet spas deliver, experts say.

As an example, interior designer Pollard cited the walk-in shower for big dogs and luxurious ceramic tile tub surrounds at



The graphic pattern at the bottom of the glass walls at Healthy Spot lets customers see groomers working on their pets—but prevents dogs walking through the store from seeing other dogs being groomed.

Spa Menu Options

HERE ARE JUST some of the high-end options now appearing on menus at pet spas:

- **Pawdicures.** A "pawdicure" is a nail trim that might include "pawlish" (if desired by the owner). "You'd think poodles and fluffy dogs would be the ones having this done, but we've actually done a pit bull. We did her nails orange and yellow," said Saran Nurse, owner of Kiki's Pet Spa & Boutique in Brooklyn, N.Y.

It might also include application of soothing shea butter paw balm to moisturize rough paw pads.

- **Blueberry facials.** A blueberry facial involves the application of a blueberry-scented facial cream. It appeals to customers who patronize spas as well as people who like to snuggle with their dogs, but don't want to smell dog. "It just makes their faces look and smell better," said Nurse.

- **Hot oil treatments.** Hot oil treatments, often containing soothing botanicals, rejuvenate dry skin and coats. Most customers at A Paw Spa in Littleton, Colo., get them for purely practical reasons. "As humans, we moisturize on a regular basis, but animals don't have that benefit," said Rina Stanley, owner

of the salon. "Anyone who's concerned about their dog's itching, flaking skin, and doesn't want their dog scratching all the time, might get the deep conditioning hot oil treatment."

- **Massage therapy.** Massage therapy for pets, an increasingly popular service, offers many practical benefits. For example, it can improve muscle tone, enhance joint flexibility, improve blood circulation and reduce pain associated with hip dysplasia and arthritis. A complete body massage, including shoulders, legs and joints, can be especially beneficial for older dogs, according to Kathi Molloy, co-owner of Bark Place in Boston.

- **Hair coloring.** Hair coloring appeals to customers who really want to show off their dogs, according to Nurse. "We have a whole range of colors. We have a lot of people who get Mohawks on their dogs and get the Mohawks dyed," Nurse said.

A new offering at Nurse's spa is temporary "tattoos"—stenciled designs, such as flowers, airbrushed onto pets' coats. She said, "It appeals to people who want to do something different with their dog, to have their dog really stand out from the crowd."

—Allie Johnson

Briefs

Oct. 15 at www.petsit.com/owners/year.php. The 2010 award is sponsored by Business Insurers of the Carolinas (Chapel Hill, N.C.).

Petsitting.com, an acquisition of **LocalDogWalker.com** (New York), connects pet owners with professional pet service providers in the United States and Canada.

As a result of a new partnership with **DoodyCalls** (Charlottesville, Va.), the site also will help users find pet waste removal companies in their area.

Dina Perry and Dennis Gnetz, co-founder and owner respectively of **Wag'n Tails Mobile Conversions** (Granger, Ill.), were featured on a recent segment of "The Early Show" on CBS, giving makeovers to shelter dogs to help them get adopted.

Also featured were Sheri Harvey of **Sheri's Pampered Pets** (Flanders, N.J.), Armando Melendez of **Trim Down the Hound** (Bronx, N.Y.), Jeannie Marcial of **Grooming Jeannie** (New Hyde Park, N.Y.) and Shaffia Galis-Menendez of **Best of Breed Grooming** (Belleville, N.J.)—all owners of Wag'n Tails mobile grooming vans.

The Zoom Room, an indoor agility training center and canine social club, celebrated the opening of its Hollywood flagship location in September. ■

The Lodge at New Tampa in Tampa, Fla., a high-end boarding facility and spa the Bacon Group Architects designed last year. "[Pet spa owners] are going for nicer finishes in the grooming areas," Pollard said. "They want to know that if someone came in and wanted to do a tour, it would look just as nice as the lobby."

At Kiki's Pet Spa & Boutique, Nurse emulated the look of a luxury hotel and spa with a dramatic chandelier in the entryway, earthy yet soothing colors, and regular bathtubs with tile platforms rather than stainless steel tubs in the grooming area.

At A Paw Spa, Stanley incorporated high-end materials, such as a granite countertop for the receiving desk, with bright colors and polka dots for a funky, modern feel. "I definitely think people are trying their best with whatever their finances are to go higher-end," Stanley said. "Most of my clients are affluent, so I've definitely designed the spa to cater to the affluent personality."

Of course, pet spa owners still must balance practicality with good looks. Therefore, it's common to see durable solid surface or quartz countertops and epoxy-coated, stained concrete or terrazzo floors, according to Garg. "Of foremost importance is the cleanability and durability of the surface," Garg said.

Of course, it's not just the materials used in the design, but also the little touches that create a true spa environment. At Kiki's Pet Spa & Boutique, Nurse places rolled spa towels in the grooming area. At A Paw Spa, Stanley installed aromatherapy machines to infuse the air with stress-relieving fragrances such as mint. "People come in and say, 'This doesn't smell like dogs,'" Stanley said.

Green Materials

Many pet spas also incorporate eco-friendly materials. "There's definitely an increase in the use of recycled and green materials," Garg said.

At Bark Place in Boston's South End, co-owner Kathi Molloy and her husband incorporated a number of earth-friendly elements—eco-friendly flooring made from recycled rubber, reclaimed furniture



The use of eco-friendly materials represents another key design trend in pet spas. Bark Place in Boston's South End incorporates reclaimed furniture and light fixtures plus other earth-friendly materials.

that was in excellent condition and reclaimed commercial-grade lighting, purchased from a company that was going out of business. "It was less expensive, and was perfect for our purposes. We just painted it," Molloy said.

These choices made sense for Bark Place because of its location in an eco-conscious, walkable neighborhood—and because of its commitment to using all-natural shampoos and other products. "We're all about green, eco-friendly and all-natural," Molloy said.

Many clients of the Bacon Group have requested that the firm incorporate green elements and building materials into their designs, such as bamboo flooring in a lobby area instead of carpet, according to Pollard.

"[Pet spa owners] want modern, clean lines—sort of a Zen look, like the Asian flair of the day spa with bamboo and stones, aromatherapy rooms and massage parlors," Pollard said.

The biggest trend, however, is toward incorporating pet spas as one component of larger pet-oriented facilities that contain retail space as well as doggie day care or boarding—and even lounge areas for pet owners. "Facilities are going to have more cohesiveness," Garg said. "Everything is going to be more centralized." ■

Allie Johnson is an award-winning freelance writer based in Kansas City, Mo. She frequently writes about pets.

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