

# A DOG'S LIFE

By Jura Koncius

Thursday, March 11, 1999; Page T04

Oscar, the portly dachshund, is catnapping on a brushed cotton dog bed in the media room, where "101 Dalmatians" is the featured flick. Jester, the Jack Russell terrier, prefers jumping on the black vinyl cushions in the office. Latte, Meatloaf and Rocky frolic in the pebbled courtyard.

Just another fun day at Capitol Hill's Dog-Ma, one of several doggie day-care centers that have popped up on the Washington landscape. City Dogs, whose reception area will feature a cedar house facade, is to open Saturday in Adams-Morgan.

Washington is catching on to the '90s national trend of dog digs designed to meet the demand for care and entertainment for the dogs of busy working owners. For a daily charge (usually \$25 to \$30), your schnauzer is treated to all the comforts of home. But should a canine client expect to find a chewed-up sofa and a pile of old shoes in the ideal home away from home? "How to Decorate a Doghouse" is not a class offered in design schools.

"It's all about being practical," says Rebecca Bisgyer, a former corporate marketing executive who opened Dog-Ma last September. "You find out there are very few floor coverings or ground covers that will hold up."

Looks differ across the country. New York Dog Spa and Hotel features industrial chain-link fences and sturdy metal chairs, while San Francisco's Every Dog Has Its Day Care has built a brightly colored doghouse inside its facility. Always There Pet Care in Arlington provides a mauve and teal futon for canine couch potatoes.

Dog-Ma has put a lot of emphasis on style. It has three indoor rooms: the office/reception room with snappy black-and-white vinyl tiles, hand-painted Guatemalan dog mask and a rack for leashes and collars; the cavernous playroom, whose floor is painted with a nonskid periwinkle blue finish; and the TV room, with plush dog beds and a sink-in sofa. Bisgyer chose river pea gravel for the fenced-in yard, and she and her husband raked 74 tons to a three-inch depth. For guests, there's no jumping on the UPS man or they might be sent to one of the dreaded time-out cages.

City Dogs is planning a gym room and more minimalist interiors featuring bright blue and yellow walls, although dogs have very poor color vision, according to City Dogs owner Jennifer McLaughlin.

"At first, I envisioned couches for them to lie on, but this causes marking," she added. "The more things you have out with fabric, the more you have to wash."

Most owners of dog day-care centers agree accessories should be kept to a minimum and plants allowed only up off the floor. Forget rugs.

So what of the ceramic cookie jar labeled "Cat Treats" at Dog-Ma? It's just a cruel human joke. "No, we don't take cats," says Bisgyer. "If we did, I might not be able to give them back."

There may be only one universal dogma in dog decorating.

Says Naresh Jessani, an owner of New York Dog Spa and Hotel, "Everything is going to get peed on."