

BUILDING AROUND YOUR PETS

With the Chinese Year of the Dog commencing on February 16, Master Builders director Michael McLean reports on how to make provision for your pets when renovating your home.

FOR those of us who have pets, we generally treat them as members of our family. Some of us might even sleep with our pets whereas others show them the door when the lights are turned off.

Pets come in all shapes and sizes, with dogs and cats the most popular.

One of my friends just took on a lamb as a pet, which will provide some challenges in the future.

There are many risks to pets when renovating your home, such as toxic paints or chemicals, power cords, tempting rubbish piles or open gates.

You will need to make sure you confine your pet to a secure area and make allowances for new routines.

You may even have to consider relocating your pet or yourself during the renovations.

With more than 60 per cent of Australians owning pets, it also makes sense to design your home with our mostly furry friends in mind. There is a great resource available called Four Legs Four Walls that looks at home design for pet owners. It has lots of useful advice that is outlined, in part, below.

The quality of space provided to a pet is much more important than the quantity.

However, more space does create more choice for your pets when it comes to choosing where to spend their time.

It may not always be possible to have much area outside with decreasing block sizes, so more pets are spending additional time indoors.

If possible, pets should have direct access to most areas of the home, including garages. The garage is also a good place for cat or dog litter trays, as these should be separate from their food. For some pets, confinement within the home or yard may be necessary, so the placement of fences becomes important.

If it is necessary to confine cats indoors,

create spaces that provide climbing opportunities and extend your cat's range of surveillance. Also, make sure there are warm and quiet spots for your cat to lounge in.

Design elements should also protect a pet from injury and provide adequate shelter and ventilation. Older and frail animals can often be susceptible to falls on slippery floors.

Spiral and open tread staircases should also be avoided where possible because they can cause anxiety for dogs. Also, when working on a garden plan, make sure you have pet-friendly plants that are non-toxic.

Providing a window for pets to view the outside world can provide a source of distraction for them while you're at work or away from home. However, for some dogs this can cause anxiety, which will often be expressed through barking.

It is important to design your home to help protect members of the public from your pets. Security screens on the front door provide a second barrier to help constrain your pet.

In addition, it also increases ventilation for your pet if the front door is left open.

In contrast, double-glazing or thickened glass helps reduce the effect of noisy dogs – a design element your neighbours will be grateful for.

Wall and ceiling insulation can have a double benefit of cutting your power bills and muffling any pet noise.

Consider ventilation of the area they sleep in or occupy during the day. If dogs are left outdoors, make sure they have some water, shade and shelter at all times of the day. If you have a cat flap, make sure it is small enough not to allow unwanted intruders in.

If you are living in a strata development, check the rules regarding pets before you purchase.

