

# Designer furniture has really gone to the dogs

By Janet Smith



Whether it's with home-baked biscuits, doggie daycare, or Louis Vuitton leashes, people these days are treating their four-legged friends better than they treat some humans. So it's not putting two local industrial designers down to say they've decided to treat humans like they do dogs.

Chris Morse and Jae Won Sim started out inventing high-end beds for Bowser, but now their stylish creations are leading to a whole new line of human furniture.

When the two Emily Carr Institute industrial-design grads decided they wanted to create a product from scratch, they began researching gaps in the market.

"Here was one area where industrial design has not been applied," says Morse, surrounded by furniture at the company Pet Revolution's Burnaby studio. He points out the dog bed has traditionally ranged from an old-style "doughnut" to a miniature couch. "Those looks weren't doing much for people who had a design-oriented home. We looked at the problems first: one, they were hard to clean, and two, we found the dog's smell would permeate the material and you would have to throw them away."

The duo designed a bed encased in waterproof, tear-resistant nylon—finally settling on the same material that's used for bulletproof vests.

To make it more aesthetically pleasing, they came up with the idea of a removable, zip-off covering—a reversible panel of microsuede that could be thrown in the washing machine or inexpensively replaced. Soon, they were playing with fashion colours: a neutral bed could be transformed into a bright robin’s-egg blue or vibrant orange with a pull of the zipper.

Over months and months, they interviewed dog owners, trainers, breeders, and vets. “Part of the project was learning how dogs live,” Morse explains.

They discovered that people were keeping their dogs longer, and that these older pooches need support for their aging joints. The solution, the duo determined, was enough foam density that a sharp little elbow wouldn’t push through to the floor. They also had to accommodate the range in breeds, with a longer bed, with two raised ends, for large ones, and a smaller, boxy version for smaller pets. Morse and Sim designed optional, stylish metal or transparent-acrylic stands for those dogs that prefer sleeping off the floor; the mattress Velcros on and off, so it’s easily transportable to other rooms. (Prices start at about \$400. They’re for sale at Fetch [5617 West Boulevard] and soon at Barking Babies [433 Davie Street], as well as via [www.petrevolution.com/](http://www.petrevolution.com/) or call 604-451-0321 for more information.)

The result was a chic-looking piece of furniture that, as Morse puts it, you don’t “have to hide away when company comes over”. What they had was a washable, comfortable, durable piece of contemporary design whose colour could be changed on a whim. And suddenly they realized those attributes might be attractive to two-legged customers, too.

It helped that Morse's two-and-a-half-year-old daughter had taken to sleeping on one of the prototypes he had lying around the house. It was warmer and more comfortable than a regular crib mattress, but just as waterproof and cleanable, and much more tear-proof. Now the team has brought in another partner, furniture designer Celina Dalrymple, to design a proper kids bed, with a slightly raised end that incorporates a pillow right into the mattress and a printed flannel covering that zips off for washing. (The line, available on the Web site above, is called Child Revolution, with the beds and coordinating blankets starting at around \$400.)

But the trio found there were many more applications for their basic design. Just as they had observed dogs lounging around, Morse and Sim started looking at the way people use furniture in lofts and urban condos. Eating dinner on the ottoman or the couch is now the norm, and they and Dalrymple recognized the usefulness of the waterproof fabric and removable covers for the living room, too.

"One thing that radically differentiates our furniture is that it can be a fashion statement—you can change it every season," says Sim, pointing out most people are leery of investing in anything but a neutral-hued sofa or other big piece of furniture because its colour might go out of style. Revolution's zippable coverings offer materials that can change with someone's mood.

Their first pieces are rectangular, upholstered benches that can double as seating or ottomans. One model incorporates hidden storage. Another has a metal base that becomes a low table when the cushion

is removed; you sit on the cushion to eat. (The benches, under the label Interior Revolution, start at about \$830 via the Web.) Next up: Morse, Sim, and Dalrymple are developing sleek sofas that won't cause a coronary when your friends spill their wine.

The possibilities seem endless, but the Pet Revolution team hasn't finished creating items for its four-legged customers. For one, Morse and Sim are working on a more burrowlike bed for those breeds who like to den. And they've come out with faux-fur throws that coordinate with their doggie loungers: one pink lamb's-wool blanket looks chic enough for Paris Hilton's beloved Tinkerbell. Come to think of it, Paris would probably appreciate it, too—and that's the whole point, after all.