



## Heather Higgins + Winslow

Heather Higgins is the Principal and Founder of Higgins Design Studio, a full service interiors firm specializing in high-end residential and commercial design. With over 30 years of experience successfully creating residential and commercial interiors, Heather is extremely sought-after to create individually conceived projects that reflect the needs of each client. Higgins Design Studio interiors are known for clean, elegant details with an emphasis on color and materials that embrace both the architectural and decorative elements of a space.

The Higgins Design Studio philosophy is simple: everyone has unique needs in a home or office space, and as their lives and the world around them grow and develop, living and work spaces must adapt to changing needs. The success of an interior's design is determined by its relevance to how we live and work, and whether we feel a personal connection to the space.

Heather has a history of creating unique and inspired spaces for clients with four-legged family members and is known for seamlessly integrating the entire family's needs into a unique and comfortable space. **LIFE+DOG** was lucky enough to grab some time with Heather and her companion Winslow at her office in New York City so we could ask her questions for our readers on how they can work their dog's needs into their own decor.

### **LIFE+DOG:** How did you get into design?

Heather Higgins: The explanation for how I got into design is probably two-fold.

Growing up, my family moved every few years. My Father worked for a large corporation, where job promotions usually came along with a transfer to another city. As a result, I often spent a lot of time alone in my room,



entertaining myself, until I was able to make friends in our new locale. I quickly learned the value of a space that provided comfort and personal meaning. Bored, with a lot of time on my hands, I would forage through the neighbors' trash and find wonderful treasures with which to decorate my room. To my parents' great relief, I was eventually drawn to design and not hoarding!

Later on, just out of college with a marketing degree, I came to New York and worked in the public relations department for a corporate giant specializing in textiles and home furnishings. I was given the responsibility of organizing the onslaught of magazine and newspaper submissions for the firm's annual interior design awards program. Knee-deep in glossy photos of inspiring interiors, I knew in one moment that I didn't want to just look at great spaces like these, I wanted to create them! I returned to school a few years later, got a degree in interior design and began working for a large architectural interiors firm in New York.

**L+D: What are some of your favorite projects you have worked on?**

HH: My favorite projects are those in which the design of a home makes a positive change in how a client feels about spending time in their space, and the quality of their personal relationships with both people and their companion animals.

My favorite example of this was a project for a client, who first contacted me when he was overwhelmed with the grief of recently losing his wife. He would avoid going home to his empty apartment because it represented the enormous void he felt in his life since she had passed on. To fast-forward this story, we initially made some simple cosmetic changes to his space, which transformed the feel of it for him. However, about a year later, he called back to say that he was ready to start the next phase of his life in a new home. He wanted to create a fresh look and design a space that would facilitate his love of cooking and entertaining. Just as we were finalizing the drawings for the renovation of his new space, he called to announce that he was engaged. Luckily, he married a terrific woman, who also likes to cook and entertain. The space has worked out perfectly for the two of them and all of their friends, family, and their two cats!

**L+D: What is your favorite thing about your job?**

HH: What I enjoy most about being an interior designer is the ability to improve the quality of people's lives... how they feel, function, and what becomes possible for them out of the experience of living in their space, not just with themselves, but with family, friends and their animals.

**L+D: What are the home accessories that you cannot live without?**

HH: The most important accessories in a home are items which convey a strong message or feeling about the occupants of the space—who they are now, have been in the past, or aspire to be in the future. They help to build emotional bonds and a sense of personal connectivity. These may range from family heirlooms or local crafts collected on a memorable trip, to a framed series of photographs or pieces of their children's artwork.

**L+D: What is your favorite design trend?**

HH: The trend I find most exciting is the recognition that our home's design has a direct correlation to our life experience—including our relationships with four-legged family members. Although living with dogs can bring challenges, it doesn't preclude living in a well-designed home. Today, with the many technological advances in finishes and fabrics, it is possible to achieve elegance and practicality simultaneously. It's great to see that the needs of our companions are no longer just an afterthought and are being taken into consideration during every stage of project planning, from the layout of the space, design of cabinetry and storage space, to the selection of finishes, furnishings and window treatments.

**L+D: How often do clients seek to integrate their dog's needs into their decor?**

HH: Most commonly, if clients live with a dog, the focus of their concern is on the durability and maintenance of finishes and furnishings.

**L+D: What are ways that people can integrate their dog's needs into their decor without looking like their dogs have taken over their home?**

HH: In planning the design of your home, the functional requirements of owning a dog need to be considered. Where will feeding stations, beds, or wee-wee pads be located? How will food and care products be stored? Accounting for these things in advance allows dedicated areas to be created or space allocated in the design of general household storage. Furniture can also be built-in or custom made to match the style of your living space, helping it to integrate into the home's design more easily.

**L+D: What are the most dog-friendly fabric choices?**

HH: Upholstery is one of the most vulnerable targets of accidents. The best dog-friendly fabric choices really depend on your breed of dog and what issues they have...shedding, drooling, scratching, etc.

Microfiber fabrics, like "Ultrasuede" are ideal in many situations because they are resistant to stains, liquids,





and wear. However, they can be problematic for dogs with shedding issues. The high-performing “I can’t believe it’s not leather” polyvinyls are also a strong contender in this category and are available in a range of colors and finishes, including metallic looks.

If faux suede or leather is not your look, consider some of the indoor-outdoor fabrics. There is an appealing range of color and pattern selections. Most of these fabrics, in addition to being very durable, are also stain, moisture and fade resistant.

It is also important to know that many standard fabrics can now be successfully treated for stain-resistance. This is commonly done prior to upholstering pieces. There are several products available and pros and cons to each, depending on the particular fabric selected and proposed usage.

**L+D: What are your best tips for homes with companion animals who want to incorporate design into their home?**

HH: Since situations with companion animals are so varied, I would generalize and advise that safety and function guide each design decision.

**L+D: How did you meet Winslow?**

HH: My dog and I found each other through the Shih Tzus

and Furbabies Dog Rescue Group. They are a group of very kind, professional, well organized people and they have a terrific website: [www.shihtzuandfurbabyrescue.org](http://www.shihtzuandfurbabyrescue.org).

**L+D: What is your favorite thing to do with your dog every day?**

HH: My favorite time with Winslow every day is walking through our wonderful city neighborhood together. In between visits to the shop owners and doormen, who he has charmed into believing every day is trick-or-treat, we catch up with his many dog friends and their owners strolling along the sidewalk, while intermittently checking out seasonal plants and flowers or merchandise in antique store windows.

**L+D: What is your favorite thing to do in New York with your dog?**

HH: One of my favorite things to do with Winslow in New York is the Halloween Parade Walk through Washington Square Park with his girlfriend, a beautiful Havenese, and her owners. Dressed in costume, both dogs love the attention and numerous photo-ops with tourists. Last year they went as Prince William and Kate Middleton. . .it was before the wedding!

**L+D: What has your dog taught you in life?**

HH: You can never have too many friends.



**L+D: What is your favorite memory of your dog?**

HH: Our ride home together, when I initially picked him up from the rescue group volunteers who brought him from Charleston, SC to New Jersey. He had traveled by car for two days, making many stops with several other dogs. As I held him and we drove back to New York City, he nuzzled his tiny nose under my arm and instantly fell asleep. In that moment, I fell in love.

**L+D: What is your favorite memory of any dogs in your past?**

HH: From the time I was born, until I was about 4 years old, my parents raised Irish Setters and Dachshunds. I remember, as a toddler, rolling in the grass, just covered with puppies. Isn't that a dream come true?

The very first dog that I had on my own was my dearest companion and occupies a huge space in my heart. He was a handsome pure-bred Miniature Schnauzer named Homer. He lived until he was 16 years old and I didn't think that I would ever get over losing him. That was until I met bright, bossy little Winslow many months later, who insisted that I make room for him too.

**L+D: Do you have a favorite dog-related quotation?**

HH: My favorite dog-related quotation is credited to the veteran host of the *Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show*, Roger Caras, who said "Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole." However, I really try to temper this with Author Edward Abbey's comment that "When a man's best friend is his dog, that dog has a problem."

**L+D: If you could describe your relationship with your dog in just one word or a few words, what would that be?**

HH: Made for each other.

**L+D: What is your favorite thing about dogs?**

HH: Their big, warm, open hearts and willingness to be silly at the drop of a hat.

**L+D: How has your dog changed your life?**

HH: Winslow is my constant companion and insists on keeping things in perspective for me. His motto is "It's not all about you. . .it's about me!"

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