

Inglewood photographers capture animal magic: Urban Vibe aims to capture bond of pets, owners

Calgary Herald
Monday, April 4, 2005
Page: E2
Section: Calgary Business
Byline: Tamara Gignac
Source: Calgary Herald
Idnumber: 200504040026
Edition: Final

Story Type: Business
Note: Inside Small Business: Companies - People - Contacts. This story features a factbox "Small business".
Length: 630 words
Keywords: PETS

Illustration Type: Black & White Photo
Illustration: Photo: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald / Shane Grant, left, Jennifer Dick and Jennifer Barnett pose with pooches Cody and Wynne in their studio at Urban Vibe in Inglewood. Urban Vibe specializes in creative photography of pets and their owners.

Some clients slobber. Others have halitosis, pass gas or refuse to make eye contact.

It's all in a day's work for Shane Grant and Jennifer Dick, who specialize in pet photography. "You've got to have a lot of patience," admits Grant. "But we've been around animals our entire lives and understand their psychology and the way they think and behave. Once they see what we want, they pretty much work for us."

Urban Vibe operates out of a heritage building in Inglewood, the site of Alberta's first freight elevator now retrofitted into a modern-day studio. Dick and Grant will snap pictures of just about any pet, but their forte is dogs and cats.

A tour of the studio reveals black-and-white and sepia-tinged portraits of furry creatures of every ilk, from a grinning chihuahua and pensive Great Dane to a trio of playful kittens.

Some pets are more precocious than others -- drool on the camera lens is one hazard of the job -- but Grant and Dick swear they've never met a pooch or glamourpuss they couldn't charm.

A few are divas and perform to flashing strobe lights and disco music. Others respond best to soft lighting and scented lavender. "Our cheeks literally get sore from smiling. We have so much fun with them and I think they can sense that. We're loving and respectful of what they do or don't want to do," says Grant.

Longtime friends, Dick and Grant launched Urban Vibe as a means to capitalize on their two greatest passions: photography and animals. To their amazement, the pair found few studios in Calgary that specialize in four-legged creatures, a growing niche in the exploding pet industry.

Canadians spend about \$3.1 billion a year on their pets, according to 1999 Statistics Canada figures. Of that total, \$1.6 billion is spent on pet food and \$1 billion on vet bills, leaving about \$500 million to spend on everything from doggy day care and feline massages to woollen sweaters and gourmet food.

Urban Vibe offers clients a two-hour studio session for \$69.99, which includes unlimited poses and a followup meeting where pet owners select Fido's favourite photos.

Pet images can also be transferred to purses, mugs, mouse pads and magnets.

The company also sells a wide selection of non-toxic recyclable pet toys and organic snacks, including soy-based dog cookies and kosher catnip.

"If toys aren't pet-safe -- like a tennis ball -- it can be incredibly harmful to the animal," said Grant. "Some of the toxicology reports we've seen are incredibly frightening."

Urban Vibe often markets their products at shopping centre kiosks and pet shows, carving out a secondary business line designing animal calendars and other products. They also cross-market their services with local firms that cater to the canine set and heavily promote non-profit organizations like the Meow Foundation and Beagle Paws.

This spring, they are planning a Hogs and Dogs promotion with pooch enthusiasts and their motorcycles, tying it into some of the local charities bikers support.

But Dick and Grant say they are happiest in the studio, where they literally hang from the ceiling and crawl on the floor to get the perfect shot of a treasured family pet.

Too often, they say, people don't think to immortalize a beloved feline or hound until it's too late. "A lot of people get a kick out of buying our gift certificates. It not only shows they care about the household and the family but the future of memories," says Grant.

tgignac@theherald.canwest.com

Small business

Urban Vibe

FPinfomart.ca

Canada's source for research, media monitoring and company information.

- Founded: Dec. 2004

- Number of employees: 2

- Location: 207, 1215 13th St. S.E.

- Website: www.uvibe.ca

- Specializes in pet photography and their owners.
Also carries a wide assortment of non-toxic toys
and organic treats for dogs and cats.