

lifestyle

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FUTURE OF FROST

A MUSEUM MOVES FORWARD

PAMPERED PETS

SPOILED IN SOUTH FLORIDA

THE TRIPLE THREAT: CHEF TAKEOVER



Johnny B. Goode, America's Top Dog Model national winner
Photo credit: Stacia Norris

CREATURE COMFORTS



LIFE IS PAW-SOME FOR SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST PAMPERED CATS AND DOGS

BY FELICIA LEVINE

Johnny B. Goode never steps outside unless he's perfectly coiffed. The statuesque calendar model has a personal stylist, dines on fine imported cuisine and wherever he goes – be it the Lexus dealership, an equestrian event or a charity ball – the flashbulbs pop. “He causes more sensation than anything,” gushes West Palm Beach resident Debra Blevins about her father John David’s 4-year-old standard poodle. “We’ve had traffic stop because people wanted to see him.”

Forget dog eat dog. In 2015, it’s a dog-eat-steak world – especially in South Florida,

where pets luxuriate at posh spas, attend black-tie soirees and hold court at shopping malls (owners pushing their strollers or carrying them like diminutive divas, lest their “pawdicures” touch the ground).

“One cannot help but notice the stylish canines strutting Worth Avenue, Mizner Park and Ocean Drive,” says Jo Jo Harder, a designer, author and founder of the America’s Top Dog Model calendar contest, which Johnny B. Goode won this year. He appears on the cover in a jaunty sailor suit.

So, why all the fuss over some dogs and



Posh Pet Hotel in West Palm Beach

“I WANTED A PLACE WITH ALL THE AMENITIES I APPRECIATE WHEN I STAY SOMEWHERE.”

National Doral Miami offers bottled water, gourmet snacks, toys and personalized blankets. The Chesterfield Palm Beach lavishes pets with welcome baskets, grooming, dog-sitting and treats.

Can't take Fluffy with you? Five-star pet resorts and day care centers offer everything from decadent blueberry facials and limo services, to belly rubs and bedtime stories.

California transplant Lincoln Baker opened the Posh Pet Hotel in West Palm Beach three months ago. The cage-free resort, which is decorated with crystal chandeliers, offers a Zen room with acupuncture and massages and Ferrari, Bentley or Cadillac Escalade transportation. There's a salon and spa, too, plus the Posh Bistro for organic meals and holistic biscuits. DOGTV plays "Lady and the Tramp" and other Disney favorites, while felines can gaze at a saltwater fish tank. Luxury suites start at \$49 per night, and if you miss your four-legged friend, there's a live webcam 24/7. "Our clients love their pets like children," says Baker.

Amy Jo Birkenes opened Pompano Beach-based Chateau Poochie eight years ago. "I wanted a place with all the amenities I appreciate when I stay somewhere," says Birkenes, whose property includes a hotel, day care and spa for dogs and cats and has been featured on Animal Planet. Suites are opulently decorated (some with sleigh beds), and there's a cat boudoir, spa, fitness center, senior center, boutique and social lounge where "paw-jama" parties include games, music and "pup-



A luxurious dog bed in the Posh Presidential Suite

cats? Because people just love their four-legged family members.

NEW LEASH ON LIFE

Before you poo-poo the pampered pet trend, consider this: According to the American Pet Products Association, last year, we spent \$58 billion on our 397 million furbabies. And a national Amazon.com survey of the United States' "20 Most Pampered Pet Cities" ranked Miami No.1 for spoiling cats and dogs. It's a phenomenon entrepreneurs from Miami Beach to West Palm Beach are banking on.

Traveling with your dog or cat? Many upscale hotels not only accept pets, but they indulge them. The Trump



Pampered pooches get flashy cars at the Posh Pet Hotel



Dr. Benjamin Carter examines a dog during a house call

“I realized how much better my patients responded in their own environments.”

corn.” “We treat them with the same love and affection they find at home,” Birkenes says.

ANIMAL HOUSE

Want to keep your dog on a short leash? Many overprotective owners who prefer their furry companions

remain home keep pet sitters on speed dial.

Linda Johnson, aka The Pet Nanny, cleans litter boxes, walks dogs and will reside with animals while owners travel. Most recently, she stayed 19 days at a family’s Boca Raton home caring for their Maltese while they vacationed overseas. Clients leave her copious detailed instructions: She’s been asked to serve food strictly at room temperature on fine china (“a different color for each meal”), brush whiskers after meals using a special comb (“so the dog won’t

itch”) and tuck a Schnauzer into his baby bassinet each night (“so he feels safe”).

For scaredy-cats or dogs, there’s even a vet who makes house calls. Dr. Benjamin Carter started Signature Veterinary Care 18 months ago after receiving multiple requests. “I realized how much better my patients responded in their own environments,” says Carter, who treats South Florida cats, dogs and the occasional rat or hamster. “They were much calmer, and so were their human companions.” Carter travels in an unmarked medicine-stocked sedan (“so if a client’s building doesn’t allow pets, no one’s tipped off”).

When it comes to pampering, he’s seen it all. The most outrageous: a freestanding Victorian-style doghouse located in the owner’s living room, complete with a lounge, high ceilings and a flat-screen TV. “I’d like to live in that house,” he quips.

But seriously, do animals actually benefit from all this decadence? Yes, says Dr. Carter. “Owners become more in tune with pets and are able to spot issues sooner. Plus, the pampering expands the animal/human bond. When they’re doted on, they know they’re part of the pack and that makes them confident and have a sense of territory.” And for humans, their pets’ unconditional love is priceless.

John David, 91, finds great comfort in Johnny B. Goode, who’s also his therapy dog. The pair spends time watching golf, running errands and attending the annual Worth Avenue Pet Parade in, naturally, matching outfits. He’s so proud of his poodle he carries around a “brag” book. “Dad is frugal, but never when it comes to Johnny,” his daughter says. “For him, he spares no expense.” ■