



By Carol Bryant

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# With Eye-Popping Custom Canine Couture, High Fashion Has Gone to the Dogs

FOR DOG PEOPLE

Susan Godwin could not believe her Morkie, Tasha Bella, was the only naked dog at her first canine meetup in New York City. That was many years ago, and times have changed.

"When I took Tasha to her first doggy get-together, all the dogs were dressed up except her," Godwin recalls. "I knew I would have to step up my game as a dog mom."

She took a big leap and became involved in canine fashion.



Tasha Godwin wearing Ada Nieves. Photo courtesy Susan Godwin

## Form *and* Function

"I started putting Tasha in sweaters to get her used to wearing clothes," Godwin recalls. "I quickly learned that New York dogs do not buy 'off the rack,' so I contacted canine designer, [Ada Nieves](#), so my dog could dress to impress."

Godwin proudly admits Tasha never put up a fuss about wearing clothes. She wears sunglasses and even the most elaborate headdress atop her tiny head with pride. Goodwin knows some dogs don't like wearing clothes, but says Tasha loves it.

"I feel like most dogs wear clothes with their heads held high, loving the added attention they get and knowing that they are going out with their human, being included in the plans for the night when the couture comes out."



"if there's ever a dog wearing clothes with their tail down and not wanting to walk, then, of course, I wouldn't force them. But that's not my dog. Tasha loves being a fashionista!"

Courtesy Susan Godwin

Tasha has gone on to become something of a fashion diva in her world, earning recognition as Top Dog Model and Most Photogenic at [dog beauty pageants](#). The little dog even performs community service as the national leader of Godwin's [PupScout](#) organization, a nonprofit that's, yes, a scout troop for dogs: Dogs wear adorable uniforms and earn badges as dutiful canine assistants to their parents who organize fundraisers and other events to benefit pet charities.



Tasha in her Pupscout uniform. Courtesy Susan Godwin

In Godwin's experience, people like her who dress their pets to the nines are often actively advocating for animals in need. While it's a fun way to show off their pets, the Pupscouts' main focus is to raise money for animals in need.

Other designers and pet parents such as those you'll meet below are also involved with fund and awareness raising, and volunteering their time to local shelters or rescue groups.





Dexter Bryant wearing Janice Craig. Photo by Alice G Patterson for Carol Bryant

## A Personal Note

Full disclosure: I am one of said pet parents. Pre-pandemic, my wife and I hosted yearly pet-friendly gala events to benefit a variety of dog rescue groups. We noticed tickets sold faster and more people were willing to attend because they wanted to see dogs dressed up. Those same people were more willing to help promote the event and share photos on social media.

As a result, we sold out of every event and helped raise thousands of dollars for homeless pets. My beloved dog, Dexter, wore designs for warmth and fashion from many of these designers. I am personally acquainted with the fashionistas and designers mentioned in this piece. They all truly love what they do, and it shows in their canine-positive lifestyles.



Ada Nieves, fashion designer to dogs and more. Courtesy photo

## Bark Is the New Black

Ada Nieves is an icon in the pet fashion industry who splits her time between New York and Florida. She has been designing canine clothes since 2004 and earned a degree in Pet Products and Marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 2008.

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**The average price of a piece of custom canine couture can range anywhere from \$150 to \$900.**

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“Dressing pets is very meaningful to me,” Nieves says. “Consider an owner who indulges in luxurious pet accessories; a dressed pet will not be abandoned, lack medical care, and will eat well. The owner will take care of their pet and want to show them off.”

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The designer says pet fashion has become very popular over the last 10 years with the growth of nontraditional families—including those who view their pets as their children. People view their pets as part of the family and want to spoil them. Oftentimes, pets are a projection of who we are, including our social status, and clothing is one way to express these characteristics.

"As we get closer to our pets, we find ways to help them live long lives with us," Nieves states. "This includes things like canine shoes to protect their paws on the pavement, fabrics to warm or cool body temperatures, and tracking devices in collars should they wander—it really is unlimited."



Photo courtesy Ada Nieves

Nieves shares her life with [Chihuahuas](#) and Chihuahua mixes along with her cat, Martini Beethoven, the latter of which acts more like a dog than a cat—and yes, they model her designs, too.

"Once a pet relates dressing up to fun, there is no fuss. My own pets run to my side, waiting for me to pick them up and see what the next adventure is," Nieves says.



## Canine Couture Rocks the Runway

Doggy designer [Anthony Rubio](#) grew up New York City, surrounded by influences from his Puerto Rican heritage—everything from the culture's music and food to its colorful fashions.



Anthony Rubio with his dogs, Bogie and Kimba, and a model. Photos courtesy Anthony Rubio

He attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York with a focus on women's wear and was a designer in the late '80s and mid-'90s. He attributes his upbringing in the heart of the fashion world and growing up during one of the most rebellious and expressive periods in fashion history with influencing his artistic vision.

Rubio came into canine couture by accident. After rescuing a dog, Bandit, in 2002, he set out on a mission to create apparel and costumes for him.

The rags-to-riches dog loved it, and as more people saw Bandit's fashions, they wanted Rubio to design for their dogs. In 2003, Bandit Rubio Designs was established. The rest, as he says, is canine history.

After Bandit passed away in 2011, the company name was changed to Anthony Rubio Designs. Since that time, Rubio has done huge production runway shows, with his first New York Fashion Week runway in 2012.

These days, he is a proud doggy dad to Chihuahua twins, Bogey and Kimba, whom he adopted at two months old. The boys and Rubio's creations have been featured in [Vogue](#) magazine in different countries, [Harper's Bazaar](#), [People](#), [Glamour](#) magazine, and just about "every fashion publication you can imagine," Rubio says.



Courtesy Anthony Rubio

## Dogs Rule the Catwalk

Like Rubio, doggy mom, Anne Maria Tafoya of Albuquerque, New Mexico, got involved in canine fashion by accident. She adopted a rescue Pomeranian and named her Sophia Loren. Poor Sophia was afraid of everything.

"I put a little tee shirt on her one day," Tafoya recalls. "And I saw her blossom before my very eyes; wearing clothes every day became our ritual."



After entering Sophia in a Halloween costume contest, folks from New York got in touch. Sophia was asked to be a canine model in fashion shows. Companies like Petco courted her to be a brand ambassador.



Left: Betty White with Sophia Loren. Right: Greyshoes modeling a designer creation.  
Photos courtesy Anne Maria Tafoya

"I met Anthony Rubio at one of these shows and got to know him and his amazing designs," Tafoya shares. "Sophia modeled for him at Los Angeles Fashion Week in 2017, and it was the most magical thing I had ever seen."

When Sophia passed away, Tafoya adopted a Pomsky named [Greyshoes](#), who had mighty big shoes to fill. Tafoya firmly believes Sophia was looking down from heaven to guide Greyshoes toward the runway.

At a few months old, Greyshoes walked his first fashion show, with Rubio calling him the world's first runway Pomsky. He and his canine sister, Daffodil, love wearing clothes as they both strut down the runway with fashion models at the end of their leash.



Daffodil walks the runway. Photos courtesy Anne Maria Tafoya

## Canine Fashion—What's Next

Canine couture is here to stay, from dog booties to [Swarovski crystal-laden collars](#).

A simple Google search for "[dog clothes](#)" produces millions of results, from every manner of [pet halloween costume](#) to the latest collection from high-end designers like [Louis Vuitton](#), [Versace](#), and [others](#). Dogs (and cats!) on the runway? Check. Dogs as guests at fashion shows? Check. Dogs who may have a better wardrobe than you? Um, check.


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While pet clothes are often about the fashion, they can be about function, too. Many small dogs, and some cats, feel warmer and safer wearing an outer layer. When my Cocker Spaniel, Dexter, injured his leg (twice) and ruptured his [anterior cruciate ligament](#), he required surgeries. I opted for a [onesie-like post-surgery suit](#) for dogs during postoperative recovery (from the folks at [Tulane's Closet](#)), and Dexter never had to struggle with the cone of shame to keep him from licking or chewing his stitches.

With a [new generation opting to have pets over human children](#), and with more pets in more homes and a [closer relationship with them than ever before](#), you can expect haute couture for pets to get more creative, more custom, and more specific to the needs of pets, along with their doting parents.

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Carol Bryant is the founder of [FidoseofReality.com](#) and [Wigglebutt Warriors](#). A pet industry expert, Carol is the Immediate Past President of the Dog Writers Association of America (DWAA) and the 2020 and 2021 winner for Best Dog Blog. "A dog lover of the highest order" is how Gayle King introduced Carol when she appeared with her Cocker