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The Search for Pet-Friendly Real Estate



By Gwendoline Watson

When my shih tzu and I opted to seachange from the Inner West to the Eastern Suburbs, we had little idea of the fun we'd have looking for pet-friendly real estate. (Let's just say Indiana Jones had it easy finding the Holy Grail.)

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Statistics may claim that two out of three Australian homes have pets, but I have a strong suspicion they're not referring to rentals.

While our search started with high hopes and high standards, views for me and gardens for her, priorities quickly turned to finding anything that would allow four-legs in the front door.

When I finally persuaded one spotty young agent to let me submit an application (along with solid pet references and a photo of pooch looking cute and well behaved), he didn't seem hopeful.

"Basically, if it were up to me there wouldn't be a problem," he explained. "But it's not up to me, it's up to the strata."

Strata's computer said no.

Then he gave me some sage advice well beyond his years. "Look, most of our flats don't allow pets, yet most of our tenants have them and we just look the other way; stop telling people about the dog."

Now the thought of telling porkies quite frankly made me nervous, but it also got me thinking. Just how many other pet-lovers out there were being forced to live in sin?

A quick sniff around revealed I wasn't alone. What I discovered in fact was an extensive sub-culture of pet-hiding that made my reservations seem quite naive.

It all started innocently enough – the odd tropical fish here, a couple of guinea pigs there. But when a colleague admitted to turning her spare room into a clandestine reptile park, complete with lizards, turtles and a 2m jungle python, I knew I was onto something big.

Emboldened by these maverick pet-pioneers, I decided that pooch and I were going to have to adopt stealth mode.

But why should us renters hide the dog bowl every time the plumber comes a-knocking. Surely responsible pet-owners are by nature good tenants, so why aren't we better looked after?

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Tips for Pet Friendly Living

The Petcare Information and Advisory Service (PIAS) – www.i-pet.com.au

Follow the links to 'Pet Friendly Living' for helpful hints and a sample pet policy to help homeowners and pet-owners live in perfect harmony.

Click on to their sister site www.petnet.com.au for a landlord checklist to prove you're a responsible pet-owner.

The Australian Companion Animal Council – www.acac.org.au

Features advice and a helpful guide for landlords considering renting to tenants with pets – pass them on!

In the United States, where approximately 69.1 million homes have pets, house-seeking pet-parents are very well catered for. From pet-friendly housing finders in New York, to pet social networking sites from Florida, right across the US there is a wide range of services specifically devoted to helping connect pets-owners to pet-friendly homes.

Yet back on our humble shores, despite a comparable 4.8 million pet-dwelling abodes, services are practically non-existent. I found one site-in-progress out of Queensland, sent them my details, but never heard back. We've got some way to go, Australia.

Still, according to the Petcare Information and Advisory Service (PIAS), the demand for pet-suitable inner city apartments is growing and 'as much a priority as the view and the number of bedrooms.' With more and more Australians downsizing and moving into urban areas, the call for pet-friendly townhouses and high-rises has gone through the roof.

As a result, developers are cashing in and many new complexes are being created with pets in mind.

A rep for PRDnationwide Gold Coast explains, "Up to 80 per cent of potential apartment buyers either have a cat or a dog or intend to get one... The [apartments that] are pet friendly are showing greater capital growth than those which are not and they stay on the market a shorter time".

This is great news for animal-loving buyers. But let's face it, for us humble renters who choose to live in little old flats by the

sea, this doesn't help much. What we need is for existing landlords to give pets a chance.

A friend of mine justified his no-pets door policy by listing smells, fleas, extra repairs and added inconvenience. He clearly hasn't heard of pet-bonds, landlord checklists and good old-fashioned Febreze.

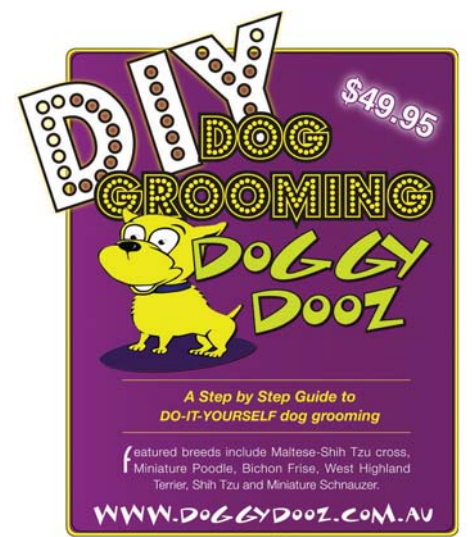
But if that's not enough, the Australian Companion Animal Council (ACAC) provides an extensive landlord's guide on their website and advises that a "well managed pet-friendly policy can help improve profitability, lower vacancy rates [and] reduce tenant turn-over."

That's worth a little inconvenience isn't it?

So to all good honest pet-owning citizens who want nothing more than a roof over their head, surely it's time to tell landlords to get with the pet-program. After all, they've been allowing cockroaches to co-habit for years, how hard can it be?

As for pooch and I, our stealth mission was busted early on, but luckily our new landlord has a soft spot for shih tzus. Unfortunately, it turns out he also has a soft spot for renovation, so we're soon to be back out on the street. Can someone get me Harrison Ford on the phone?

Gwendoline Watson hails from the green, green valleys of Old South Wales and has been living and writing in New South Wales since 2001. She recently moved East-side and has discovered that her previously quiet and retiring shih tzu, Peaches, was in fact a maniac just waiting for the right seagulls to chase.



NEW RELEASE

Pet Reads

Compelling books on pets, care and just fun reading

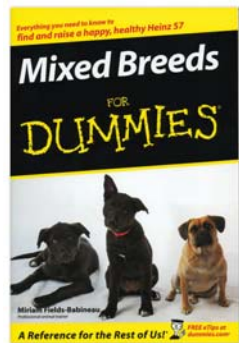
Mixed Breeds For Dummies

By Miriam Fields-Babineau

Is it a mutt or a 'designer dog' or just plain cross-breed. It seems there's a 'Dummies' book for everything these days and this book sets out to dispel some myths about what you really get when you cross a this with that. Author and professional animal trainer, Miriam Fields-Babineau, looks at what traits and personality types you might identify in your Heinz 57.

Expert advice on everything from houstraining, grooming, healthcare and nutrition make up the greater portion of this book. Very informative and practical advice is given to finding the right dog for your home environment with basic advice on temperament testing. Keeping the household happy with dog proofing your house and teaching basic commands is also included. This is a great resource for all new dog owners, or those considering blowing the budget on a 'designer dog' or rescuing an equally worthy mutt from a rescue organisation.

Published by Wiley RRP \$25.95



Why Does My Dog Act That Way?

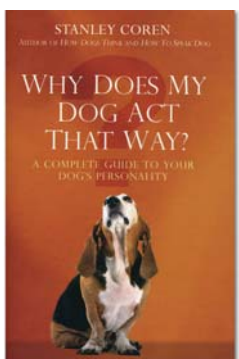
A complete guide to your dog's personality

By Stanley Coran

Stepping it up a notch comes this highly informative read from well-known psychologist and best selling author, Stanley Coran. This book is fascinating reading for those of us wanting more information of why dogs do the things they do and act the way they act. If you've ever wondered why your border collie fixates on shadows or why your beagle is selectively deaf, then this is a must read into understanding the way dogs, and certain breeds in particular, tick.

This book explains the scientific traits of numerous popular breeds and examines how this affects the way they react in and out of the home, with other dogs, with adults and children. It also looks at mixed breeds and the cocktail of characteristics and variations within breeds. This is a fascinating and highly readable guide to understanding the inner dog.

Published by Pocket Books, distributed by Simon & Schuster RRP \$24.95



A Guide to... Cockatiels

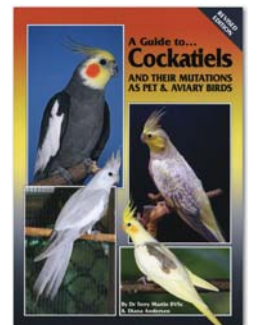
And their mutations as pet and aviary birds

ABK, or Australian Bird Keeper Publications, continue to come out with thoroughly researched and informative books on the care, health and nutrition of pet and

aviary birds. The Cockatiel is one of the most popular companion birds in the world and its size and hardy constitution make it a relatively easy pet to keep. However there is much to know about the diet and house of these charming 'mini cockatoos' to keep them in healthy and happy.

This is an excellent resource for all people who have a Cockatiel as a pet. It's a practical and informative guide that is an invaluable reference on all aspects of this delightful avian character.

Published by ABK Publications RRP \$55.00



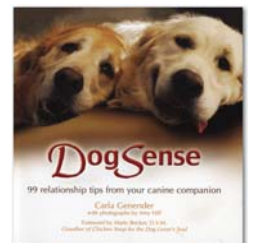
Dog Sense

99 relationship tips from your canine companion

Carla Genender, photos by Amy Hill

This book is so delightful we decided to share much more of it with our readers on pages 20-21. So many breeds are featured and each dispenses their own little piece of dog wisdom. The author has also taken the time to research the origins of each breed and this adds an informative element to this very sweet publication. It's one of those great books that touches the heart and reminds us not to take things too seriously. We recommend buying one for yourself and another for a close friend.

Published by Health Communications, distributed by Harper Collins RRP \$32.99



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