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October 2007
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Pet Style NEWS

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My Bowl Runneth Over

High-end pet dishes are breaking the mold.



By Nikki Moustaki

Lapping up luxury is getting easier for Fido and Fluffy with the fairly recent development of the high-end bowl trend. Sure, there are still pet bowls at the big discount stores that sell for a couple of bucks, but what self-respecting poochie or puss would dare drink from that? No—today's trend-setting setters need something a little more upscale.

BOWLS ▶38



Furniture for the Furry

Retailers and manufacturers are offering new options for organization and comfort. ■ By Jennifer Blanchard

Pet boutique customers feel the same way about their pets as most people feel about their children: Nothing is too good for their babies. So it's no wonder that pet parents are beginning to stock their homes with furniture made especially for their furry, four-legged best friends.

FURNITURE ▶52



Holiday Fashion

Designers have lots of haute surprises in store for pet holiday fashion.

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Getting It Down to A Tee

The classic fashion trend grows and reflects our popular culture.

■ By Sandy Robins

Retailers from coast to coast all endorse one perennial pet style standard—T-shirts. These days, the trendiest tees are geared toward dogs of all sizes. Prices are being cut to fit comfortably into consumer budgets both big and small, which ultimately means that this fashion translates into big business.

TEES ▶44



Pet Fashion Week a Success

More exhibitors and a 66 percent increase in the number of buyers, including more from outside the U.S., added to the August event's excitement.

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Simply Fido's family of organic pet toys

Weaving a Greener Future

Her mother's illness inspired Jean Chae to go organic with Simply Fido.

By Meghan E. Murphy

Five years ago, Jean Chae wasn't even working for her family's toy business. But today the art director has helped her family turn SimplyFido in Brooklyn, N.Y., into an all organic, environmentally friendly company that's paving the way for all-natural toy production.

Chae joined her family's business when her mother was diagnosed with stage-three liver cancer and could no longer work. But she didn't just take her mother's place, she also took her advice.

Chae's mother refused chemotherapy to treat her cancer and instead turned to a natural, healthy lifestyle. Before long, the focus on an organic way of living rubbed off on the family's business.

Simply Fido History

Jean Chae's parents have manufactured toys for dogs and children for 30 years, but it wasn't until Chae was at an international toy festival five years ago that she thought about how their products impact the earth. After hearing all her mother's platitudes on eating right, she says she thought "Oh my god. What are we really making for these children? The plastic and polyester toy gets thrown away. What about organic toys that are good for the earth and good for us?"

The organic, natural craze wasn't booming at the time, so the Chaes had to create their own methods of making organic dog toys. They experimented with materials and processes to make sure the products were non-toxic and high quality.

The only organic cotton the Chaes could find for their fabric was produced in Tibet. So that raw material had to be shipped to their Shanghai factory to be dyed with herb-based colors and set in water instead of chemicals.

Finding a color that is both organic and appealing was a difficult task. Before joining the family business, Chae was an art director at an advertising agency, so she insisted that the product had to look good.

"My biggest dilemma when looking at other organic products was that this precious organic cotton was made into a product that's not so attractive," she says. "If we're going to use these wonderful resources, I said 'Let's make it really pretty!'"



Jean Chae and her husband, Sam Hahn

Refining the new toys took the Chae family about two years. When they launched the product line, response from store owners and customers was beyond their imagination. Because of the slow production process, the toys were sometimes out of stock for up to three months, Chae says.

The Importance of Education

Chae also aims to educate consumers with the packaging of the SimplyFido products. Each new retailer receives a poster about the benefits of organic products, and Chae always talks with store owners about the products.

"Educating pet owners is key," she says.

(BUSINESS PROFILE ON PAGE 60)



Chae and her mother at their Shanghai facility in front of organic fabric hanging up to dry.

Harlow, a rescued dog, poses with one of the toys



(BUSINESS PROFILE FROM PAGE 58)

Chae encourages retailers to place her products near the organic pet food to help reinforce the organic message to consumers. Each toy comes in a bag attached to a card, so it can be hung on a peg board where health-conscious shoppers gravitate.

Aside from being earth-conscious, the Chaes also give back to the community through donations to local dog shelters. Chae said shelter employees have told her that the dogs love the toys and bring them into their sleeping quarters.

"Hearing that was very rewarding," she says.

The natural, healthy way of life has been fruitful for the Chae family as well. Chae's mother is doing well despite the doctors' dire diagnoses.

"She's healthier than ever now," Chae says.

She doesn't work, but helps other cancer sufferers convert to a healthy lifestyle. She invents new healthy vegetarian dishes with her daughter as her guinea pig. The two are even considering writing a vegetarian cookbook together.

Meanwhile, the Simply Fido business is simply growing. Dr. Marty Becker featured the organic pet toys on ABC's "Good Morning America" This year, the company is launching a new dog fashion line, which was to be on display at New York's Pet Fashion Week. Chae designed embroidered T-shirts that will be available to retailers beginning in October.

The way Chae sees it, she owes it all to her mother's perseverance.

"Because of an illness, an organic product was born," Chae says. "She actually helped us to go even further."

To find out more about SimplyFido products, visit the website at www.simplyfido.com. ♦

Efficiency And Ecology

SimplyFido is continually striving for better efficiency, so the company recently opened an ecologically friendly factory to streamline the process and ensure quality control. Chae believes it may be the first factory in China certified by the Organic Consumers Association.

Some of the eco-friendly features in the factory include a recycling process that uses gray water from Shanghai's largest tofu factory, and an ultraviolet sterilization system. There is also a vacuum that constantly sucks dust from the air, so the workers don't breathe in cotton dust.

"What good is it if we get to make good toys, but we're not considering our workers' health?" Chae says.

Eventually all of the toy fabric will be made in the Shanghai factory so the Chaes can oversee the quality of all material.

With high-quality ingredients and a longer manufacturing process, SimplyFido toys are more expensive than other pet toys. But customers and pet store owners don't seem to mind. Chae says people are willing to pay more because they know they're getting an environmentally and pet-friendly product.

Chae adds that the family's goal is not to focus on how much the toys cost.

The Chaes want to lead factories around the world, and especially in China, to see the light and lessen their impact on the earth.

"We try not to make it about the price of toys. We think it's more like a mission for us," she says. "We want other people to follow and be aware of the things that are going on in China. We haven't really shown them the role model; they've never seen it. They've never heard the 'organic' word; it's just very foreign to them."

In fact, the family returned to China in July to educate all of their workers about the environment, and how they can live naturally to improve their lives and those of their children and pets.

All Simply Fido toys go through a UV sterilization process to kill germs and bacteria before being packed. (This process is not required by any industry, but the company felt that it was necessary to ensure the safety of their products for pets and babies.)



Unlike many Chinese factories in rural areas, the Chae factory's main sewing area is super clean and is air conditioned. Everyone wears special slippers, no street shoes. Each sewing station has a vacuum hose that sucks up large amounts of dust.



The company installed metal detectors to make sure no metal pieces from floors or machinery or any needles have gone into the toys.

