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Boca woman explains canine couture in latest book

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By Linda Haase

Special to The Palm Beach Post

Boca Raton — Top Dog takes on a whole new meaning in Jo Jo Harder's life.

Harder, an effervescent Boca Raton resident and creator of America's Top Dog Model calendar contest, has unleashed a new venture: *How to Become a Top Dog Model*, a book designed to help canines achieve supermodel status. The guide explains what it takes to be a top dog model and includes resources, including canine couture, model and talent agencies, top dog designers and photographers.

Harder, a former model, fashion designer (her clothing lines were sold in Nordstrom, Marshall Fields and other upscale stores), stylist and owner of Romeo, a miniature 18-pound Greyhound (who has a chic wardrobe), penned the book in response to queries she's received since she launched the calendar contest in 2005.

"During the years of organizing this national competition, I received numerous emails from around the world. A majority of the inquiries consisted of this question: How can I get my dog into modeling?" explains Harder, whose first book *Diva Dogs: A Style Guide to Living the Fabulous Life*, was published in 2008.

Just what does it take to be a top dog?

"It requires a lot of training and patience and a certain personality. They also have to be obedient, well groomed and photogenic," explains Harder, a University of Minnesota graduate who began modeling in Bloomington, Minn. when she was 13.

"They can't just be cute. That just gets their paw in the door. They have to make a difference (by being service dogs or volunteering in some way)," she explains.

Harder, a longtime canine lover, is creating a reality show about dogs.

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"Dogs are wonderful companions. I can't imagine being without a dog. They are part of your family," she notes.

As for her Romeo: "He's friendly, playful, good natured, smart and understands what I am saying."

Q&A

Who is your hero or someone you admire and why?

"I have tremendous admiration for CoCo Chanel. She was a magnificent woman, who was a force and legend in her time and ours. She revolutionized fashion — forever! I once visited her apartment in Paris and was photographed in her famous white chair!"

Who would you like to be stuck in an elevator with and what would you discuss?

"Oprah Winfrey. We would discuss program ideas for her OWN Network."

What is something about you that would surprise people?

"People may be surprised that I spent half my life traveling the world as a flight attendant." She also grew up on a Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota, where she lived until she was 12 (her father was a teacher and principal at a school on the reservation and she is part Cherokee and Creek Indian).

What is the biggest misconception about dog models?

"That it's all about eye candy! There is so much more to this business than just eye candy. A dog model must be smart, well trained, sociable, obedient, patient, charismatic and friendly. America's Top Dog Models possess all of these qualities and more. They are dogs that make a difference, working as service dogs in nursing homes, hospitals, schools, and research."

What is your favorite book?

"One of them is Depths of Glory by Irving Stone. It's a well-researched, intriguing account of one of the most important figures in art history, the brilliant painter, Camille Pissarro. The book chronicles his development as an artist, as well as the multitude of talented individuals with whom he shared his life... the French Impressionists."

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: JO JO HARDER

'Top Dog Model' creator pens book offering tips to owners of canines

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DAMON HIGGINS / THE PALM BEACH POST

Author Jo Jo Harder with her miniature greyhound, Romeo, at Mizner Park in Boca Raton. Harder is also a fashion designer, stylist, ex-model and creator of the America's Top Dog Model contest. She recently published her second book: *How to Become a Top Dog Model*, which describes how canine models get started, succeed and stay on top.

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