

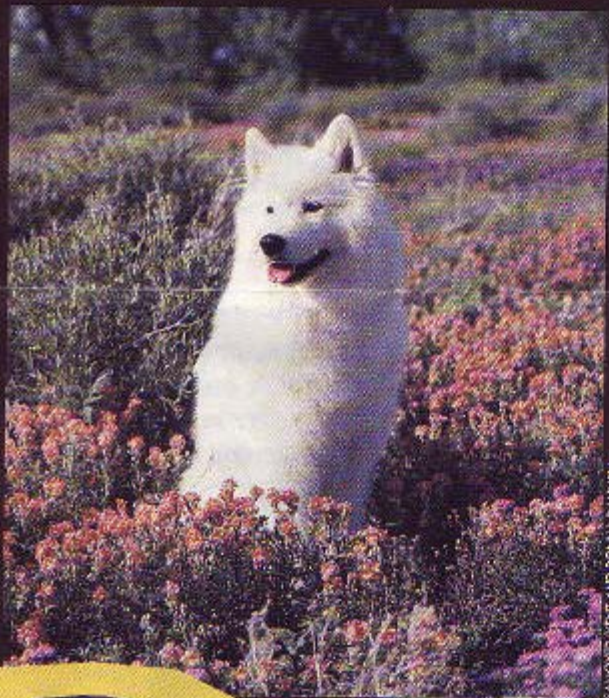
Recycled Beauty

by Leigh Silverman

This article was published in the September 1997 issue of the AKC Gazette.

Dogs sniff them. People wear them. Everyone who sees one knows they're special. Those who can afford Santa Fe weaver Nancy Paap's incredible coats and hats made from canine hair — price tags range from \$115 for a beret to \$1,750 for a full-length coat — find themselves attracting the kind of recognition reserved for celebrities.

Paap has cornered a most unusual



SAMOEYED: VENT AND DONNA DANNIN

Recycled

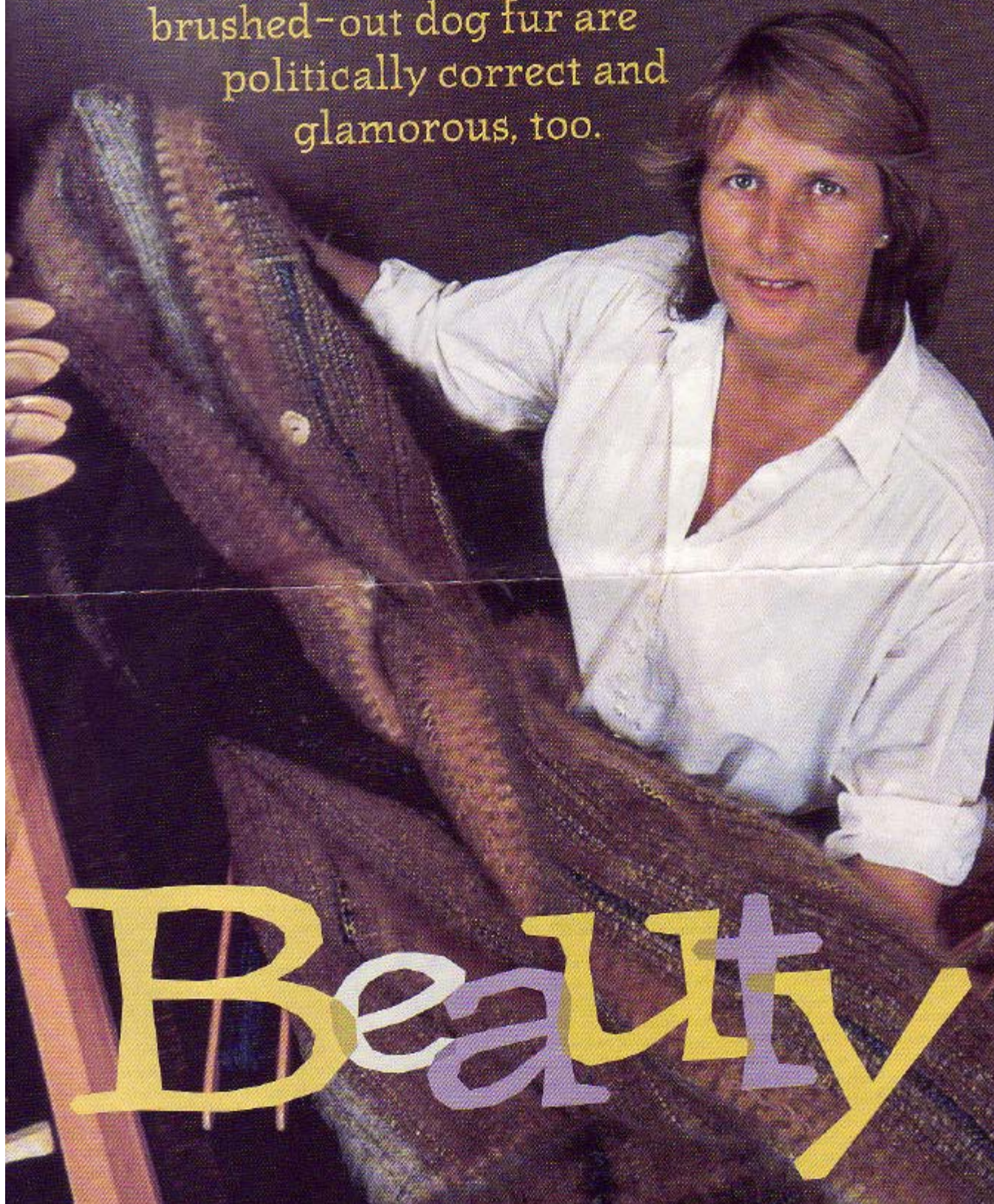
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66 AKC GAZETTE

COLLEGE HAVES



Garments made with
brushed-out dog fur are
politically correct and
glamorous, too.





This full-length coat used about four pounds of Samoyed hair to complete. Fur must be brushed out, not clipped.

market. "Although there are people who use dog hair," she explains, "they don't do it to the full extent that I do it, and they use it differently." No one has imitated her style, or succeeded at making a living from the craft, as she has. She says it has taken her 20 years to build up a group of people to save dog hair for her, and to find spinners to spin the hair so it "makes a beautiful fabric that can be made into a jacket you can wear, that doesn't fit like a board or fall apart."

Paap began her unique career in the early 1970s. Her mother-in-law would save her Samoyed's brushed-out fur and give it to Paap, who would spin it into thread and

weave it into rugs and pillows. She gradually adapted her techniques to make clothing.

Today Paap produces a number of items, including bomber-type jackets, three-quarter-length coats, shawls, scarves and throws. The items are displayed at the Santa Fe Weaving Gallery in New Mexico. "There's a wide variety to choose from," Paap says, "and every piece is different."

Advertisements in breed club magazines bring in her supply of hair. She pays \$10 per pound; four pounds of hair are required to make a coat, two pounds for a jacket and half a pound for a scarf or a shawl. Paap says because show dogs are constantly being groomed, their hair is cleaner than the hair she gets from groomers who work with pet dogs.

Paap spends four to six weeks making a single garment, depending on the complexity of the project. First she spins the dog hair onto a strand of cotton- or silk-like yarn. Next she washes the yarn with dish detergent and ammonia, allowing it to dry before weaving it with fibers on one of her looms. She then washes the fabric and cuts and sews the garment. Each item is lined with silk and then dry-cleaned. Although Paap leaves the dog hair its natural color, she uses other yarn to add turquoise, magenta or copper. The end product is lighter than a fur coat, but just as warm, she says.

Samoyed and Chow Chow fur are her specialties, though occasionally she'll use the hair from a Collie, a Great Pyrenees, a Standard Poodle or a Golden Retriever. "You can't use any short-haired dogs," she says, "and the fur has got to be brushed out, not clipped."

Some of Paap's customers provide their own dog's fur to be recycled into a custom-made coat. "If the dog is old and passes away," she says, "they have something to remember it by." The rest of Paap's customers, she says, are "fashion-conscious people who like to buy something that is unusual and looks good on them."

Her garments hold special appeal for those sensitive to animal rights. "For people who don't like to buy furs," she says, "this is a politically correct alternative. Sometimes people mistake the clothes for 'real' fur — when you say it's dog hair, they think you've slaughtered the dog, which you haven't done. You know the dog is happy and prancing around in his brushed-out, beautiful, clean coat!"

PHOTO COURTESY THE SANTA FE WEAVING GALLERY

But what about other dogs? Do they know the garments are made of real dog fur? "Dogs will smell the coats, but they won't attack it," Paap reassures. "But they'll know it's something interesting."

Although dog attacks are not a concern for Paap's customers, allergy attacks can pose a problem. She recalls a coat she sold to a couple who were allergic to dogs. "The customers questioned whether they'd be allergic to it once it was woven and spun and really clean," she says. "So we made the agreement that they could return the coat if it didn't work

The jacket below combines Chow Chow fur with wool. Paap leaves the hair its natural color.



This Samoyed fur jacket is interwoven with beige-colored wool yarns.

out." They returned the coat.

But at least Paap learned never to sell her garments to people with even the slightest allergy to dogs. "The coats do shed a little bit," she says, "but I don't know what it is that makes them allergenic. You used to think it was the dander on the animal and it would all be taken out when the item was washed and cleaned, but it must be something else in there that does the same thing."

In addition to the allergy warning, Paap is considering providing other information with future dog hair garments: "Each coat," she says with a chuckle, "might be sold with pedigree papers."

For more information write to Nancy Paap, c/o The Santa Fe Weaving Gallery, 124 1/2 Galisteo, Santa Fe, NM 87501. Or call (505) 982-1737. 🐾

Leigh Silverman was columns editor at the AKC GAZETTE. She now lives in Arizona, where she is an editor and free-lance writer.

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