

CRITICAL SHOPPER | TRIXIE & PEANUT

Don't Catch a Tail in the Fitting Room

By Mike Albo

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IN 1997, My friend Cary found Harry in the East Village, tied to a door and abandoned. He is a Chihuahua, and one of the most neurotic creatures I have ever met. He barks constantly, tries to bite people who are overly affectionate, and has the picky diet of a Pilates-addicted Upper East Side socialite. He is grumpy, paranoid, vituperative, insufferable but I love the shivery little thing.

These days Harry is getting long in the tooth: he has joint problems from Lyme disease; he has lost weight; he's developing cataracts. He's beginning to resemble the post-stroke Bette Davis in looks and temperament. No matter how crotchety he gets, Harry still demands respect, attention, organic chicken and couture.

For Christmas I decided to give my cranky friend a little coat, so Cary and I took him to Trixie & Peanut, a clothing and accessories boutique for the well-kept pooches of New York, because for city animals like Harry, looking stylish is paramount if you want to make it in the dog-run social scene.

The store is among the highly trafficked shops of the Flatiron district and has a glassy entrance and clean white interior. Two dog-employees immediately rushed up and greeted Harry as we entered. This was Annie, a Pomeranian, and Tessa, a Boston terrier. While they sniffed each other's hindquarters and got acquainted, Cary and I perused the trendy, adorably practical, occasionally scary merchandise.



Donna Alberico for The New York Times

We first noticed the wigs and hats, modeled by little mannequin dog heads, including a Royal Highness crown and cape (\$35), Doggie Mullet wig (\$40) and the requisite Reindeer Antlers (\$12). Most enticing was the Amber Bobcat Doggie Diva Wig, a chestnut mane styled into a perfect Los Angeles actress blowout. With this and a necktie, your pet could re-enact Jennifer Aniston's recent cover for GQ, easily.

A thin diagonal table slices through the store. On it are neat piles of tiny fashionable outfits, like T-shirts emblazoned with skulls and crossbones (\$19) or with snarky expressions like Chick Magnet and Local Celebrity (\$22 and \$29).

On a nearby shelf, I saw a soft Sunset Mohair sweater (\$59) that comes in beautiful rust colors. Next to it was a Pawtucket sweater with a built-in scarf (\$35) and a cable-knit cardigan (\$35). Tessa ran around the store in an off-the-shoulder oversize paisley print sweater (\$32) that made her look like a hipster in McCarren Park. All of these items were trendy, wearable and within my price range. For a second I thought I had hit the shopping jackpot but then remembered I was a human being.

The shelf of chew toys is, by itself, worth the visit. Here are stuffed critters with names like Bite-me Spears, Angelina Grrrowlie and Brad Pitbull, and plush objects like a Chewy Vuitton handbag and a Bark Jacobs shoe. My favorites were the Pee and Poo dolls, if that tells you anything about my sense of humor. Check them out for yourself: if you don't immediately laugh, we will never be friends.

Sometimes even I find the merchandise frightening, like the stack of fluffy car beds: a Hollywoof Limo and a red Furrari. If I were on a date, and found one of these in the guy's apartment, I would run out the door without looking back.



Donna Alberico for The New York Times

But amid the whimsy are more practical items. Collars and leashes come in an array of colors and prints, including studded “punk rock” collars (\$25) and an \$85 Cheyenne Collection harness and lead set made of woven nylon in a striking American Indian-inspired print.

The pet carrier selection is also impressive. Cary was drawn to a white canvas tote, trimmed in pink with a mesh bottom (\$165). Harry climbed inside and seemed relaxed not an easy feat. A saleswoman explained that the bag is airline approved and holds up to 15 pounds.

Other bags are more chic. A \$119 brown faux leather Barcelona bag and a \$99 black bag in shiny faux patent leather have hidden mesh screens on the sides, yet still resemble bags you might see at Coach or at least in a Canal Street knockoff.

THE day after I visited, I called the store's founder, Susan Bing, who explained that she started Trixie & Peanut in 1999 as a mail-order catalog, naming it after her two rescued boxers. (Peanut is still with us; Trixie died that year.) Ms. Bing could be considered the Coco Chanel of the pet world, one of the first retailers to offer domestic animals decent duds in modern silhouettes.

“When I started, people laughed at me,” she said, “but everything out there was really froufrou, like it was made for the crazy old lady who dresses her dog, or it was really mass market, plaid and boring.” She quickly expanded, starting a Web site in 2000, then opening

this space in 2003. Now, trying to imagine the lame, uncreative age before the Four-Legged Fashion Renaissance is like trying to recall how New York women dressed before “Sex and the City.”



Donna Alberico for The New York Times

It took us a long time to decide which coat was right for Harry. A pretty saleswoman retrieved sizes and colors for us with calm patience. You could tell she had dealt with plenty of dog divas.

Cary slipped Harry into a \$25 quilted vest with a baseball jacket-style collar, but he recoiled. We liked a Fargo denim jacket with a faux shearling lining (\$39) and a Snappy Pocket Parka with a removable hood trimmed in faux fur (\$39) but settled for a light blue fleece Snuggle Suit, also \$39. Leaving the shop, Harry quietly padded through Union Square in his new suit.

I'm not sure he liked it. Cary says that when they got home, Harry shot her an annoyed glance. Luckily Trixie & Peanut has an exchange policy, so Harry can pretend to be all gushy and thankful to me, kvetch to all his friends about my tacky taste, then sneak back and get something he really wants. Typical New Yorker.

TRIXIE & PEANUT

23 East 20th Street (between Broadway and Park Avenue);

(212) 358-0881.

BARK A narrow, brightly lighted boutique full of outfits, hats, harnesses, leashes, collars and other accouterments for four-legged fashion victims and their clotheshorse owners.

YAP Much of the merchandise is geared to pint-size pets, but check the extensive Web site (trixieandpeanut.com) for items suitable to bigger dogs. Everything online is available in the shop but may not be displayed.

AWW The human help are pretty, patient and accommodating. The dog-employees are also friendly and put nervous canine customers at ease.