

Animal People

MELINDA AND DAVID COLLIE,
PINEHURST, NORTH CAROLINA



Divot, on the alert

David and Melinda Collie live in a beautiful, c. 1928, Charles A. Platt designed home in North Carolina, surrounded by extensively landscaped grounds among the famous pine trees of North Carolina. The house is called “The Pines” and they are happily ensconced with their five dogs: the three Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Wicket, Mallet and Rush, and their two newer additions, the rescued Jack Russell Terriers, Divot and Elsie de Woof. They are in the process of adding two rescued Great Pyrenees. They also love larger animals. David gave Melinda an imported Dutch show horse for her fiftieth birthday. Their love of horses has led them to rescue several mis-treated Welsh ponies, which have now recovered and are competing in horse shows.

The Collies have been going back and forth between their homes in Florida and North Carolina for several years. However, with a current count of seven dogs and ten horses and ponies, they have just purchased land in Wellington, Florida to build their dream farm. “Yes,” explains Melinda, we want to have all of our dogs together, and to be able to look out our windows and see dogs playing and horses grazing in the fields.” The more I talk to the Collies, the



Preliminary study for Christine Merrill's portrait of Wicket, Mallet and Rush



Christine Merrill, Wicket, Mallet and Rush, 2010, Oil on canvas, 25 x 40 inches

more I understand how they are truly animal people, caring not just for dogs, but for all animals.

Melinda and David both had dogs growing up, but it was Melinda who was first enamored of the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, “My first Cavalier was named Stubbs, and I got him in New York City, where I lived at the time. He was a Blenheim and he lived to be around fourteen. I do think that his life was extended when I moved down to Florida. His arthritis improved, and he seemed to enjoy life more.” Melinda and David got their first Cavalier together about nine years ago, a Blenheim named Wicket. The Collies are great croquet enthusiasts, and all of their Cavaliers have croquet-related names. “We got all three of our Cavaliers from Colin Richardson in England,” explained Melinda. “He is actually a farmer and does not like showing his dogs, but they are beautiful Cavaliers and very healthy. When he called to say that he had a litter available, David wanted the tricolor, but as we were getting only one, we got a Blenheim, like Stubbs. We later found out that the tricolor had been sold to a show home, but she developed a puppy hernia and could not be shown. We decided to give her a home as well, and we named her Mallet.” Accustomed to being the only dog in the house and the center of attention,



Recumbent King Charles Spaniel, one of the Collies' favorite paintings

explains Melinda, "Wicket was not overjoyed to see her sister. 'Oh, I thought I left her in England' was her reaction." They did not intend to get a third Cavalier so soon either, but when they discovered that Colin Richardson was doing one final breeding with Mallet and Wicket's parents, they succumbed. Colin sent them Rush, another Blenheim, and her sister, Caddie, who went to friends in Maryland.

The three Cavaliers have surprisingly different personalities, and when the two Jack Russell Terriers were introduced, the interactions between them changed once again. Wicket, who is somewhat aloof, is clearly the snob of the group. "She only likes other Cavaliers and horses," explains Melinda. David agrees, feeling that Wicket more or less ignores him, while their tricolor, Mallet, is just the opposite, and follows him around everywhere. "We have a photo that Melinda took of me, lying on the croquet field, playing with the dogs. Mally's looking straight at me, but Wicket is only interested in the croquet ball!" As with the other Cavaliers, Mallet loves luxury, and usually finds the softest pillow in the room. All three are in fact very discerning about their pillows, and Melinda indulges them. "When we travel," she explains, "we have to take their down-filled pillows with us. They won't lay on anything synthetic."

David and Melinda Collie with their dogs Rush, Mallet, Wicket and Divot with Elsie de Woof on the ottoman



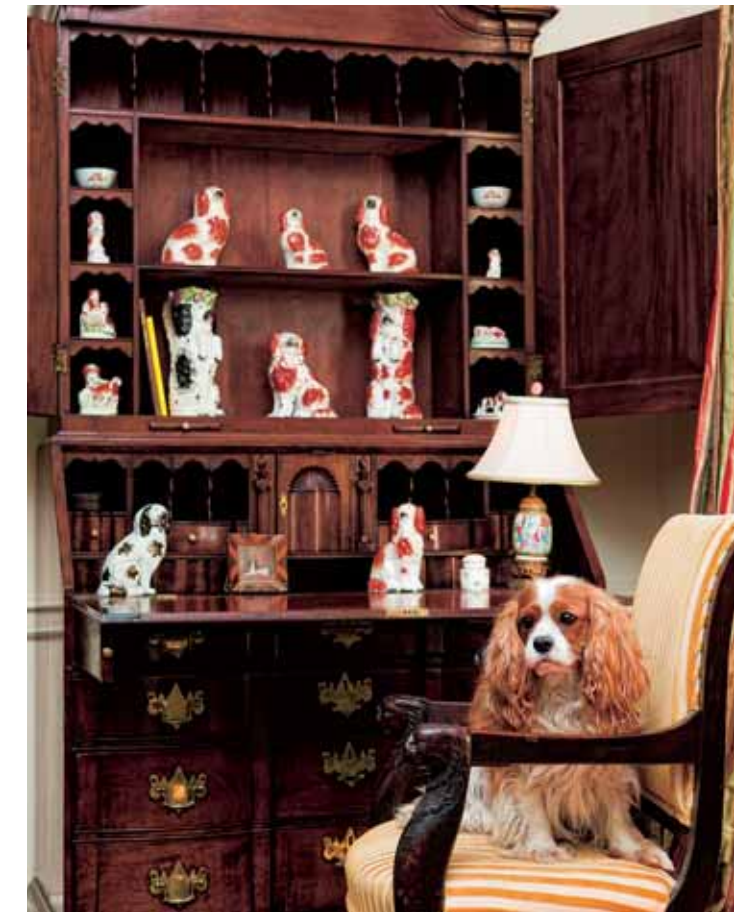
The Jack Russells, being terriers, have very different personalities. Melinda explained that they got their first Jack Russell, because Wicket became afraid of going outside. "Wicket went out one day and she saw a snake in the garden, and she would not go out for the next three days. And then she saw a mouse and she wouldn't go out for the next two days. And one of our friends suggested that we get a Jack Russell." They now have two Jack Russell Terriers: Divot is the rough coated one and Elsie de Woof, named after the famous interior designer, has a smooth coat. Elsie de Woof is the only dog of the group that does not have a croquet-related name, as she was originally intended as a surprise for a friend. It did not work out, however, so the Collies adopted her, and they kept the name.

Elsie is by far the feistier of the two, and as David and Melinda sit on the sofa with their five dogs, it is Elsie who periodically takes offense and growls to maintain her dominant position in the group. Melinda and David are accustomed to her behavior, and feel that the Cavaliers are mellowing the Jack Russells, and the Jack Russells are toughening up the Cavaliers. "We call Divot the 'Honorary Cavalier,'" explains David, "she likes to sleep on down pillows like the Cavaliers do, and she likes to sleep close to you." The Jack Russells are always on alert, and as Melinda explains, "The Jack Russells actually guard the other dogs, and us. In the morning and evenings when it is dark and the dogs are about to go out, we open the French doors to the terrace. The two Jack Russells rush out, running the perimeter of the property, as if they are checking to see if everything is safe. It is only when they return, that the Cavaliers enter the yard. It's so amusing because Wicket, who is such a snob, won't set a foot outside until the Jacks' have returned to tell her it is okay."

Animals seem attracted to Melinda and David. "We heard about two Welsh ponies that were in terrible shape, with hooves so long, they were curling upward," explains Melinda. Melinda and David rescued them

Top: Rush, sitting in front of the Collies' collection of antique Staffordshire figures

Below: Mallet in a contemplative mood





Lady Hillary, by the nineteenth-century artist, Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, hangs over the mantelpiece in the living room

and nurtured them back to health. “Tice just won a class at his first horse show in St. Louis!” Melinda says excitedly. It seems that Tice and Tory have become good-luck charms for anyone who meets them. Melinda is planning a book about their extraordinary life and the adventures the ponies have experienced on their road to recovery. Tory is referred to as “David’s pony”, since after his abuse, he allowed only David to touch him and to help him begin his new life.

As we talk about the ponies that they have rescued, the conversation drifts back to the farm they are planning to build in Wellington. The property will have room for all of their animals, and David has designed a large library where they can house all their books and their collection of nineteenth-century dog paintings of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels that they have collected over the years. “Yes,” explains Melinda, “this is where we are going to hang Christine Merrill’s portrait. She has captured our dogs’ personalities exactly



Melinda Collie with Wicket and their rescued Welsh pony, Tice, now a prize-winning show pony

and we plan to hang the painting over our mantelpiece. We also want Christine to paint a portrait of our two Jack Russells. On a recent visit to her studio, we discovered that Christine shares our love of horses and is a very accomplished equine artist. So it is no surprise that Christine has now been commissioned to paint Tice and Tory!”

Knowing of Melinda and David’s love of beautiful paintings, their collection will no doubt grow when they move into their new house. And no doubt they will also find room for some new animals that need a home as well.