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Star Taryn Manning graced this cover with a real wolf. We have many people asking if this shot was photo shopped? No that is real and they were together. One of my favorite works.



Our newest cover featuring 'Transformers' star Megan Fox. I could only visualize one idea for this cover shoot. I made some calls and found a real red fox to join us on this shoot. This is a classic example of two amazing & beautiful creatures.

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"I came up with the concept while working at a job in the Beverly Hills area." Christopher explains. "I would see celebrities walking their dogs all the time and I thought how nice it would be to capture beautiful images of them with their pets. Not paparazzi shots but more personal black and white photos, not all 'done up'—more like a step above home pictures. I compiled two years worth of photos for my first book 'Pets and Their Celebrities'."

As Photography magazine which profiled him described it: *He wanted to photograph these stars looking very comfortable and relaxed. So he made it a goal to shoot pictures of celebrities in their own environment, wearing little or no makeup. He also decided to use only black-and-white film.*

His first subject was Janeane Garofalo, who was very approachable. He photographed her with her dog, Dew, at a park near Sunset Boulevard. "The pictures came out the way I had envisioned them." says Ameruoso, "And I knew I was onto something."

Today when he sees Janeane Garofalo, he enjoys telling her, "Because of you, I have a career."

From this first contact, opportunities seemed to snowball. He approached some stars, but others came knocking on his door once his work became known. All in all, his first efforts encompassed about 90 stars with their pets—and all were photographed with nothing more than an Olympus IS-20 point-and-shoot film camera and natural light. The resulting pictures were very appealing, and showed a real side of celebrities that we don't often see.

Now he works in the digital world of image capture and stuck with Olympus as his primary sidearm to shoot fast and furiously so as not to overstress his subjects and capture them more naturally—both fur and famous folks. Making the switch from film to digital saved him immense amounts of time and money allowing him to pursue his craft in top gear.



Above: Jennifer Love Hewitt

Below: Adrien Brody and his chihuahua Ceelo

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Nicolette Sheridan gave me this classic cover with her dog Oliver. Nicolette is such a great personality I knew that she would love this cover idea. It is such a great reward when you visualize a photo and comes out just how you pictured it in your mind.



Cesar Millan was the first male to be featured on a cover of Paw Print. I thought what better subject then the Dog Whisperer himself



We surprised this wonderful talented actress with her favorite animal for this cover shoot. Amy and the Owl have such similar eyes I couldn't resist setting up this shot.



Shawnee Smith is such a powerhouse I thought that a hard core cowgirl would fit her just fine for this cover. This photo was taken in the Desert in about 110 heat. It really set the mood for the photo shoot. Visually this is a great shot

His immense body of work makes it tough for him to pick favourite shots, clients, personalities or pet subjects. "Each cover shoot that I have done has a personal memory for me. Especially the animal covers. I get to see a different side of celebrities when photographing them with their pets." Chris explains.

"One in particular that really stands out and is very special was the shoot I did with Pink and her dog Elvis. Besides the fact that Pink is an amazing animal advocate, Elvis tragically passed away shortly after the shoot. This made the shot that much more special and personal. The overwhelming responses and emails from Pink's fans were incredible."

"I also love some of the other covers that I shoot that have nothing to do with animals. Smoke magazine is a very prestigious cigar publication. I had the opportunity to photograph one of my favorite actors, Joe Mantegna, with one of his favourite 'stogies'. These are exciting for me as I get to experiment with other setups and ideas."

A sampling of his cover shots is on his personal site www.chrisaphoto.com along with pointers to his other images. With a body count of over a thousand, we pressed Chris for the inside story on whose pets he's fallen for.

"Oh that is a tough question to answer. I'm a sucker for any animal. It can be a cat, dog, rabbit or monkey. I just melt when I'm around any of these creatures. Would I be playing favourites by saying who is the one? I do have a special place for Nicolette Sheridan's dog, Fatty. There is something so special and endearing about Fatty. Each animal I have photographed has a special place in my heart."

But it's no secret his favourite is his own Chinese Crested, Stella Blue who appears in some of his photos. She's an engaging pup with eyes as intense as Chris and was posed with actress Julianne Moore in his first book.

"I got her when she was four months old. She is going to be 11 in March of 2009. She is my joy and my life. There is nothing more rewarding than the love that a pet gives you. Stella is the first true pet that I have owned. I recently lost a pet parrot that I had named Peewee. He was a grey cheek parrot, I had him for about 15 years. That was one of the hardest things that has happened to me in my life was losing that bird. I am a tattoo fanatic so I do have a tribute to Peewee and a portrait of Stella on my arm."

It's even tougher for him to do a name drop on his fave pet buddy. "You know, we all seem to be drawn to an animal or pet that resembles us in some shape or form. I do think that my all time favourite team would have to be Rose McGowan and her two Boston Terriers. They are all made for each other. Also one of my favourite photos."

"People really do love their pets. We all show it in different ways. Some people have their dogs sleep in bed with them some have them sleep outside. Doesn't mean they love them any less it is just their ways. I find that each and every shoot that I do, it amazes me to see the perfect match between owner and the pets they have chosen to be in their lives."

Is it difficult to get the shot of the star and their star pet with a bevy of entourages and assistants? We asked what the worst shoot scenario was.

"I never really had a worst shoot. I have had shoots that don't go as planned because the animal is a bit restless. It usually happens with cats. They seem to be a bit more uptight in front of the camera. I have learned through the years to have lots of patience. It seems that the owners get more uncomfortable than I do when the pets are not responding to the photo shoot. As far as having a shoot that has completely failed, that has not happened. Waiting for some celebrities to show up--that happens now and then but not often. In defence of the celebrities, most of the time it is not even them. It is the people around them that make things difficult."

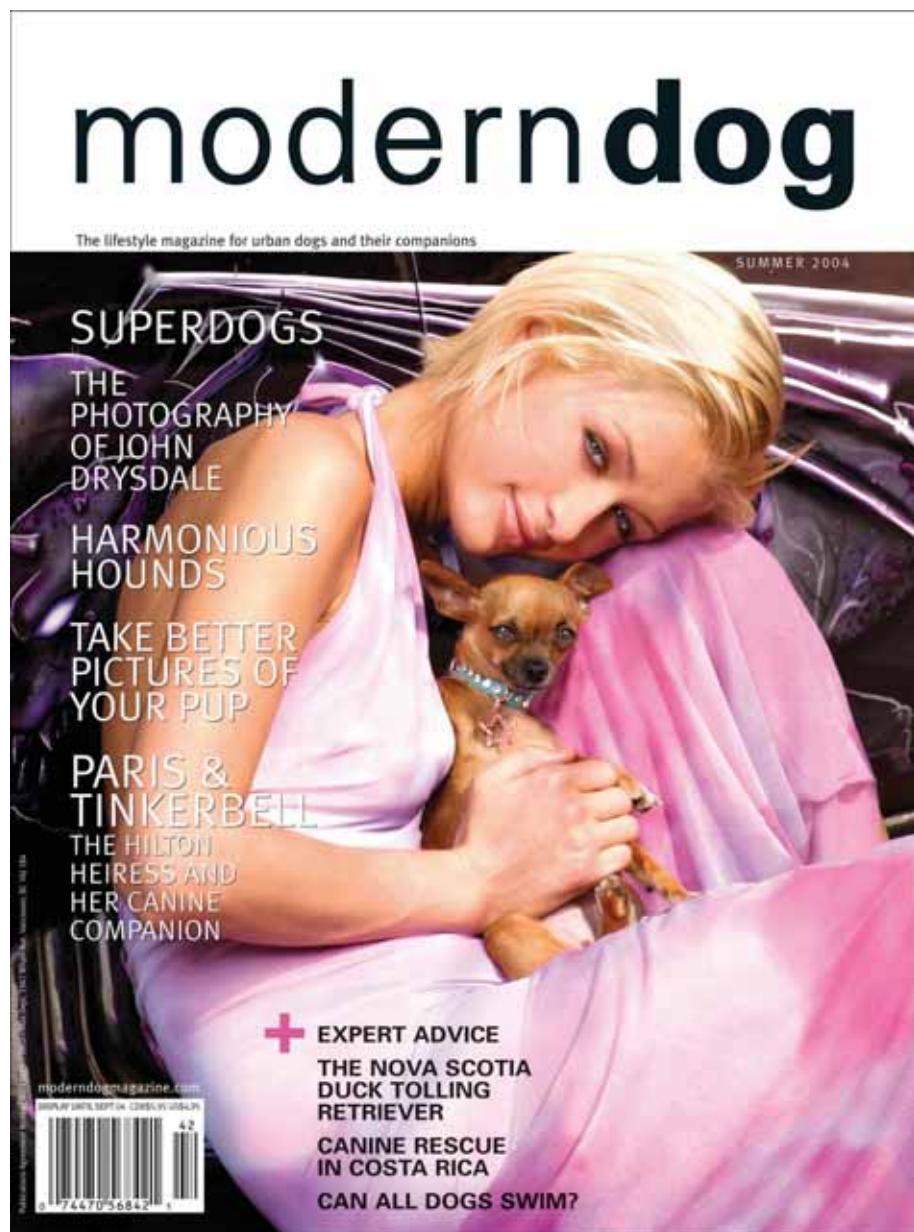
But he spends a large amount of time on pet issues and his celebrity mates happily share their time and talents with him.



Above: Kat Von D, one of the most respected and sought-after tattoo artists in the world, star of "LA Ink" and "Miami Ink" for the TLC Network, with her cat Beethoven.

"I have always had a big heart for animals and animal issues. I thought, 'How can I use the celebrity status that these people I was photographing have to help animals and animal issues?' A lot of the work I do is Public Service Announcements (PSAs) as ads or billboards. I also donate the proceeds from my books and calendars to animal groups; one in particular. Last Chance For Animals (www.LCAnimal.org) and also Linda Blair's World Heart Foundation."

"Last Chance for Animals is very dear to my heart. There are so many wonderful organisations out there that do so much for animals, they are the hands-on groups that struggle every day to make ends meet. These are the groups that I try to support more. I do also shoot PSAs for PETA from time to time. I really root for the underdog when it comes to supporting and fundraisers and things of that nature."



Above: Chris Ameruso's Paris and Tinkerbell cover shot for Modern Dog Magazine

"Celebrities do draw attention to issues and this does help. There are issues that everyone can relate to just as a pet owner. One of my biggest is pet theft. Two million pets are stolen each year for use in laboratory experiments and to be sold to puppy mills as breeding dogs. In the recent years Pamela Anderson and Nicolette Sheridan have helped me promote awareness of these issues."

A couple of years back, he got a bit pissed off at the mainstream pet media who were turning his pics into covers but paying him a pittance and crying poor, despite their high prices and hefty advertising rates. So he created his own magazine and made it free.

"After years of bringing celebrity talent and great photos to other pet magazines, it seemed that all they cared about was what you can buy for your dog. I knew that it was time to create my own magazine and let the celebrities talk about their issues as well as entertain with the more lightened content. I like to run many PSAs in the magazine as well as talk about the serious issues that plague the animal world. I wanted to target a younger more edgy pet owner. I wanted to let them read about the issues that seem to get covered up with all the other pet magazines because they might be too controversial. With PAW Print I like to push the boundaries of what the pet owner has been seeing for years with other magazines."

"Look, I'm really not trying to promote what people spend on clothes every year for their pets. I want to talk about whatever the everyday pet owner experiences. I'm not worried about putting in PSA's from PETA that may insult some people. One thing for sure, you can never ever please everyone. I get negative emails all the time from people that don't agree with cover shots or PSA's. I also get tons of emails from people praising what we do."

"Paw Print is a quarterly magazine and is growing. To date we have put out seven issues. We are in a holding pattern right now. We are getting more people involved with the magazine and getting more capital behind us so we can reach a wider audience. I'm not worried about putting out our next issue late. I know we put out a great magazine and we will always find the audience to pick up the magazine."

"PAW Print was a free publication. I wanted to build a fan base and let people see what we are all about. It worked, people are very happy with the magazine. We did have a subscription fee for four issues a year that could be mailed directly to your home. When we start up again we are going to have a cover price we are trying to stay at a US\$2.99 price."

Though it's not been available here, the covers you see in this article are on the PAW Print website www.pawprintmag.com and can be ordered as back issues.

"People can get back issues if they are still available. Usually you can e-mail us requesting the issue that you are looking for. If we have it in stock we will send you a copy. Paw Print is at 72 pages right now and we are hoping to raise that page count number when we revise the magazine."

Like many famous pet photographers such as William Wegman and John Drysdale, he's had a couple of books published. His second book was "Celebrities and Their Pets" but he didn't have a happy time with those first two, opting to self-publish his latest. "I have been burned by each publisher. The publishing world is a horrible business. You never get sales reports. You are always told that books did not sell, you never ever see any checks but yet you see your books all over the internet being sold everywhere. Someone is profiting."

So recently, he assembled some of the best of his images into the 154 page "Best of Stars & Their Pets" published in June and three hardcover books—"Stars and Their Pets Limited Editions 1 and 2" and "Animals Limited Edition 3" that are unique print on demand books.



Above: Chris Ameruso's first book "Stars and Their Pets"

"At this point I decided that self publishing is the way to go. I found a great website book company that sells books to order. They are a little more expensive but well worth it. You get to keep track of your sales and the books are shipped directly to the buyer. You can purchase these books on www.pawprintmag.com."

He's constantly in demand for commercial work but he's also tapped a lot by charities and causes to either use his images or his personality and connections.

"Yes I do get asked all the time for images to use in different publications. I'm very responsive to this but at some point you have to draw the line. I know what it is like to own a magazine and it gets very costly purchasing images. I feel that if you contribute something back I can at least put that towards helping a group in some way."

But because of the ease of ripping off images from the web, he has to police this himself. "As far as the web, yes I see my images all the time on different sites. I'm cool with that as long as they are not being misrepresented in any way. If there is anything that I feel uncomfortable with I will contact that site and let them know to remove the images."

But there are scads of shots being used on websites that he controls, profits from and recycles into his social conscience work. And there's no doubt he'll continue as a commercial success as well as an animal welfare evangelist. Chris has that unusual balance in life that those who pursue fame, money and power most often lack.

For more about Chris Ameruso go to his site (www.chrisaphoto.com), Paw Print magazine (www.pawprintmag.com), or his daily blog (www.photoblogchat.blogspot.com). His MySpace page is www.myspace.com/chrisaphoto and you can even find an array of videos on YouTube. Photographic Magazine also did a major feature on him which you can find online at: www.shutterbug.net/refreshercourse/family_tips/0703career/index.html



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