

THE DOG WHISPERER FIELD GUIDE

How to photograph dogs like you have done it a hundred times

For: the Vega's Pets Grooming shoot

Why this exists: people shoots you already own. Dogs are a different animal (literally). These are the working tricks that turn a squirming pup into a calm, expressive, on-brand portrait, so you walk in looking like the part you are.

Dedication Is Required. Everything Counts Today.

1. GET THE LOOK (the eyes, the ear-perk)

The whole game with dogs is the half-second their ears go up and they lock onto something. Your job is to cause that on cue, with the camera already at your eye.

- **The sound bank.** Have three sounds ready, used in this order so they keep working: a soft kissy noise, then a squeaky toy, then a brand new word the dog has never heard ("pineapple?"). Burn through the boring ones last.
 - **Treat above the lens.** Hold a treat right above your lens hood. The dog looks "into camera" without you ever saying "look here." Reward fast or you lose trust.
 - **One sound, one frame.** Make the sound, shoot immediately. The perfect ears last about a second. Do not make the sound, then chimp the screen, then shoot. Camera up first, always.
 - **Catchlights.** Angle the dog so a window or open door puts a little spark of light in the eyes. Dead eyes kill a dog photo. A catchlight brings it alive.
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2. KEEP THEM CALM (a calm dog photographs premium)

- **Let them sniff you and the gear first.** Two minutes of being ignored beats two minutes of being chased. Crouch, no eye contact, let them come to you.
 - **Get low.** Shoot at the dog's eye level, not down at them. Down-angle makes them look small and scared. Eye level makes them look like a character.
 - **Work with the groomer, not against.** The handler the dog trusts should stay in close, just out of frame, voice calm. The dog watches them, you watch the dog.
 - **Never rush a nervous dog for a shot.** If a dog is stressed, photograph hands, paws, tools, the bath, anything but the panicked face. You can always come back.
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3. CAPTURE PERSONALITY (this is what sells)

Owners do not book "a groom." They book the feeling that someone will love their dog. Shoot for that.

- **The head tilt.** That new-word sound earns the tilt. It is the single most shareable dog expression there is.
 - **The tongue / mid-pant smile.** A relaxed open mouth reads as a smile. Catch it between actions, not during stress.
 - **The trust gesture.** A dog leaning into a groomer's chest, a paw resting in a hand. Quiet, real, premium. Watch for it and be ready, it happens fast.
 - **Texture in the coat.** Rake side light across a freshly groomed coat so you can almost feel the fluff. This is what says "skilled work" without a caption.
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4. THE BEFORE / AFTER MATCH (the asset that books appointments)

The matched pair is the most convincing thing this business will ever post. It only works if the two frames line up.

- **Tape the floor.** Mark exactly where the dog stands and where you stand. Same spot, both times.
 - **Lock everything manual.** Same lens, same distance, same height, same aperture (f/4), same manual exposure. Do not let auto drift between the two.
 - **Same background, same light.** If the light changed, match it back or the eye reads "two different photos" instead of one transformation.
 - **Square crop (1:1).** It is the format that travels furthest on Instagram and Google.
 - **Shoot 2 to 3 pairs** across different dogs. One is a fluke. Three is a brand.
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5. THE 3-SHOT BURST RULE

For every important dog moment, fire three: one a hair early, one on the peak, one a hair late. Dogs do not hold a pose, so you are buying yourself the keeper. Delete the misses later. Never gamble a hero moment on a single click.

6. SAFETY + ETIQUETTE (the pro details)

- **The dog's comfort beats the shot. Every time.** A stressed dog is bad for the dog, the groomer, and the photo. Back off.
- **No flash near animals.** It can startle them and it is against your locked natural-light plan anyway. Window light and a bounce, always.
- **Watch your gear at floor level.** Wagging tails, water, and curious noses. Keep bags zipped and lenses capped when not shooting.
- **Wipe the lens often.** Bath and dryer spray will fog you without warning. Cloth in your pocket, check between setups.

- **Ask before you reposition a dog.** Let the groomer move the dog, not you. They know the animal.
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THE ONE THING

If you remember nothing else: **camera up, make the sound, shoot the burst, reward the dog.** Repeat that all day and you will come home with a library that makes Vega's look like the best groomer in Ashburn, because the work already is, you are just revealing it.

D.I.R.E.C.T. Studio · Jorge Amaya Photography · Ashburn, VA — reveal the brand that already lives in the work.