

## **Patterning Spring Trends**

### **Prints and purples are in for this season.**

By Jennifer Blanchard

During the cold months of winter, it's warming to think about times to come, so this is a great time to preview spring fashions for pets.

"Spring is an optimistic season," says Charisa Antigua, owner of Oscar Newman. "With the changing economic climate, consumers are looking for uplifting colors and patterns that evoke a sense of freshness and new beginnings as well as a feeling of value and stability." And with the upcoming colors and trends for spring, the future is looking much brighter.

### **Colors and Trends**

"The major trend for spring 2009 will be patterns," Antigua says. "Lots of patterns, from simple stripes to bold, geometric, mod-inspired patterns. New combinations of colors and thicknesses energize stripes in a new way, and art nouveau patterns will convey glamour and high-style." "It will be a season of bright colors with a fluorescent feel," she says. "In spring, color takes center stage and joins forces with materials, which are soft, airy and silky in feel."



**Tatiana Dress, Pooch Outfitters**

Tiki Beauzay, owner of Gidget-Gear, which recently relocated to San Jose, Calif., from Sarasota, Fla., agrees. "For spring, lightweight fabrics and pastel colors are the trend," she says. "It's a time of year to go back to classic-clothing items that are comfortable, such as a lightweight button-up dress shirt, jeans and a lightweight blazer."

*Floral prints are also going to be popular this spring. "With the onset of spring, we're looking for lightweight fabrics and knits in pastels and subtle floral patterns," says Jay Kirsch, co-owner of Barker Street Gourmet Dog Bakery and Boutique in The Woodlands, Texas. Kirsch says there's one trend that is carrying over from fall. "Clever plays on name brands like, "Abberdoggie and Fetch," and "Arfmani" and "Fur-sace" are perennial sellers and should still be in the spring," he says.*

Another trend is to add just a "splash" of color to an outfit. "Spring invites all colors," Beauzay says. "Pets will be wearing bold splashes of color with neutral clothing.

When it comes to dog booties and shoes, pet owners are looking for two things-comfort and that they're easy to take on and off, according to Michele Ochs, owner of Doggie Design, Inc. in Surfside Beach, S.C. As for colors, booties and shoes range from all shades of pink and green to lavender and all shades of blue."Every shade from powder blue to turquoise," Ochs says.

Unfortunately, Ochs says shoe and bootie sales are expected to slow down. "In springtime, bootie and shoe sales are a little slower than they usually are," she says. "Shoes sell more in the winter months. Booties sell a little better year-round because they're lighter-weight and people use them for everything from keeping their dog's feet clean and dry when it rains to hiking to walking on hot sand or pavement. Disposable booties are popular as well. Those are a constant seller."

### **Back to Basics**

Even though the pet industry is currently doing well, the country is still dealing with an economic crisis, which is affecting the amount of money people are spending and what they're spending it on. "It's an economic year," Beauzay says. "People are going back to basics, meaning washable, wearable clothes that are comfortable. People aren't really 'glamming out' their pets right now. They're looking for items that are less fancy, more practical and easy-to-care for." Beauzay says people are starting to pare down their expenses. "People are simplifying their lives and their fashion," she says. "They are becoming more practical, simple, organic and natural, and they're looking for pet fashions that are all that, plus affordable."

And she says retailers are starting to take this approach in their stores, as well. "Retailers are carrying clothes that are basic and easy for pets to wear," Beauzay says. "People are very conscious about not letting their pets be uncomfortable, and dogs will always show you when they're not comfortable." Antigua says this spring, retailers need to show customers that their pets can still be fashionable without spending a lot of money. "Retailers should focus on fun, practical pieces that pet owners and their pets will enjoy wearing for numerous occasions, such as a spring shower or a summer beach party," she says.

She says the economy drives what people are buying. "The ever-changing economic condition is forcing pet fashion companies to be more conscientious about the quality and value of the collections they are offering," she says. "Cost-conscious consumers will be looking for quality, value and unmatched styling when purchasing fashions for their pets."

*Retailers are always looking for ways to stand out from the crowd, but in hard economic times, they need to try even harder to stand out. "Offering unique fashions, even though they might be pricier, always sets a boutique apart from a mega pet store or the pet aisle of the Super Wal-Mart," Kirsch says.*

### **Catching Customer's Eyes**

*Displaying pet fashions is an easy way to make a sale, but with a few simple display tweaks, retailers will be able to make multi-item sales. "While we use both clothing racks and pegs on a grid wall to display our clothing, items that face the potential buyer [meaning they can see the whole item from a few steps away] always sell faster than those discovered while fishing through a rack," Kirsch says. "We reserve our more expensive fashion items to be displayed 'face-out' or on mannequins or individual clothing stands. Grouping items, like a shirt with a coordinating sweater and hat, often suggests to the buyer a complete ensemble and provides the retailer with a multi-item sale."*

Antigua suggests playing on your customer's emotions when displaying pet clothes. "Retailers should display pet fashions that affect their customers' emotions, such as creating beautiful, pleasing themes using bright, cheerful colors and presenting stylish ensembles," she says. "A display that excites and uplifts often encourages consumers to spend."

Beauzay likes to take a creative approach to displaying pet fashions. "I love putting clothes on live animals in your shop if you can," she says. "This is a great way to show the outfit off and prove it looks cute and the dog is comfortable in it."

Another display option is having an in-store event. "Put on a fashion show each season and invite customers to check out your new pet fashions," she says. "Both real dogs and fashion shows show people how the items are supposed to be worn without making it complicated. Retailers need to show customers how the products they carry work."

Beauzay says no matter how you display them, pet clothes need to be shown off. "Retailers need to create a clothing area like you'd see in a department store," she says. "Clothes need to be shown off so people can touch them. Make it easy for customers to mix-and-match pieces by displaying them together."

*Although many retailers and manufacturers are feeling the economic crunch, Kirsch believes the pet industry will continue to flourish. "Pet fashion is a luxury, and luxuries are the first to go in a struggling economy," he says. "However, the growth in our industry has been so positive and the evolution of pet couture so advanced, I believe that with shrewd purchasing and a good eye on fashion trends, pet fashion will continue to be a money-maker."*