

The noisy art of pooch photography

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Photo credit: Photo by Danielle Finkelstein | Richie Schwartz, a pet photographer, comforts and cuddles 10-month-old Olive during a shoot at Petco in Lake Grove.

"Strike a pose."

That's likely what Richie Schwartz would say if he could talk to the animals.

But the former veterinary technician and dog trainer who's been snapping pictures for 30 years uses other means of communication to capture his subjects' attention, namely clamorous paraphernalia — squeaky toys, bells, whistles, rattles and horns.

"I've seen a few pet photographers explain how they work, and they always say to make sure to have a squeaky toy and some doggy treats," Schwartz says. "I don't use treats, other than as a last resort, which is almost never. I don't have a squeaky toy to make noise. I have about 30 squeaky toys and noisemakers of all varieties . . . My job is to quickly find out which noise the dog is most attentive to."

When the gadgets don't work, Schwartz mimicks animals, woofing, mooring, clucking, sometimes resorting to bogus sneezing and the occasional raspberry; whatever it takes to garner cooperation from his subjects, who tend to be preoccupied by their surroundings.

That's because Schwartz, 57, who owns Pets Photography Studio, conducts most sessions not at his tranquil [West Hempstead](#) studio, but smack dab in the middle of specialty retailer PETCO. Schwartz is the exclusive pet photographer for the 71 stores in the tri-state area.

Photo sessions are set up on an aisle. Strolling shoppers, often accompanied by their children and pets, tend to linger around the action. Adding to that distraction is a deafening cacophony of chirping birds, plus the racket stemming from dog training classes just steps away from the shoots.

Not all pet photographers are willing to take on such commotion. That's why Pet Photography by Roy makes house calls. "Everything I do is at the client's house," says photographer Roy Somech of [Albertson](#). Others opt for the outdoors.

One of those is Rob Gulotta of [Long Island Pet Photography](#) in [Huntington](#). "I prefer to shoot on location," he says. "A studio is nice, but there's nothing like having a dog outside. . . . You can get beautiful portraits, in certain instances, of a dog just running and being."

Schwartz simulates the outdoors with backdrops of sandy beaches or forests. For visual interest (and to complicate his shoots), he adds colorful props such as buckets and flowers. In a recent session, he tried to stuff Lucy, a feisty 9-year-old pug, into a little toy wagon.

"This is never going to work," mumbled Lucy's owner, Nancy Skon of Saint James, who'd brought along another pug, 9-month-old Olive, to participate. "There's no way he's going to get them both together."

But Schwartz persevered, positioning Lucy and Olive, then instructing Skon's children, who were standing by: "Look at the dogs, not at me, and when I say, 'Let go.' . . . Ready, let go!"

At that, Schwartz blew into a piercing whistle, which caused the dogs to scramble out of the frame in panic. A second attempt involved a bicycle horn, followed by a banging board and lots of barking — by Schwartz.

The fourth try contained clucking, a fake sneeze and a forceful, owlish hoot . . . and in a split second of attentiveness — click! The perfect shot.

