



HANDCRAFTED I.D. TAGS

CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF YOUR PET

By Liz Morrison

Fido Friendly Magazine, Winter 2002

Dogs know when they look good. Right after a bath or fresh from the groomer your dog holds his head a little higher, and walks with a strut and an attitude that says "Yes, I am the best looking dog on this street, or on any street for that matter."

Goodman Gries, a metal artisan located in Atlanta, Georgia knows how to make your dog look especially good. He creates unique, handmade identification tags that are truly works of art. Handcrafted from either sterling silver or solid brass, Gries' tags are made to order, using information provided from each pet's owner. You won't find them hanging on racks or in the display cases at your local pet store. Each tag is custom made, reflecting the artist's gift for understanding the nuances of your dog's life.

Gries, a native of Bay Shore, New York, has had a propensity for art since he was a child, and began drawing squirrels at age three. With an educational background in painting and drawing from the internationally acclaimed Pratt Institute in Manhattan, Gries is an accomplished artist. Years before venturing into metal arts, Gries had a show of black and white drawings at the Peter Flanagan Gallery in New York City.

After taking blacksmith and metal arts classes at San Francisco's City College, Gries began making jewelry for upscale stores such as M.A.C. (Modern Appeal Clothing). The transition to dog tags was purely serendipitous. About six years ago, after his dog Sandy passed away, a photo of a dog on a flyer in the grocery store caught his eye.

"I saw an ad for a dog with a pic-

ture and some telephone numbers, and someone was watching me (read it), this woman named Pali Boucher. She's sort of the saint of shelter dogs; she places dogs with people. She saw me looking at the ad and asked if I wanted to see the dog. I went to Pali's house, saw Lulu (the dog) and adopted her," Gries said.

Gries wanted to do something to thank Pali for introducing him to Lulu, a Treeing Walker Coonhound. According to Gries, Lulu resembles a beagle with very long legs. After mulling over several different gift ideas, he decided to use his creativity as a silversmith and fashioned a beautiful hand engraved dog tag. Little did he realize it would be the first of many.

"(Pali) named all her dogs after jazz people, her dog was named Lead Belly, so I made a tag out of some brass, stamped it, played with it, soldered a sterling silver ring on it, and made it a nice gift," he said.

He then wrapped up the tag and went to see his friends who owned Bernal Beast, a pet store in the Bernal Heights section of San Francisco. They were so impressed with the finished piece, they convinced him to sell his tags in the store.

"I started doing the tags for clients out of Bernal Beast and other people started to call me after seeing my stuff there, and then a few other stores started (carrying the tags)," he said.

Word spread quickly and a new venture was born. Between exposure from the stores and a few ads in pet related magazines, his dog tag business began to take off. Meanwhile, Gries became more fascinated with metal arts, engraving, and embossing

techniques. He began making his own tools and stamps as well as collecting unique tools and hard to find stamps. His searches for unusual stamps have taken him to places like Paris and London.

"Every single mark I make (on the tag) is like a drawing. I make complex borders out of maybe seven stamps. I made a bone shape (stamp) out of the tip of a chisel." Gries is in the process of developing a Web site but until that's online, potential customers typically contact him by phone. Gries then sends the person an order form that lists available sizes and dimensions, gives a choice of brass or sterling silver, lists the available gemstones and, most importantly, offers a space for information about the dog. Since face-to-face meetings are impractical, the owner's written perspective on their dog is invaluable information to Gries for his creative process.

Lucky likes to chase birds. Sophie loves to have her belly rubbed. Sabrina has a favorite tennis ball, Skippy likes to play tug of war with a sock, and Hannah chases the mail carrier. It's information like this that allows Gries to make each tag unique.

"I try to know something about the dog so that every single tag I make is completely different. I don't want to do a production kind of thing. I really try to think about the dog (when I making the tag) and sort of read between the lines and be as intuitive as I possibly can. If they send photographs of the dogs it's even better, then I can really get to know the dog," he stated.

One client wrote this about her dog, "She has a wardrobe that is the envy of all other dogs. She has a col-

lection of over 40 high-end collars, and approximately 16 outfits including raincoats, winter coats, evening wear and costumes.”

“I love to hear about other people and their love for their animals, their special love and their special relationship. They’re very precious relationships,” Gries said.

Gries incorporates elements of each dog’s daily life into the stamped artwork on the tag’s border. The dog’s name is engraved on the front side of the tag and a phone number is engraved on the back. For an additional fee he’ll add an address or a gemstone. Gemstones are available in five beautiful accent colors: garnet (red), citrine (yellow), amethyst (violet), peridot (green), and tourmaline (pink).

“I took a course in stone setting from Revere Academy of Jewelry Arts in San Francisco. The only color I like is decorative color so I do love gemstones. When I engrave or emboss on to the metal I usually put a patina on it which means I actually change the color of the metal using heat and

my own techniques so that the engraved lines are very dark and they remain that way,” Gries stated.

He also handles special orders. One customer had a collar with an intricate design and wanted the tag’s border to reflect that same look.

Another named her dog after a well-known tennis player and requested a tennis theme on her dog’s tag. And another was planning a trip to the Himalayas with his dog and requested a mountain range on his tag.

Word of Gries’ one-of-a-kind dog tags spread quickly and his work became well known in celebrity circles. Don Johnson’s dog wears a Goodman Gries tag as does the dog belonging to Andre Agassi’s sister. Artist David Hockney, an old friend of Gries, requested one for his dog, Boogie (pronounced Bou-jhee).

Don’t let the artistic quality of the tags deceive you; they are as durable as they are beautiful. Gries uses only solid brass and sterling silver. Every tag has a piece of sterling reinforcement soldered inside the hole that connects the tag to the dog’s collar.

This allows for the collar’s ring to rub against the edge of the hole in the tag without causing erosion. And don’t worry if you have an ocean-loving pet. The tags won’t rust after exposure to salt water. But if a tag does wear out, Gries will replace it.

So what is Lulu, the artist’s dog, wearing on her collar these days? According to Gries, Lulu has the most beautiful tag of all, decorated with tiny crowns and a pink tourmaline, because after all, she is a little princess.

Goodman Gries tags can be ordered from Alpha Dog in Mill Valley, CA and Highland Pet Supply in Atlanta, GA. To order directly from Goodman Gries Studios, call 404-892-3218 or email Goodman at goodmangries@aol.com. His studios are located at 302 Ninth Street NE in Atlanta, Georgia.

Custom tags start at \$69.50 plus tax and can go to \$99.50 plus tax. Gemstones are optional and have an additional charge of \$59.50 plus tax. Tags are available in extra-small, small, medium, and large.