



I feel pretty: Sydney dog groomer Vanessa Pollari with one of her clients Lady Lenox

Hair of the dog

This job requires a pooch person, writes JACQUI MCGILL

Living in the world's leading nation of pet lovers, it's little wonder that Vanessa Pollari's services are in demand.

A partner in the business A Dapper Dog Grooming, Pollari is renowned for her cutting-edge style so she's generally kept busy pampering the pooches of Sydney's eastern suburbs.

Pollari bought the Maroubra salon with her silent partner about eight years ago after working there as a dog groomer since high school. "I've always loved animals, I suppose it was as simple as that," says Pollari who first sharpened her scissors in the grooming parlour while on work experience.

"I much preferred the grooming parlour because instead of being full of sick animals it was full of healthy, beautiful pets — most of them well cared for," she says.

"I've been doing it now for 17 years," says Pollari who has shampooed, clipped, conditioned and styled almost every breed of canine client you could name. I'm a stylist now."

Pollari, who employs other staff to assist with shampooing and drying, nail-clipping, ear-plucking and teeth brushing, says the job definitely has its challenges.

"Some dogs are quite phobic about teeth-brushing if they aren't used to it," she says.

"Dogs are like children, they need to get used to having their teeth brushed and if they aren't, they can get quite frightened. Some dogs we just can't groom and some (only a few fortunately) need to be sedated to be groomed."

Judging by the tail wagging though, most regulars are only too happy to turn up for another session from where they'll emerge looking like they're ready for the catwalk.

"Most of our regulars love it," Pollari says.

"It's just like a busy hairdressing salon only the clients have four legs."

Though dog grooming is a learned skill, Pollari says the job requires an innate rapport with animals.

"You definitely need animal handling skills because 80 per cent of the job of grooming is

about animal handling," she says. "Animals have a sixth sense and they intuitively know if you have a problem handling them — if you are confident and interact well with them, that's half the job of a groomer done."

Patience and an "absolute love for dogs" are other qualities you need to be a good groomer.

"On occasion you get dogs that are a bit worried about what is going on so you need to be able to gain their trust and put them at ease," says Pollari who charges \$20 for a no-frills cut for small dogs and up to \$60 for a fancy "poodle-style" job and extra for manicures and ear plucking. "I have a wonderful job," says Pollari. "I love working with healthy, happy animals that are well looked after."

"It takes a special kind of person to be a vet — dog grooming is for me."

Pollari says up until now, most dog groomers learn the techniques of their trade through on the job training although TAFE NSW offers an animal attendant course that may be beneficial.

She says the Pet Industry Joint Association Council (PIJAC) is also working with the Government to develop guidelines for an accredited training course for the dog grooming industry. "In the near future we may actually have a recognised, accredited course for dog groomers but at present it's mostly on-the-job training," she says.

Yet she says the most important accreditation for an aspiring dog groomer to have is a natural "love and respect" for dogs.

"Some people get the wrong impression and think of a grooming parlour as a petting zoo," says Pollari. "It's not a petting zoo, this is a blue-collar job and quite labour intensive."

"It's a business, like a busy hair dressing salon but in this case the clients are dogs."

Another notable point of difference is the confidential nature of the staff/client relationship within the salon. "In this salon, we do all the gossiping and the dogs just listen in."