



An orangerie full of flowers for a loyal four-footed friend and a singing canary

A brown dog, a yellow canary and black chickens: florist Johan Gryp surrounds himself with some colourful company, both at home and at work. And it perfectly matches the ambience and interior of his house and flower shop. The mix of tones, patterns, styles and textures is breath-taking. His dog Omer, a basset fauve de Bretagne, follows him everywhere he goes. In the greenhouse, when he's out making deliveries, in the orangerie and in the garden. The two are inseparable and very popular with flower lovers.

Pax is a rescue dog from Portugal. They take him everywhere they go: to the beach, to the studio and when travelling in their camper van.





Underappreciated guinea pigs

Guinea pigs are sweet, cute creatures, but you don’t immediately associate them with adults. They are the perfect pets for teaching children a sense of responsibility. That is why Rena had them from such a young age. And she always loved them, mainly because she is allergic to most other pets. Rodents are small, and before our interview, we are convinced that they don’t interact that much with you. Why would you keep them, we ask ourselves. But Rena defends them passionately: ‘Guinea pigs are often underestimated as pets. They are adorable, funny, and react to people. Rabbits can be quite grumpy. I also had mice and rats. They are too tiny, they’re always moving around making them difficult to caress. But a guinea pig loves to cuddle.’ Rena produces ceramics under her own label, called ‘Studio Hear Hear’. Sam, ‘The Endeavorist’, is a software product manager. They both work in the studio. When it’s time for a break, they like to pet their tiny friends. The creatures seem to enjoy it. The males get out in the garden regularly to play or dominate each other.

Online pets

Rena happened to stumble upon two of the four guinea pigs on a secondhand website, where they found the studio and most of their vintage furniture. ‘A little boy had received them as a present but was unable to keep them. He let us have them for free and gave us the toys and the cage.’ Such a deal is not really an exception because when we check out online, we realise that people offer anything from rodents to dogs, cats, turtles, parrots, fish, and other pets. Rena and Sam find it difficult to exercise restraint. They would love to find a new home for all unwanted animals.

A short-lived but good life

Every guinea pig is different. Ben is Rena’s favourite and comes from a pet store. He seems to blend in with the sofa, with his mixed grey fur. At-At (all animals are named after Star Wars characters) is Sam’s front-runner. ‘He’s sweet but a bit on the heavy side. We call him ‘Patatje’ and ‘Petoetie’. The couple has more nicknames for their pets than for each other. Ben, At-At, Finn and Lasse are the third group of animals that has the privilege of living with Sam and Rena. Guinea pigs as a rule like to live with others, which is why they recommend you get at least two of them. They usually live six to seven years. ‘They love company. They’re quite unique. When one of them dies, we’re always very sad,’ Sam says. ‘It’s quite pitiful, but a rodent generally doesn’t live very long. You get used to it after a while,’ Rena adds. ‘I can imagine that it must be terrible to lose a cat or a dog because they live much longer.’

Animal lovers don’t eat meat

When Sam opens the door to the fridge, the guinea pigs start to squeak loudly. ‘They know they’re about to get their veggies, it’s the only time they make this sound,’ Sam laughs. After they have eaten, it’s our turn to lunch. We eat outside and enjoy the unique view of the field with the sheep and the cows. ‘You’re animal lovers. Are you also vegetarians?’ Rena asks, who stopped eating meat 15 years ago. ‘When I have friends that visit and that like the sheep, I never understand how they can eat lamb.’ She reminds us that all animals are equal. ‘People don’t eat horse meat, but they do eat chicken. What is the difference between the two? And who am I to judge? I really can’t live with the fact that a piece of dead animal passes through my body simply because I like it. It makes me sad because I really do love all creatures great and small.’ She hates the meat industry, which kills animals daily on a large scale and has an environmental impact.

Organic food for everyone

Although Sam is also a vegetarian, he nuances her statements: ‘If you look at how the world is evolving, everyone will become a vegetarian sooner or later. In the old days, they used to call you a hippy if you shopped at the nature store. But now everyone does. I find the growing awareness important, but it doesn’t mean that I want to convert everyone to my radical lifestyle.’ He points out a large number of tasty alternatives that is available nowadays, but also thinks the price is too high and needs to be reduced urgently. All too often, organic food is just for the happy few. If you want to stop people from eating meat, a lot more needs to happen. Sam and Rena are very serious animal lovers. It is a commitment and an attitude, as you can tell by what’s on their plate. Their conviction makes us think: how can you love pets but still consent to killing them? Is it true that real animal lovers don’t eat meat?





Veva is able to give her interest in interior decoration free rein in the building. The spaces are showrooms, which she has adorned with products from her online shop.



A dream project

Buying, renovating, and selling rundown houses, that is what interior architect Kim Verbist does best. She is currently restoring an old farm, with a home and two sheds, surrounded by fields, in the countryside. Kim describes it as ‘the dream’ which she shares with her partner Sofie Van Waeyenberge. While Kim draws the plans and makes interior design decisions, Sofie sets to work. Kim is a dreamer, Sofie is all about action. They complement each other beautifully. In the meantime, they have transformed the dilapidated dwelling into a warm and colourful cocoon. The interior is very simple, with patinated furniture, ethnic accessories and anonymous outsider art on the walls. Kim compares their home to a caravan because it’s so compact. The large windows look out onto the sheds and the fields. Nature invades the house, just like the sun, which embraces the interior with its warm glow. It is a magical place where the animals feel happy too. They run in and out of the farmstead and play anywhere they can. There are no valuable objects, and all the furniture can take a hit.

Office dog

The adopted pets are part and parcel of the family. And because they have separation anxiety, they make the commute from the city to the countryside and back. Seraphine, the oldest dog, even goes into the office. ‘I left her home alone once. She howled so loudly that the neighbours thought there was a baby in the house,’ Kim laughs. Taking your dog into work is the new cool thing to do apparently because Seraphine now shares the building with seven other animals. ‘For now, everything is going smoothly. They never fight, but when they play, it’s like a race course.’ Seraphine is a mix of a dachshund and a West Highland terrier. It’s a small hunting dog that is smart but stubborn. Terriers are very independent, although this does definitely not apply to the rescue dog that Kim decided on six years ago, after having gone through 14,000 pics online. ‘She was already quite old when I adopted her. Seraphine was stuck in the rehoming centre with her puppy and her little brother. Unfortunately, they had already been reserved. Otherwise, I would have taken in all three of them,’ Kim confesses, who strongly believes in adoption. ‘Many owners kick out their dog when their family situation changes. Often, the problem is not the animal. You just need to take the time to choose a pet whose personality matches yours.’

A puppy with a cat bell

Odile, the four-month-old puppy, a mix of a dachshund and a jack russel terrier, is also a rescue. You don’t often see puppies in the pound, but I unexpectedly had the

opportunity to adopt one,’ says Kim about the pooch that Sofie also loves with a passion. ‘I didn’t grow up with pets, and I definitely am not a dog person. But I love Odile because she is quite a character. Like most dachshunds, she is very stubborn,’ Sofie explains. ‘And she gets into so much trouble. We always know where she is because of the bell around her neck.’ She likes to cuddle up close to Seraphine to sleep. Kim and Sofie worry about how Odile will cope when her buddy is no longer there. Seraphine’s cancer has come back and is incurable. Kim has already lost many rescue dogs, and yet she always saves another one. She just can’t help herself, she loves animals too much.

Cat with an arched back

A few years ago they found a cat, called Poes in a box on the street. ‘We think her owner threw her out of the car window.’ After she recovered, she stayed on. She also commutes, with the dogs. She likes Seraphine but hates Odile with a vengeance. When the pup approaches her, she hisses and arches her back. The dogs want to spend most of their time in the living room, which is why Poes has claimed the bedrooms as her own. She goes out now and then, into the fields, to chase mice. During our visit, she accepts to be petted. Kim likes the tranquillity that emanates from the pets. ‘They teach me to relax,’ she says, with Odile on her arm. But the peace and quiet ends abruptly when the puppy spots a partridge. She manages to free herself and runs off, chasing the bird.



Annick has her own textile label, Triconick, specialising in macramé. In her studio she creates bags, plant hangers, curtains, and so on.





The dining area has all the allure of a cosy, Italian bistro. The rabbit likes to sit under the table or on top of Voss when he's lounging on the floor.