

Ruff Justice However well groomed your pooch is, landlords may take a dim view



Pet peeves

Tenants with dogs are having to jump through hoops to find a home for themselves and their furry friends, says **Emma Smith**



The coddled canines of affluent west London enjoy their own pampering parlours, day spas and even designer accessories, thanks to Pet-a-pawter.com (yes, really), but when it comes to the local landlords, they are still *persona non grata* – or should that be *canis non grata*. Although a bichon frisé may be a vision of sophistication peering out from a Louis Vuitton handbag or sipping on a frothy “puppuccino” (again, really), her charms are rarely enough to melt the heart of a Belgravia property magnate who has just spent a small fortune creating the sort of pristine, light, bright apartment favoured by today’s mobile elite.

Agents in many of the capital’s most affluent postcodes insist this is a growing problem – a posh pooch housing crisis, no less – with more and more dog-owning tenants fighting over a dwindling number of canine-friendly tenancies. In some cases, they are being forced to pay as much as £25,000 for a deposit, stump up several hundred pounds for a professional deep clean when they leave, and even provide a

canine curriculum vitae, giving details of grooming, demeanour and other landlord-pleasing accomplishments.

Five years ago, just 2% of those looking for property in central London were dog owners, but that figure leapt to 20% in 2014 and is at about 30% this year, according to the Mayfair-based lettings agency EJ Harris, which carried out a survey of its clients.

“About one in every four calls is from a dog owner,” says Elizabeth Harris, whose agency caters largely to the corporate sector and high-net-worth individuals. “It is becoming more of a problem, particularly because so many of the head leases in this area don’t allow pets. Our clients are reliable tenants with well-groomed and well-trained dogs, but it is still harder to find a tenancy – and they have less negotiating power because of the limited number of properties. We really need to change perceptions.”

The number of pet dogs in the UK has increased from 5m back in 1970 to about 9m today, and almost a quarter of all households now own one or more. This rise has been attributed, in part to the popularity of toy breeds, the so-called “handbag” dogs – chihuahuas, pugs, shih-tzus, yorkshire terriers and bichon frisés – popularised by a host of celebrities including Simon Cowell, with his yorkies, Squidly and



Peter Turpin, Tim Flach/Natasha Ghose/Danika DeHemert/Getty

Diddly, and Paris Hilton, with her seemingly ever-growing collection of accessorising lapdogs.

A decade ago, just over 2,000 pedigree pugs were registered in the UK, according to the Kennel Club. Last year the figure was more than 9,200, making it one of the 10 most popular breeds, while chihuahua registrations rose from 1,769 in 2005 to more than 6,250 last year. As well as being fashionable, these miniature dogs are seen as compatible with urban living, being more portable, requiring less space and exercise, and creating less domestic disruption than larger breeds. In addition, the introduction of pet passports has made it easier for people to relocate with pets.

An “Airbnb-style” sitting and walking service was recently launched in the UK (dogbuddy.com), while the Pet Spa, in Chelsea, has become popular among

Alice Wong was turned down by several landlords because of her maltese terrier, Suri

wealthy dog owners, offering the discerning canine everything from pedicures and facials to aromatherapy massages (petspalondon.com). Yet many landlords, particularly in highly desirable central locations such as Belgravia, Knightsbridge, Mayfair and Chelsea, remain hard to charm.

“As my relocation agent told me, ‘Londoners love dogs – just not in their rental homes,’” says Aric Johnstone, an accountant who recently moved to London from San Francisco and will soon be joined by Bella and Bailey, his two toy poodles. Johnstone, 31, has found a flat in Pimlico through John D Wood lettings agency, but it wasn’t straightforward: “Trying to find a flat that accepts dogs will decrease your available rental inventory by at least half,” he warns.

Dog owners renting in central London normally have to pay a higher deposit – equivalent to eight to 10 weeks’ rent, rather than the typical six – in order to persuade a landlord to take them on. And landlords will often require a non-refundable payment to cover the cost of professional cleaning when they move out.

In a bid to woo landlords, Tom Smith, a partner at Knight Frank Lettings in Belgravia, encourages tenants to use creativity: “Well-prepared owners bring separate references for pets,” he says.

Alice Wong and James Douglass recently moved back to Knightsbridge after three years in China. They were surprised to be turned away by several landlords on account of their dog – even though she is a tiny maltese terrier, weighing only 4kg and about as aggressive as a mop head.

“We were turned down by several landlords because of my Suri,” says Alice, who has owned her beloved pet for about a decade. “I don’t understand why – she is a sweetie. We walked away from one deal because the landlord wanted a clause stating that, at any time, he could ask us to remove the dog. What were we supposed to do with her? She’s part of the family.”

Alice and James point out that Suri is an ideal companion for their five-year-old twins, and does not bite or shed fur. They eventually found an apartment, but at a price. “We had to pay a deposit of about 10 weeks,” says James, 49, a lawyer. “People think dogs are going to damage the house, but we provide photographs of our impeccably groomed pet, and it’s hard to see the problem. Landlords are cutting themselves off from a large number of tenants. More and more people, particularly wealthy people, have dogs.”

“You just have to watch The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills to see that,” he adds with a smile.