

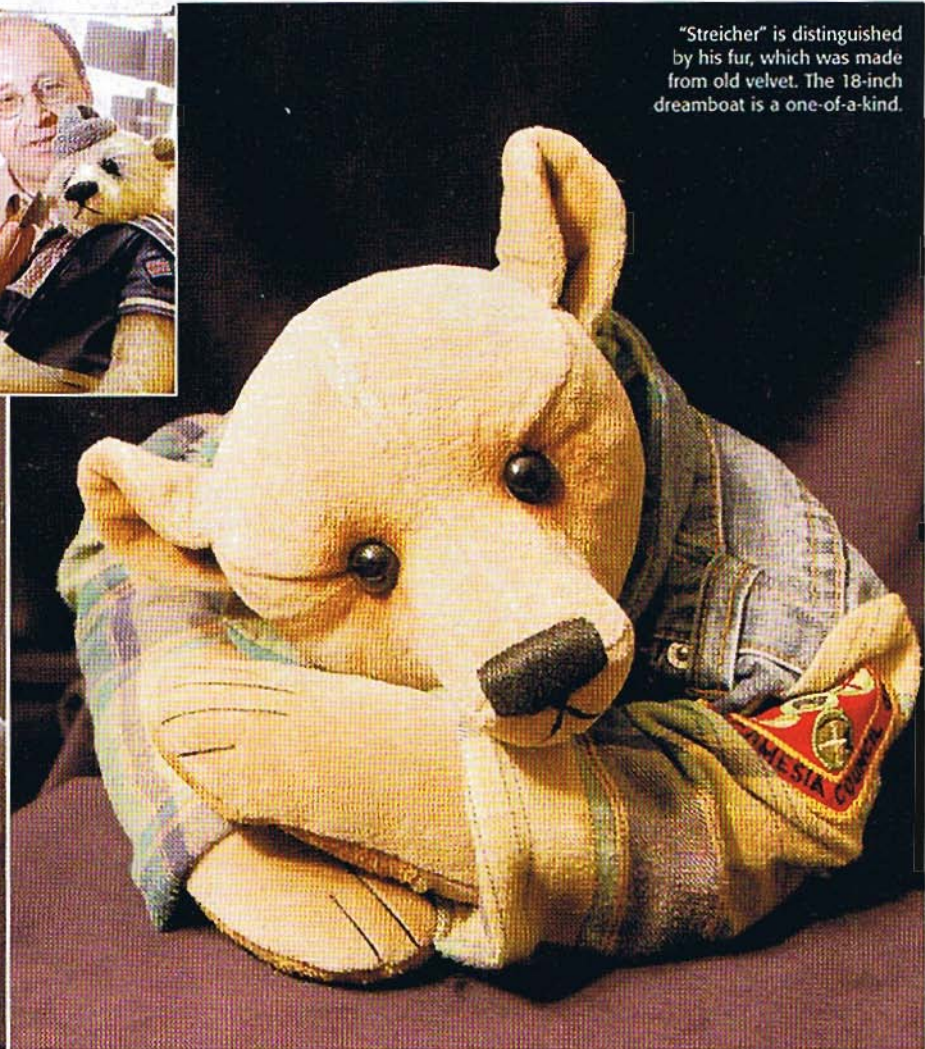
Fashion Forward

The Dufeus are forging a path as a creative and innovative design duo. Features editor Stephanie Finnegan chats with the pair about how looking backward has helped them to strive ahead.

Americans have always been infatuated with canines: We've been gaga for Lassie, Rin-Tin-Tin, Benji and Beethoven. Knowing this national affection for pups and pooches, it makes perfect sense that the artistic team behind Dufeu-Bears is getting a lot of feedback. Here is a kennel's worth of doggies that are beautifully dressed,



Eva and Günter (above right) Dufeu are happily married and merrily united as co-artists.



"Streicher" is distinguished by his fur, which was made from old velvet. The 18-inch dreamboat is a one-of-a-kind.

carefully posed and snazzily decked out. The purebreds that spring forth from Günter and Eva's studio are a canine fancier's dream. One doesn't want to dog-whisper about these wonderful creations; instead, you want to ascend to the rooftops and shout the praises of these exciting and exhilarating characters.

Besides fashioning fabulous Fidos and Fifis, the Dufeus also are first-rate, top-notch bear artists. Their battalion of brunins run the gamut from military men to coquettish cubs, proper and prim British lords to raunchy and raucous mohair mariners.

"All our animals have their past lives and biographies," husband Günter explains. "This is really a marvelous part of our work. For example, my personal bear, 'Charly the drunken sailor,' has an unknown parentage, but he is an old sailor who has lots of experiences all over the world. He is well known in all port taverns and loves ale and malt whiskey! If you promise a beer to him, he'll tell you unbelievable stories from around the globe. Each time we travel to the sea, we take Charly with us."

Eva also has an inanimate amigo that accompanies her on their European and intercontinental treks. Befitting a lady's confidant, Eva's "familiar" is much more buttoned-up and button-down. "I really love my 'William' and he is always with me. When we are traveling, he gets some new buttons or other small gifts. William loves Great Britain, and,



Who can resist this face? "Red Atlanticus" is a 20-inch one-of-a-kind fellow.

"Many of our bears end up as boys. Perhaps it's because a natural bear looks very masculine."

"Fudge," 18 inches, is resplendent in his meticulously made attire.



in my fantasies, he was born in Cornwall and grew up there. It's no surprise that he still looks like an English landlord. Sometimes when we are drinking a cup of tea, he tells me stories about his country life in good old England. He makes me very happy!"

The characters that have emerged from the Dufeus' atelier have, likewise, made many collectors happy and keep them coming back for more.

"I've been representing the Dufeus' bears and dogs for the past three to four years," Maria Balser, of My Friends & Me, Leesburg, Va., states. "On a regular

basis, we commission exclusive new designs from the Dufeus, which we feature in our bimonthly ads in this magazine. The Dufeus' creations adorn our shop, and they bring much joy and excitement to our avid collectors. Each and every one of their bears has its own facial character, and combining that with their colorful and intricately detailed clothing, they do stand out in a class of their own."

When the Dufeus are asked to imagine who their typical collectors might be, they both scratch their heads. "I think a lovely person would be the most

"Henry," 19 inches, strikes a confident and manly pose.



perfect new owner for our animals," the couple agrees.

Both Eva and Günter grew up respecting and interacting with cuddly critters—real-live ones and the plush variety. For Eva, there was a touch of Dr. Dolittle coursing through her veins.

"My grandparents were the owners of a small shop in Dortmund where it was possible to buy a lot of different domestic animals." Eva also lists a pair of zoologists among her animal-oriented ancestors. Because four-legged friends mattered so much in her family history, when she was born, she was given a Steiff teddy bear. "That's when my lifelong love affair with bears began," she asserts. Additionally, one of Eva's grandmas had been a proud bear collector, but her assortment of mohair treasures didn't survive World War I. "My grandma would tell me stories about these bears, and she would try to re-create them for me from scraps of material and fabric." This combination of spinning yarns while threading needles has followed Eva to this day.

Günter, too, grew up with a deep and true connection to his toys and their imaginary powers. "Growing up, I had a little bear and a dragon, both were always with me in my bedroom. They were my best friends and my fighters. I was able to share all my fears and my problems with them, so I was never alone. I will never forget them, and I'm still sad, because I lost them one day."

Since both husband and wife have had such deep commitments to their past playthings, they make sure to breathe a recognizable light into their creations' eyes and posture.

"Each time one of our bears or dogs is born, we talk about him. We discuss him at great length, and then he gets his name. Each one has his or her own individual expression, and when all of that is completed, we discuss the outfit and the right materials for it. Many of our bears end up as boys. Perhaps it's because a natural bear looks very masculine," Eva muses. "Each bear has his own expression when he is born, and what can I do if he decides to become a boy?"

Far left: "Sikes," 19 inches, is handsome and appealing. **Near left:** One-of-a-kind "Lotz" is an 18-inch explorer.

Eva and Günter love to parent their new bears and dogs as they emerge into their home-based workshop, located in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany. The Dufeu household is bursting with vitality and love. They share their abode with three of their four children and two Jack Russell terriers. "Our home is a mixture of modern and antiques. It is always full of life and laughter. Making our dogs and bears is our full-time occupation, but 24 hours a day is not even enough to finish all that we want to do."

When the busy artists manage to find a free

moment, they indulge their separate and combined passions, which include "playing with the kids, playing with and walking our terriers, visiting antique markets, fishing, listening to classical music, browsing art galleries and reading." Their creatures reflect this hybrid of history, literary pursuits and hands-on interaction with animals.

"The Dufeu bears are very appealing and have a bit of a terrier look to them. We so often find that the larger bears can be a bit serious-looking and have a Steiff appearance to them. The Dufeu bears are unique in their designs. They are extremely well-dressed in



Right: "Fagin" is an 18-inch one-of-a-kind that is regal and stately.



Above: An edition of three, "Reynold" is an 18-inch elegant character. **Left:** "McRoses" enjoys being a girl—a very rare occurrence for a Dufeu creation.



wonderfully made outfits. They are also stuffed very well—with a combination of pellets and fibers—which gives them a soft and heavy feel. They are surprisingly cuddly," Jasper Pearson, of Sue Pearson Dolls & Teddy Bears, Brighton, England, observes.

Pearson's commentary is a beautiful summation of what the Dufeus strive for: gorgeous garbing, surreal realism and breathtaking detailing. Their teddies and terriers are a sensational melding of the Dufeus' past histories, present-day lifestyles and future aspirations. 🐾

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Teddy Bear Review congratulates Eva and Günter Dufeu on their 2007 Golden Teddy nods. For a complete list of who and what has received a GTA nomination, please turn to page 22.