

Pet Photography 101

Tips for Taking Better Photos
of Your Dog or Cat

Andrew Darlow



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This book is dedicated to the memory of Chachi, Cupid, Jiro, Lady, Madel, Muffet, Penny, Regal, Shaney, and the many other dogs and cats who have made an impact on my life, as well as the lives of so many others. We miss you.



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Pet Photography 101 will allow photographers of any level to hone their skills with easy-to-understand information and techniques. Many of the “models” featured in the book are rescued animals that were once homeless. Now they are special, loving companions for many families. Thank you, Andrew, for sharing your talent with others and for bringing beauty to the world through your magnificent photography.



Karen Quigley with Elwood and some of the other adopted members of her family (all of whom are rescues). Photo © Andrew Darlow

Karen and Elwood Quigley,
Sewell, New Jersey

www.EveryoneLovesElwood.com



Preface



I love photography. And as long as I can remember, I've loved sharing time with and photographing dogs and cats. Throughout my childhood, I spent hours playing with many dogs and cats at the homes of family and friends. Later in life, at the age of 18, I lived with a family in Japan, where I shared the house with a very special Akita named Jiro (see the following page for more about Jiro). Since then, I've spent time with and have had the honor of photographing hundreds of dogs, cats, and their people friends from New York City to Tokyo, Japan.

Whether I'm photographing a dog or cat while on vacation, on the front lawn of a neighbor's house, or during a commissioned assignment at a client's home, I find that my most memorable photos are not posed pictures with a paper or fabric background. They are the pictures that happen spontaneously, like a photo of a dog's face with his tail wagging happily when he reacts to the voice of a family member, or a photograph of a cat while she's in a zenlike state of relaxation perched on a window sill. I always strive to capture the spirit of pets and the people with whom they share their lives.

And that's my goal for this book—to help you make better photographs of your loved ones that you and your family will cherish for many years. If you take even one photo that is influenced by what you read here, and if that image brings a tear to your eye or a smile to your face, then I've done my job. Hopefully, you'll be making many more than just one memorable photo, filling digital or actual photo albums and frames using the advice contained in the book.

I have so many people (and furry friends) to thank for helping make this book possible. To help express my gratitude, I've included an acknowledgement section on the companion Web site. It also contains links to more information about many of the people (and of course, the pets) who have made a positive difference in my life.

How the Book Is Organized

This book is organized in nine chapters and 101 tips, beginning with information about different cameras, lenses, and the nuts and bolts of photography, including color balance, removable card storage options, and various shooting modes. Most of the book's chapters center on a theme, such as lighting and creative photography, with tips related to that theme. To help illustrate the tips, most of them are accompanied by one of my photographs and a description of the overall setting, as well as camera shooting data (for example, shutter speed and ISO). Also included with most of the tips is a description of the lighting used, including from where the sun and/or other lighting is coming.

Important note: In most cases, I've also included the month and time of day that the photos were taken to help you better determine when you might find a certain quality of light. Unless otherwise stated, all photos were taken in the northeast United States (New York/New Jersey area), which is important to know since natural light will generally be different in other regions of the world at different times of the year.



Jiro (my “host family dog”), photographed in Nara, Japan. Jiro means “second son” in Japanese, and he quickly became like a second host brother to me when I lived with a wonderful host mother, father, sister, and brother in Japan as an exchange student. In this photo, Jiro looks quite pleased with the small gift I gave to him earlier that day. There are a few tips from the book at work here, including:

- *Tip 60:* Capture some interesting profile or partial-profile views. Your subject doesn't always have to be looking right at the lens, as you can see from this photo.
- *Tip 89:* Get your old negatives, slides, and prints scanned (or scan them yourself). I scanned this photo from a 4 × 6-inch (approximately 10 × 15-cm) print on an inexpensive flatbed scanner.
- *Tip 93:* Sharpen with care (sometimes selectively) depending on the subject. For this photo, the entire image was sharpened moderately, but I selectively sharpened Jiro's eyes and fur to help draw attention to those areas.



For more tips and info, or to order the book, visit www.PhotoPetTips.com

Who This Book Is For

This book was designed primarily for those who want to make better photos of pets and people, regardless of your photographic or computer skill level. The book was designed to give you the information needed to get started or to continue on your journey toward making better photographs in many different situations—from simple but dramatic photos of a pet just waking up in the early morning sunlight, to a family photo on the beach in the late afternoon, lit with the help of a portable flash unit. I wrote the book with as little jargon as possible, and in many cases, when I wanted to elaborate or include more information about a topic, I created a reference link, which you can find on the book's companion Web site.

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Companion Web Site

The Internet offers an incredible amount of free and fee-based information about photography, digital imaging, dogs, cats, and just about every related topic. The book's companion Web site (www.PhotoPetTips.com) contains hundreds of links to more information related to the tips presented in this book, as well as additional information about photography, retouching, and much more. Just look for notations like [w1.1] throughout the book. I created these reference links to reduce the number of Web URLs that would otherwise have to be printed throughout the book. The links also reduce the amount of typing necessary to get to the information. To navigate to a link, just click on the chapter number on the main page of the companion Web site, and then click on the specific link reference number.

What You'll Need

To get started, you'll need a camera, though even a camera phone will do. In Chapter 1 I explain why I prefer digital single-lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) for most of my image making, but you'll also see why a good-quality point-and-shoot camera or video camera with a still picture mode may be perfect for all your needs. It's all about making pictures that you and your family can enjoy, and not about how many megapixels you can capture, or how many pounds of

gear you can carry. A late-model computer running Mac OSX or Microsoft Windows is highly recommended, though not necessary thanks to the many resources available today at photo labs and retail stores.

With regard to software, I mention Adobe Photoshop a lot throughout the book because I utilize the program in some way for much of my retouching and image preparation, but Adobe Photoshop is not necessary to perform the vast majority of what I cover and demonstrate in the book. Also, unless otherwise noted, when I mention Adobe Photoshop, I am speaking of Adobe Photoshop CS2/CS3/CS4, etc. In Chapter 9, Tips 85 and 86, I discuss a few free and inexpensive retouching software options, as well as some powerful image-processing programs (Apple Aperture and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom) that work differently from Adobe Photoshop, and that should be considered by anyone who is serious about photography and who would like to work more efficiently.

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About the Cover Image

On the following page is the unretouched version of the book's cover photo. I took this photograph of a beautiful 11-year-old Labrador-mix on a clear day at about 5:30 P.M. in April. The dog's owner placed her in the back of his pickup truck, which raised her position and allowed me to photograph her without having to crawl around on the ground—not that there's anything wrong with that!

As is the case with most of the photos in the book, there are multiple tips from the book that are represented in the image, and some minor retouching was done to produce the final image. Apart from cropping the photo for the cover, selective sharpening was done on the dog's eyes and fur, and some contrast enhancement was done on the dog's eyes by first selecting them and then using the curves tool in Adobe Photoshop. Also, a catch light was added to the dog's right eye by cloning it (brushing in the detail by copying it from another location) in Adobe Photoshop using the catch light in her left eye. I've included the before image here because I believe that these small adjustments to her eyes alone have a dramatic effect on the overall image. You can use a similar process to improve the photos in your collection that might benefit from the same techniques.



Camera: Canon EOS-D60;

Lens/Focal Length: Canon 50 mm macro;

ISO: 400; **Aperture:** f/4.5;

Shutter Speed: $\frac{1}{250}$ sec;

Lighting Notes: Natural daylight from the sun low in the sky provided all of the lighting. The primary catch light in the dog's left eye is the reflection of a boat covered with an off-white tarp, parked in the driveway. The catch light was then cloned to enhance the overall look of the image using Adobe Photoshop.

photo © Andrew Darlow

About the Author



Andrew Darlow
Photo by Jorge Julian

Andrew Darlow is an award-winning author and photographer whose love of cats and dogs began at a very young age. His pet photography has been featured in numerous publications and on-air broadcasts, including *Animal Fair* magazine, the *News 12 New Jersey* television program, *Rangefinder Magazine*, and the *AKC Gazette* (the official magazine of the American Kennel Club).

Over more than a decade, Darlow has been commissioned to photograph people and their pets in both formal and informal situations. He has photographed numerous dog shows, including the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York City, and he has donated his photo and custom-printing services to a number of causes, including the Susan G. Komen Foundation, Women's Venture Fund, The Seeing Eye (the world's oldest existing dog guide school), and the garden tour for Animal Rescue Fund of the Hamptons (a no-kill shelter for dogs and cats). He has lectured and conducted seminars and workshops around the world at conferences and for photography organizations and schools, including the Arles Photo Festival; School of Visual Arts, Columbia University; and the International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York.



Andrew Darlow relaxing with one of his four legged models at a client's home after a photo session. Photo by David Levy.

Darlow is editor of *The Imaging Buffet* (www.imagingbuffet.com), an online resource with news, reviews, and interviews covering the subjects of photography, printing, and new media. His book *301 Inkjet Tips and Techniques: An Essential Printing Resource for Photographers* (Course Technology, PTR) was chosen as the winner in the "Photography: Instructional/How-To" category of The National Best Books 2008 Awards, sponsored by USA Book News.

For more information and to see more of Andrew Darlow's work, visit (www.andrewdarlow.com).



Andrew Darlow photographing a client's cat in New York City. Photo by Paul Kessel.