

have pet-quality puppies that go to families that just want a dog to love. Breeders have a real responsibility to produce healthy dogs."

ORCHARD HILL CAVALIERS

After 20 years of breeding and showing Shetland Sheepdogs, Erica Venier was looking for a smaller breed that would be easier to groom and show. When she helped her daughter locate and train her first Cavalier in 1995, Venier knew she'd found her breed. "They are joyous," Venier says. "They have that sunny personality and that gorgeous, wonderful temperament. And they make you happy."

As founder of Orchard Hill Cavaliers in Leesport, Pennsylvania, Venier purchased her first Cavalier puppy in 1996 from the late Joy Simms of Bramble Kennel in New Hope, Pennsylvania. A native of England, Simms had a long association with the breed. She sold Venier a male black-and-tan puppy, Am./Can. BIS Ch. Bramble Coco at Orchard Hill (Ryan).

Having demonstrated her ability to successfully campaign a good dog, Venier returned to Bramble and purchased what would turn out to be her foundation bitch, Am./Can. Ch. Bramble Royal Heritage at Orchard Hill (Daria), winner of the 1997 National Sweepstakes and a ROM winner for producing five AKC Champions.

Darla's second litter, sired by Droleus That's M'Showoff, produced two dual AKC/CKCSC-USA Champions. These two litter sisters, Ch. Orchard Hill Party Shoes (Prada) and Ch. Orchard Hill Where's the Party? (DJ), put the Orchard Hill kennel on the map. In 2003, DJ was the top-winning bitch in the CKCSC-USA and, as of presstime, Prada was the top-winning CKCSC-USA bitch in 2004.

An important addition to Orchard Hill's program in 2002 was Ch. Sheeba Special Inspiration at Orchard Hill (Shawn), purchased from Karin Ostmann of Sheeba Cavaliers in Eagle, Nebraska. Shawn was the top-winning dog in the CKCSC-USA in both 2003 and 2004, and his first puppies were just beginning to finish their Champion titles in 2004. As for why any breeder would let go of a dog of that quality, Venier says, "Karin knew that if she sold me a good dog, I would leave no stone unturned and get him out there. Plus, she has a litter brother who is



equally nice."

Venier keeps her breeding program small, and all her dogs live in the house. She averages between three and four litters per year, and does not keep breeding stock that can't excel in the conformation ring. "I try to keep as few beautiful bitches as I can to produce something nice," she says. "I'm looking for type, a good temperament and sound movement. Plus, they must melt your heart when you look at their faces. Put all that together and that's the goal."

Venier looks for pedigrees with long-lived individuals in them. She likes to see lots of dogs that have lived at least to the age of 10. "Longevity is the goal of all serious breeders," she says. "You need to

- **Ch. Sheeba Special Inspiration at Orchard Hill (Shawn) was the top-winning dog in the CKCSC-USA in 2003 and 2004.**

balance that with type. If a dog's heart has stayed clear for several years past the age of 5, then we are happy."

Venier says she is seeing nicer dogs in the show ring. Part of this has to do with the fact that English judges have been helping educate judges in the United States about the breed. "There is a learning curve with any newly accepted AKC breed," Venier says. We are just now starting to come into an even keel. AKC judges are becoming more educated. But it will always be exciting to win under a [breeder who is also a judge], because that is the benchmark." •

Sarah Christie is a freelance writer based in San Luis Obispo, California.