

Meet the Dog Portraitist to the Stars

Christine Merrill's clients include Oprah Winfrey and CBS anchor Bob Schieffer.

Posted: Feb. 25, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

Christine Merrill knows the country's top dogs. As one of the nation's leading dog portraitists, she has painted Oprah Winfrey's Cocker Spaniels, the late fashion designer Geoffrey Beene's Dachshunds, CBS anchor Bob Schieffer's Beagle, the late Malcolm Forbes's Norfolk Terrier and Bullmastiff, and George and Barbara Bush's Springer Spaniel Millie.

"But I've also done mixed breeds, which I love to do because they're originals," says Merrill in an interview with the Wall Street Journal. "They're like designer dogs."

Merrill's clients pay anywhere from \$3,000 for a 3-by-4-inch head study to \$45,000 for a large canvas featuring multiple dogs. But with a waiting list that's nine months long and growing, it's obvious that people are happy to pay top dollar for her services.

Merrill, who owns a Chihuahua, Pomeranian, and Norwegian Elkhound, says she paints her subjects by referring to photographs and observing the dogs in their home environment – running, playing, or just sleeping.

"If it's gotten to the point where an owner wants a portrait, that dog must be special," Merrill says. "I have to try to see him the way the owner sees him."