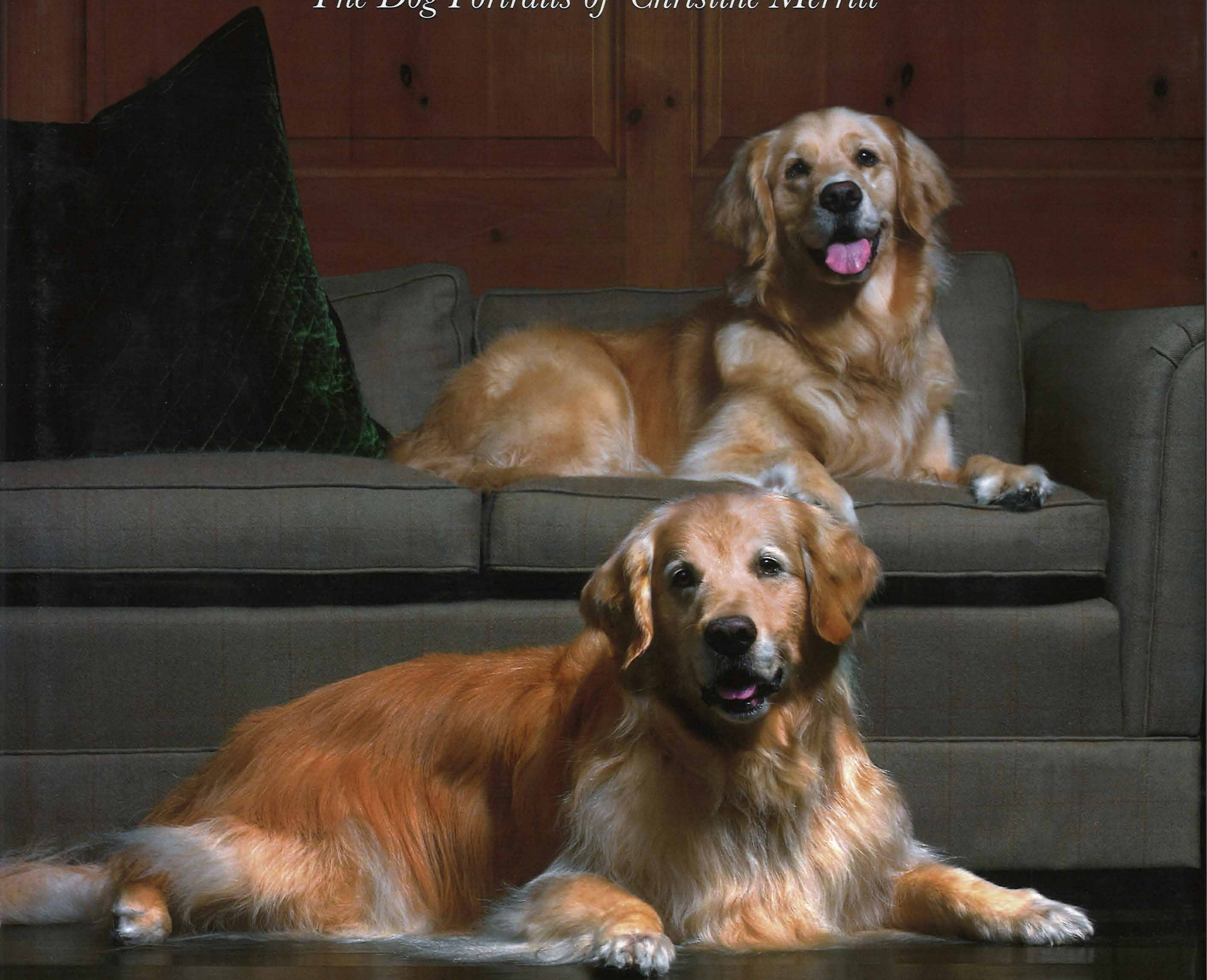


THE AMERICAN DOG AT HOME

The Dog Portraits of Christine Merrill



WILLIAM SECORD

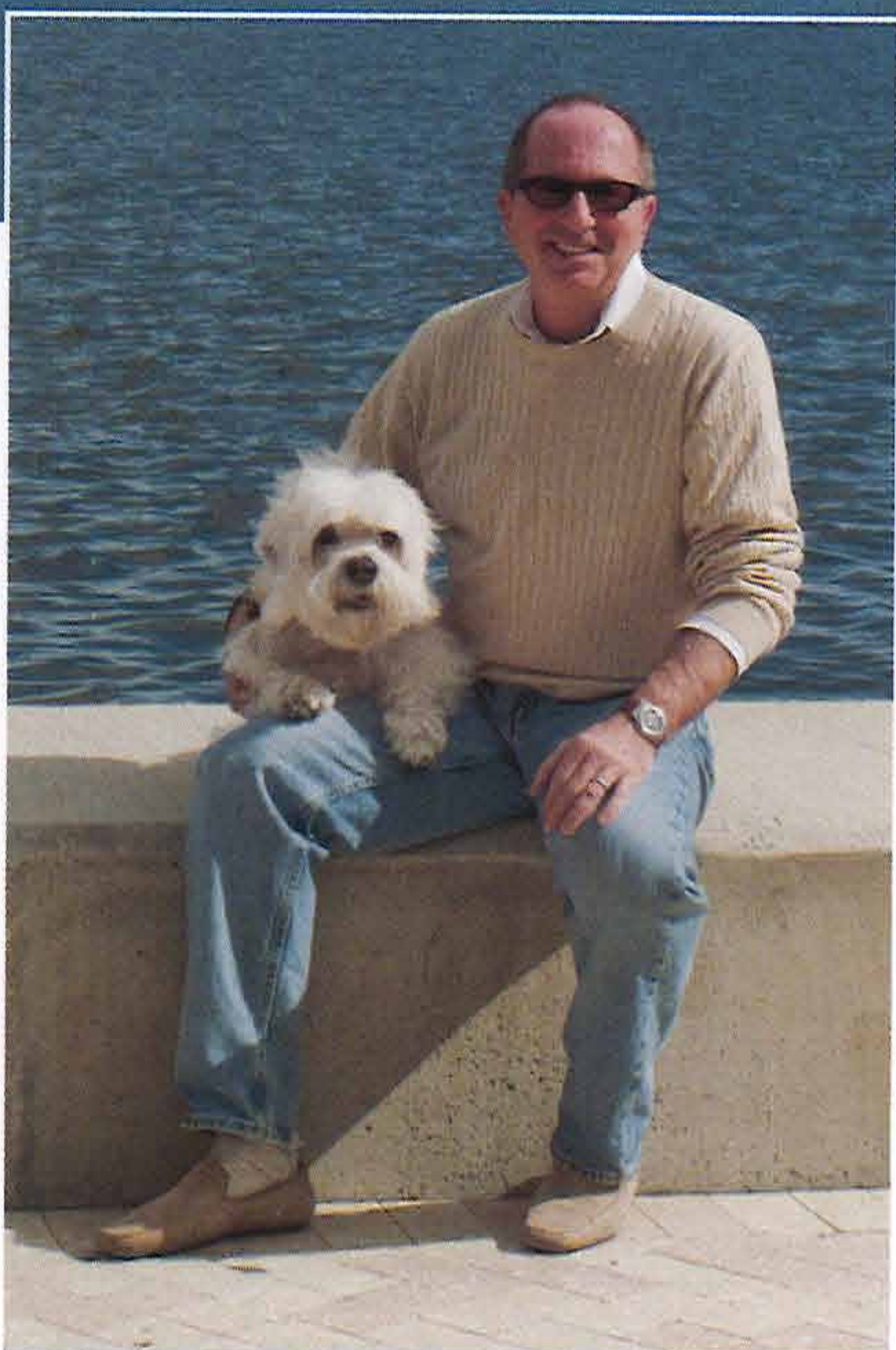
Rocky, the Dandie Dinmont Terrier

BRUCE BIERMAN, WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

As an architect and interior designer, Bruce Bierman is known for his refined, modernist aesthetic, and the couture-like details of his interiors. Inducted into the Interior Design Hall of Fame in 2000, much of his work is about scale, proportions and suitability. So when his significant other suggested that they get a Dandie Dinmont Terrier, he was a bit taken aback. Bruce knew very little about this rare breed and when it was described as having a big head,



Rocky won't jump on the furniture, unless he gets a treat



Bruce Bierman's apartment overlooks Palm Beach and the famous Breakers Hotel

Bruce Bierman takes Rocky for a walk along the intracoastal waterway, between Palm Beach and West Palm Beach

When the new puppy arrived, Bruce immediately fell in love. Though he had owned a cat as an adult, he had never had a dog. He had wanted one as a child, explaining to his mother that he was lonely. "All of my friends had dogs," he remembers, "and I wanted one, too". However, instead of a dog, his mother got Bruce his own phone line so he could call his friends! So Rocky was his first dog, and like many first loves, Bruce was head over heels. The newly named Rocky (his official name is Ch. Pennywise Let's Rock) immediately became the focus of attention.



Rocky relaxes in his West Palm Beach apartment

Rocky had to have a bed of his own. A custom bed, made to the proportions of a human bed, was fabricated, and although Rocky didn't always use it, it found a home in Bruce's bedroom. As a Mustard Dandie, Rocky has cream-colored hair, but as it grows, the tips become a dark ochre. "People would stop us on the street and ask us if we had dyed the tips of his hair," laughs Bruce. Next came discussions about Rocky's grooming. The original purpose of Dandie Dinmont Terriers, like most terriers, was to kill rats and vermin; and while they have soft hair on their head and furnishings, they are meant to have a rough coat along their back and sides in order to repel rain and snow. When the hair gets very long, or "blown," it is pulled out by hand, in order for the coarse coat to grow in. While it sounds painful, when the hair is ready to be pulled, it's often just annoying for the dog. Bruce didn't like the idea, but he went along with it, as he loved the way Rocky looked. The closest groomer who was skilled in this grooming technique, however, was eighty miles away in Aquebogue, Long Island, so every six months or so, Rocky is driven to his grooming appointment – essentially an all day excursion.

All of the technical aspects of Rocky's care were eventually worked out and a trainer was enlisted to assist in basic obedience training. "He was a very good puppy," Bruce remembers, "he never chewed on our shoes or destroyed any furniture. He never begged because we never gave him human food." Terriers, though, can be especially stubborn and single-minded, and Rocky is no exception. Luckily, he was food-oriented. By nature slightly wary and aloof, Rocky responded well to treats, although he fought to maintain his alpha-dog status in the household. He had no interest, for instance, in jumping on the furniture, so each time Bruce wanted Rocky to join him on the sofa, Bruce would entice him with a treat. Needless to say, Rocky quickly caught on to this game, and would immediately jump off the sofa, and looking up at Bruce, would wait for another treat to be proffered.

Rocky is now six years old, and he and Bruce have settled into a routine. While Bruce's main residence is in New York City, it is in his apartment in West Palm Beach, Florida, that we sit and talk about Rocky. The apartment has just been finished and Rocky's beige coat fits in well with the mostly taupe and beige fabrics that Bruce has chosen for the apartment. "Yes," recounts Bruce, "I remember sitting in the black-tie section at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show when we were just thinking about what breed we might get. Sandy Bishop and I were having such a good time looking for 'beige' dogs. Sandy still laughs about it, but at the time, I think that some of our fellow spectators thought we were a little crazy. Dog shows can be very serious."

Rocky is now very much a member of the family and while born in the suburbs, he has become a city dog. During the summer, Rocky travels with Bruce every weekend to their beach house in The Pines on Fire Island, where Rocky patrols the property, giving voice at the approach of animal or human visitors. And during the winter they travel to West Palm Beach together for the major holidays. Rocky prefers the Florida apartment, not so much for the warm weather, but because it is larger than his other homes, and it has windows on three sides. Rocky loves playing there, running from the front to the back of the apartment, going out onto the balconies – out one door and in the other. "The apartment also has a little dog park, and you can let your dog off leash to play," explains Bruce, "Rocky enjoys rolling around in the grass and acting like a dog. It is something that he cannot do in Manhattan – there, he just has the concrete streets and his walks in the park." Still, Bruce feels that the best part of owning a dog is the simple pleasure that they provide. "I love him so much," he declares, "I mean, just look at that face. And when I come home, Rocky is so happy to see me. He greets me as if I were the only one in the world. He runs around the apartment like a whirlwind, then hops up on the sofa and kisses my face for at least five minutes. All of the stress of my day disappears, and I am swept away."

Bruce had been familiar with Christine Merrill's work and from the moment he got Rocky, he knew that he wanted a portrait of him. "I had seen a lot of



Christine Merrill's painting of a Weimaraner hangs in Bruce Bierman's bedroom



Christine Merrill, Rocky, 2008, Oil on board, 22 x 28 inches

Christine's work over the years at the William Secord Gallery," he explains. "I saw several of her exhibitions and I had followed her work on the gallery web site. So when we got Rocky, it was only a matter of time before we commissioned Christine to paint him. It was her idea to paint him against a relatively neutral background and I think that it was a big success. He had just come from the groomer and every hair is in place, which is not what he looks like on a daily basis. But you know, she really captured his personality. Rocky can be a little mischievous, and she has captured that as well. I am reminded of a little devil in the guise of an angel. He looks like an angel, but he really isn't. He's a terrier."