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Keith Barraclough

By Louisa J. Curtis



*Portrait of Black Labrador Retrievers taken for Art Buyer at Discovery
© Keith Barraclough*

I met photographer [Keith Barraclough](#) back in 2006 when I first visited the Washington, D.C. Chapter of APA (American Photographic Artists). From there he became a client, and over the years we have also developed a genuine friendship as well. Keith is truly one of the “good guys” and now lives in New York City, not far from me, so he keeps me updated on his progress and what’s going on with his career.

Relocating to a new city has had its challenges for him, but I have observed Keith's patient optimism and his willingness to keep shooting, no matter what, so he always has something new to show you and to send out to potential clients. His tenacity has paid off because he has been busy recently, including shooting the wonderfully animated employee portraits for Agency Access' new Web site and a number of fun projects for Discovery. But the recent assignment I really wanted to chat with Keith about was specifically for Animal Planet, taking portraits of all 164 Kennel Club dog breeds.



Cane Corso, © Keith Barraclough

I began by asking him how on earth this assignment had come to pass in the first place? I also was interested to hear if there were any key things he did in his promotions that helped land this campaign and was his move to New York a help, a hindrance, or neither? I have known many of the AD's and AB's at Discovery for some time through sending e-promos and post cards. One of the major influences in getting this assignment was a personal project I did with a Discovery art buyer who owns two black labs. I offered to take some fun and arty photos of them at my DC studio (black labs on a black seamless.) The object was to show her, and others at Discovery, that I could take great photos not only of people but also of animals. It was extremely well received and from that project I got a call (a few years later) from Animal Planet to photograph dogs for an AKC dog competition poster campaign. Just shows that being consistent with promos really works. Since that shoot was taking place in NYC, I do think moving here did play a small role in getting that assignment. I'm a big believer in "you're only as good as your last shoot." Thankfully, I was asked to shoot three more assignments for Discovery, which eventually led me to this dog breed assignment.

And as far as how this particular assignment came to pass, Keith said, Beth Caldwell, Animal Planet's online photo editor, envisioned this shoot about two years ago. The assignment was to take portraits of all 164 sanctioned AKC dog breeds. We were only able to get 140 during the August shoot and will be scheduling an additional shoot later this fall to finish the project. The main goal of the assignment is to change the look and feel of the dog images on Animal Planet's online breed selector with new images of each breed that better represent their tag line "Animal Planet - Surprising Human." It took Beth about two years to convince Discovery to change the images; about eight months ago she got permission to move forward and asked me if I would like to be a part of the project. From there, it took another four months and countless meetings to get a budget approved and to finalize the concept. Once that was in place, we had to find a dog show where most of the breeds would be present. Our first choice (a three-day dog show in Maryland) was confirmed for July, but cancelled at the last minute. After another extensive search we found a five-day competition in Virginia in early August that met our needs.



Komondor, © Keith Barraclough

I asked Keith how he had approached this shoot. Did he have to do or plan things differently, or was he fortunate enough to be able to simply “do his thing?” Also, what were the most challenging or difficult aspects of the project? I pretty much had creative license to do anything I wanted. I knew the concept was to photograph the dogs' personalities, but how I did that was completely up to me. I expected this to be challenging, but I didn't anticipate how difficult it would be to get the dog owners and handlers to agree to have their dogs photographed.

The organizers of the event sent out email announcements telling all the participants that Animal Planet would be at the event to photograph dogs. Animal Planet made banners and flyers to post around the venue. In addition, my assistant and Beth worked the venue reminding the handlers and owners we were there. Other challenges included finding a venue and once there, finding and getting all the dogs on set. Finding a Labrador retriever or a German Shepherd was fairly easy. The rare dogs (e.g. an Xolo or Puli) were obviously more difficult. But, with the help of countless dog owners and handlers who knew many key dog owners, we were able to photograph many more than we would have doing this alone. The most challenging aspect, however, was taking the photos. The smaller breeds had so much energy they wouldn't sit still; some of the larger ones had their own challenges keeping focused or becoming skittish when the strobes fired. Trying to make all the breeds look attentive with personality took time and patience. Since we only had a few minutes with each, every shot counted. We came up with many "inventive" ways to get the dogs to sit still or to have them look in a certain direction (e.g. squeaky toys, throwing food in a certain direction or having a dog in heat on the set - yes we really did that)!

I also asked him how much his being a dog-lover and dog-owner himself help in the process? Having knowledge of what you are shooting is always key to a successful shoot and owning a dog certainly helped a lot in this case. Understanding how dogs think and react in certain situations helps. Also, having a lot of patience helps! I also have to make mention here that his assistant for this assignment was in fact, his wife, Kate, who worked for many years for an organization that donates fully trained psychiatric service dogs, trained by prison inmates, to veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have returned from tours of duty with post-traumatic stress disorder. So it was a great opportunity for the dog-loving couple to work together on this job.

And of course I wanted to hear some of the funnier moments because judging from my conversations with him, there were plenty! There were so many funny moments it would be impossible to tell them all here. Let's just say that the movie "Best In Show" rings true! One particularly funny instance happened when we were photographing a male Miniature Pinscher that would not sit still and focus. Another owner had a female Pinscher wrapped in a towel (at the time, I wasn't sure what the towel was for.) The owner sat next to me holding out her dog towards the male on set. The male dog immediately stopped jumping around and focused on the female. The owner yelled, repeatedly, "Look, we're teasing him with the bitch!" The female was in heat: hence the towel. She repeated it numerous times, right in my ear. Amazingly, this worked and I got many great images of a very attentive and expressive dog! Other memorable moments? Being pelted by semi-wet pieces of liver that the owners threw in my direction to get the dog's attention (however, some didn't have very good aim and hit me instead of throwing it towards the camera.) Having the owner of a very nervous and jumpy toy poodle hold him by the legs so that I could get a few shots as he thrashed around.

(It was actually quite funny to see him trying to get loose.) More often than not, it was the owners who were the funniest. Ranging from obsessive compulsive to nonchalant, they kept us very entertained with their brushing and grooming and endless stories (never ask a dog owner about their dog)!

I asked Keith if he had always photographed animals, or was this something new for him? I pretty much knew the answer, but I wanted the readers to hear it! I did not become a photographer to shoot animals. There have been past assignments where I did photograph animals (for a magazine), but it is not the bulk of my work. In the past year I have been shooting more for Animal Planet, which obviously concentrates on animals. It does seem to be a niche for which I am becoming known, and I don't mind that at all. I was curious as to what made him become a photographer in the first place? I never wanted to be a desk person and I never wanted to concentrate solely on one subject. I really enjoy learning about everything. Photography allows me to study and learn about so many interesting things. In one week I can take photos of a celebrity, dog breeds, and then travel to Chicago to shoot for my stock archive. All the while, I am learning about someone, what kind of characteristics are in a certain dog breed or the specific architectural style of a city. Never a dull moment!



Blue Kerry Terrier, © Keith Barraclough

And here are my **ChatterDozen** quick fire questions with Keith's responses:

- 1) What would you do if you weren't a photographer? **Either an astronomer, a marine biologist or I would love to be a producer for 60 Minutes.**
- 2) Who (dead or alive) do you admire? **Timothy O'Sullivan, a photographer from the 1800's. I admire his tenacity and that he had to go to such extremes to take such beautiful photos of the west.**
- 3) What was the last movie you saw? **Woody Allen's "Midnight In Paris"**
- 4) What inspires you? **Beautiful architecture, Roman sculptures - most anything with lines and curves, a sweeping landscape (but not a sunrise or sunset)! I don't keep a written journal, but I do keep a journal of photographs and quotes or sayings that inspire me.**
- 5) What is your favorite food? **Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding!**
- 6) What is your favorite animal? I bet it's "dog!" **Yes it would be a dog. Hard to say what breed though, but it would be on the larger side.**
- 7) What is your favorite color? **Green. It is all around us but comes in so many shades. I love all the shades nature produces.**
- 8) What is your favorite day of the week, and why? **Monday. It always feels like a new/fresh start.**
- 9) What 3 words best describe your photography? **Personality, emotion, style**
- 10) If you could be born in another period of history, when would that be and why? **1940-50's. I love their outlook on life - anything was possible.**
- 11) If you could get on a plane tomorrow, perhaps to somewhere you have never been to before, where would you fly to and why? **India. I love the colors and their culture really fascinates me.**
- 12) If I handed you an Oscar for photography, whom would you be thanking in your acceptance speech? **All the typical people – my parents and Kate (my wife), for all of their support - I've taken so much advice from so many people it would be difficult to single out one or two. I would probably thank myself for listening and taking advantage of their advice, but not admit to that in public.**

View more of Keith Barraclough's work at his site at www.keithbarraclough.com and see his blog at keithbarracloughblog.com.



French Bulldog, © Keith Barraclough

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