



ILLUSTRATION: MITCH BLUNT

When Uggie (the Jack Russell terrier that saved the day in the film *The Artist*) appeared onstage at the Academy Awards in February, it was, in a sense, a canine coup. Less than two weeks prior, a spokesperson for the film said that Uggie had “not been asked to appear at the Oscars”. When the dog failed to walk the red carpet, it seemed as if it would indeed be a canine shut-out. But Uggie mania (the Consider Uggie Facebook campaign to add the dog as a Best Supporting Actor nominee garnered nearly 17,000 ‘likes’)

must have softened the Academy’s stance. As the film’s producers, director, and cast took the stage to accept the Best Picture Oscar, Uggie was right there among them, sporting an 18-carat gold bone bow tie.

The very next day, canines scored another not-so-dissimilar victory in the city of Los Angeles. Department of Public Health Director Dr. Jonathan Fielding issued a decree, effective immediately, that dogs

OUR MAN IN LOS ANGELES

LA LOVES DOGS, BUT IS THIS CITY OF CANINE LOVERS GOING TOO FAR?

Rachel B. Levin is a writer based in Los Angeles. Her website is: www.rachelbethlevin.com

could now dine amid their owners on outdoor restaurant patios. Old rules had banned dogs from any patio that was enclosed by a fence or other barrier, though dogs were previously allowed to sit near sidewalk tables. Under the new rules, dogs earned a proper place at the outdoor table – not insignificant, considering that LA’s climate makes Al fresco dining possible year round.

Taken together, these four-legged triumphs point to the trend of expanding dogs’ rights in Los Angeles, a city that is a hardcore dog-loving town. Increasingly, dogs are entering into social and leisure territory here once reserved only for humans.

CALLING HUMAN COMPANIONS DOG ‘OWNERS’ IS CONSIDERED BLASPHEMY

Aside from the doggie yoga classes, doggie spas, doggie bakeries and doggie birthday parties, dogs in Los Angeles are now surfing, dancing and partying alongside their owners. Or, rather, their guardians. Calling human companions ‘owners’ is considered blasphemy in the most dog-sympathetic circles in town.

Even the County seems to have jumped on the dog-booster bandwagon. Fielding provided no health rationale for his sudden decree; instead, he cited the benefit for businesses to attract dog-loving customers, which assumes they are in the majority.

There are numerous reasons why Los Angeles fosters so much puppy love. Many point to its expansive

outdoor opportunities, from the foothills to the beach, where dogs make natural companions. LA’s sprawl allows for big yards, large dog parks, and landscaped neighbourhoods fit for canine enjoyment. But the city’s social quirks are perhaps even more relevant than its outdoor assets.

In a place where, stereotypically, no one ever walks, the obligation to walk the dog coaxes Angelenos to be social animals. It provides a rare opportunity for car-addicted residents to encounter one another in the street. Many report that owning a dog has allowed them to cultivate a neighbourhood community that they wouldn’t have otherwise.

But even with supportive neighbours, Angelenos can sometimes be a lonely bunch. The single, childless creative types who flock here to make it in the entertainment industry are often disconnected from family networks and, as actors and filmmakers, prone to fragile egos. Dogs provide both a steady source of unconditional love and an ego boost in the form of “parental” pride (not “Isn’t my kid amazing?” but “Isn’t my dog amazing?”).

So it’s no wonder that dogs are gaining increasing rights and privileges in this town, or that the Best Picture award went to a movie in which a dog rescued a down-on-his-luck film star from certain death.

That’s not to say there aren’t doggie detractors among the LA ranks. Sure, there are those who would prefer not to be exposed to the sounds, and smells of dogs while dining al fresco. Online comment threads on the topic of the new patio laws drew plenty of complaints. But like Uggie in *The Artist*, their protests seem to amount to nothing more than a silent bark. ■

TWITTER PITCH

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London’s Natural History Museum is a treasure in every way. Join us for updates on our science, our collections and all our activities. [@NHM_London](https://twitter.com/NHM_London)

FIELD MUSEUM

With 4.6 billion years of history under one roof, Chicago’s Field Museum is your passport to travel around the world and back in time. Start discovering now! [@fieldmuseum](https://twitter.com/fieldmuseum)

AMNH

The American Museum of Natural History in New York City is one of the world’s preeminent scientific and cultural institutions. [@AMNH](https://twitter.com/AMNH)

MUSEUM OF NATURE

The Museum of Nature is Canada’s national natural sciences and natural history museum. [@MuseumofNature](https://twitter.com/MuseumofNature)

MUSEUM NATURALIS

LiveScience reflects the essence of the collections and research of NCB Naturalis, the Netherlands Centre of Biodiversity Naturalis and museum of natural history. [@museumnaturalis](https://twitter.com/museumnaturalis)

