

# Lion Spirit

BY ALICE BIXLER



Like its mythical counterpart, the majestic Chinese Foo Dog protects home and hearth.

If you've ever noticed the formidable statues outside Chinese restaurants or in museums or art galleries you probably wondered if they were supposed to be lions, dogs or mythical creatures. The correct answer is all of the above.

The statues, known as Foo Dogs (also called Fu or Fu Dogs), are supposed to resemble lions (animals sacred in Buddhism), as well as guard dogs. However, there were no lions in China, so artists used their imagination when they depicted them, and no one would criticize their accuracy adding a touch of canine features to their imaginary lions and a few creative touches, they created Foo Dog sculptures.

Generally portrayed in a protective posture, the Foo Dog was believed to ward off demons and evil spirits. Foo Dogs were often presented in pairs, with the male's paw on a globe representing the world and the female protecting a puppy.

#### The real thing

In their early days, a thing as a living breathing Chinese Foo Dog that shares its name

with the mythical creature? Definitely some historians believe hunting dogs from Scandinavia and northern Asia were brought to China by nomads and crossed with the Chow Chow. Others attribute their beginnings to crossings between the Shagpilek wolf and the Chow Chow. In either instance, the Chow was one of the progenitors, as evidenced in the Foo Dog's appearance.

A dog of the working class, the Foo Dog earned its keep by hunting. In time, their present owners discovered the versatile nature of the breed and also used them as herders, sled dogs and guard dogs.

During the Yü dynasty (280 to 420 A.D.), the educated classes of China took notice of Foo Dogs. They thought the dogs had supernatural powers that allowed them to fend off harmful demons, and protect owners and dwellings. Because the dogs couldn't be on the job around the clock, people used the symbolic statues for protection. In addition to its prestige, the breed was adopted as the mascot and symbol of the Tong, an association in China believed to be the world's oldest secret society.

The origin of the Foo-Dog's name is up for debate. Some believe it comes from its Chinese name for *Baofu*. Others think it came from the ancient city of Fuzhou in Southeast China, which is now known as Minhou. Foo Dog was not the only name bestowed on the breed. Over the years, it has been known as the Temple Forest Dog, the Sacred Dog of Sinking, the Celestial Dog, the Dragon Dog, the Happiness Dog and the Chess Hurling Dog.

When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the government imposed a heavy tax on dog ownership and eventually banned breeding altogether. Not only was it illegal to import dogs, but even keeping native breeds was against the law. Dog lovers in Hong Kong and Macao managed to obtain and preserve Chinese dogs from remote villages in South China, but several native breeds faced extinction.

It was up to dog devotees in Europe and North America to establish Chinese breeds in Western civilization. The Chow Chow and Pekingese were already established in the United States, but the Shar-Pei and Chinese Crested still had an uphill battle. The Foo Dog was lost in the shuffle because many people thought it was a Chow cross. However, the Hong Kong-based Chinese Foo Dog Club of China was established and the breed was recognized by the Hong Kong Kennel Club. Since then, the breed has slowly gained recognition worldwide.

## Introduction to the United States

Bruce Teas of Blooming Prairie, Minn., introduced the Foo Dog to the United States in 1981. He acquired his initial dog from a Chinese-American member of the Hong Kong Kennel Club and started the Chinese Foo Dog Club of America in 1992.

Impressed by the breed's beauty and superior intelligence, Teas promoted the Foo Dog by traveling to dog shows and exhibitions to introduce the handsome canine to American dog enthusiasts. As a result, there are now 129 Chinese Foo Dogs in the United States, and the breed club has a dozen active members.

## Its own type

Chinese Foo Dogs come in three sizes. The Toy version may be a maximum of 10 inches tall at the withers and weigh up to 20 pounds. The Miniature ranges from more than 10 inches up to 13 inches, and weighs 21 to 30 pounds. The Standard is taller than 13 inches and weighs more than 31 pounds, with balance being most important.

Possessing many of the features of the typical Northern or spitz breeds, the Foo Dog is compact and square in profile.

The muzzle and skull of the breed, wedge-shaped head are equal in length and joined by a clearly delineated stop. The relatively small, rounded ears are set high and carried over. The medium, almond-shaped eyes are dark brown in color, and project an inquisitive and energetic expression. Light wrinkles may appear around the eyes, like in



The breed's dark brown eyes convey inquisitive and alertness.

accordance, the Chow Chow, the Foo Dog may have a blue-black tongue and mouth, although a pink tongue is also acceptable. Strong, white teeth must be a minimum of seven-eighths the size of the jawbone.

The muscular, medium-length neck has a slight arch and a fold of loose skin on the throat. Known as the mane, or necessary fold, the extra skin was believed to offer protection to the dog's jugular vein. The neck

descends into a compact, robust body with a deep and moderately broad chest well-sprung ribs and short, firm and wide hips. Muscular forequarters blend into straight, medium-length legs with upright pasterns.

The hindquarters feature broad thighs and moderate angulation at the ribs and hock joint of the hind legs. Bound to slightly oval paws are protected by thick pads. The high-set tail is curled and carried over the back.

A double-coated breed, the Foo Dog wears an off-standing outer coat of straight, coarse weather-resistant hair. The undercoat is soft, dense and woolly. A relatively short outer coat is known as the plush coat; the longer variety is termed a rough coat. In either instance, the coat is smooth and short on the head and front of the legs. The longest hair is found on the neck, chest, buttocks, back of the legs and under the tail, although remaining loose hair from the bottom of the paws is permitted, as other clipping or trimming is allowed for the show ring.

There's a wide choice of color in the breed. Black, black and tan, fawn, brown and blue cream and white faces, orange, all shades of red, white, and waltzy are all acceptable. Limited white markings are allowed.

Unlike the Chow's traditional wild-pelt, the Foo Dog exhibits a smooth, sleek, compatible for working, hunting, agility and other athletic endeavors.

## Good with children

Think of the Foo Dog as a garden toy dog. An excellent companion for children,

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for breeders can accept the enthusiastic advances of an inexperienced child with aplomb. Fox Dogs are dignified, calm and generally quiet. Devoted and affectionate with family and friends, they can be reserved and suspicious of strangers.

Usually docile, the Fox Dog will not hesitate to defend itself and show its teeth if a threat demands action. Extremely trainable, this hardy, energetic dog is ready and able to try a



Although the dog may have blue-tinted regions, pink is also an acceptable color.

variety of activities. Trues describes the Fox Dog as "the perfect child's teddy bear and a domestic, intelligent companion for adults."

### A multi-purpose dog

"Versatile" is the best description of the Fox Dog, which has been used for hunting, guarding and even pulling sleds. With their intelligence, trainability and devotion, the Fox Dog should be a natural fit for a variety of activities, such as agility, obedience and rally. "An all-purpose dog with a high degree of loyalty and obedience, the Fox Dog is just as versatile today as it was thousands of years ago," Trues says. 🐾

Her other judges for the AKC, ISU, AUSA, Great Danes and WUSA. She breeds and sells her breeds in California, Nevada and Florida.



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