

BUT FIRST ...

The View from Here

Death takes a holiday: pet cloning is the next best thing to reincarnation



BY HOLLY PETERSON

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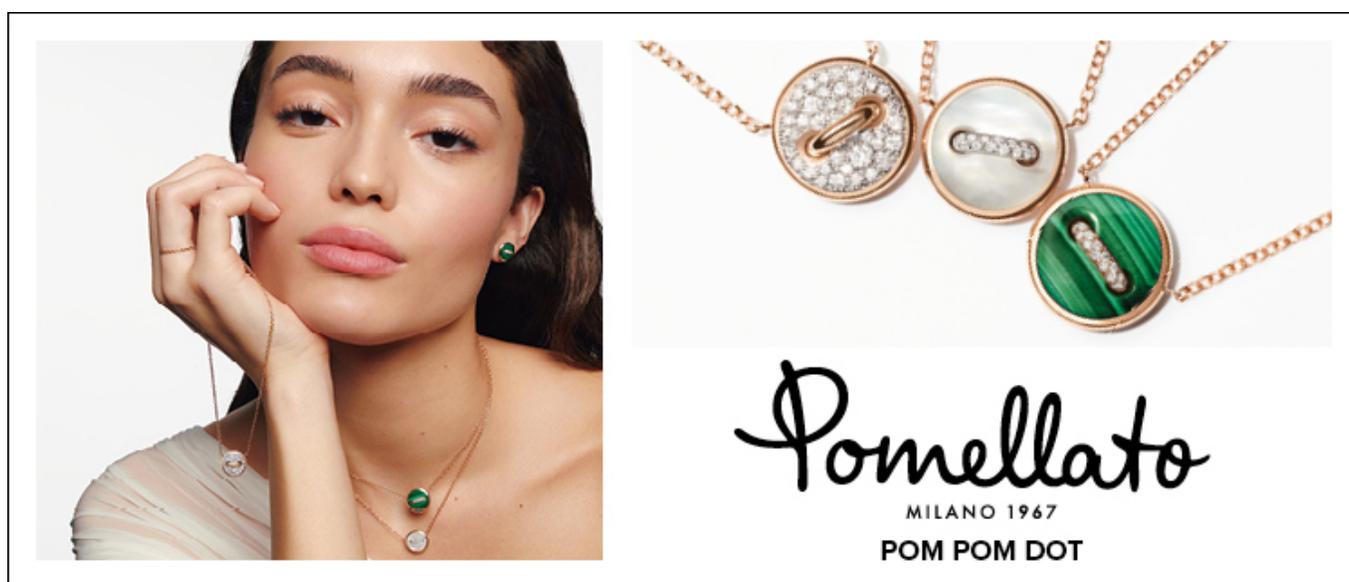
READING TIME: 7 MINUTES



Something in the way she moved attracted him like no other Maltipoo. “We

called Annie’s torso dance the ‘Wiggle Waggle,’” George Spartalis recalls with sorrow of his now deceased Maltese-poodle mix.

Upon Annie’s death, Spartalis, a retired truck driver, says the pain was unbearable. “I was so devastated. I got online. I don’t know what I was looking for, but I was thinking I was gonna find a direct number to God, you know?” Tapping into that American can-do spirit, Spartalis whipped up a plan: *Have the Maltipoo cloned*. “Annie 2 is the same as she was before. I mean, exactly. I think she is Annie 1 come back to life. That’s what I really believe.”



Who can blame the enterprising Spartalis for confusing the dead and the living? Cloning, after all, is the closest thing to reincarnation. Think of the copy as an identical twin of the first animal, just born later in time.

Barry Diller was ahead of the pet-lovers pack, as he seems to be in most fields, when he cloned his Jack Russell terrier, more than a decade ago. Barbra Streisand chronicled her puppy clones, Miss Violet and Miss Scarlett, in her memoir. And Argentinean president Javier Milei recently moved into the country’s official residence, Quinta de Olivos, with five 200-pound cloned mastiffs, four of whom are named after renowned economists. Bruce Busbice, of A&E’s *Duck Dynasty* and *Country Bucks* fame, added Southern spice to the mix by naming his new cloned

hunting dog George Cloney.

Since scientists cloned a sheep to produce Dolly, in 1996, they have cloned 22 breeds of mammals for research, commercial agriculture, sports, and in the case of pets: pure emotion. Companies such as Viagen Pets, in Texas, and Sooam Biotech, in Asia, have cloned all types of pets, from frogs to ferrets since 2005.

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Pomellato
MILANO 1967

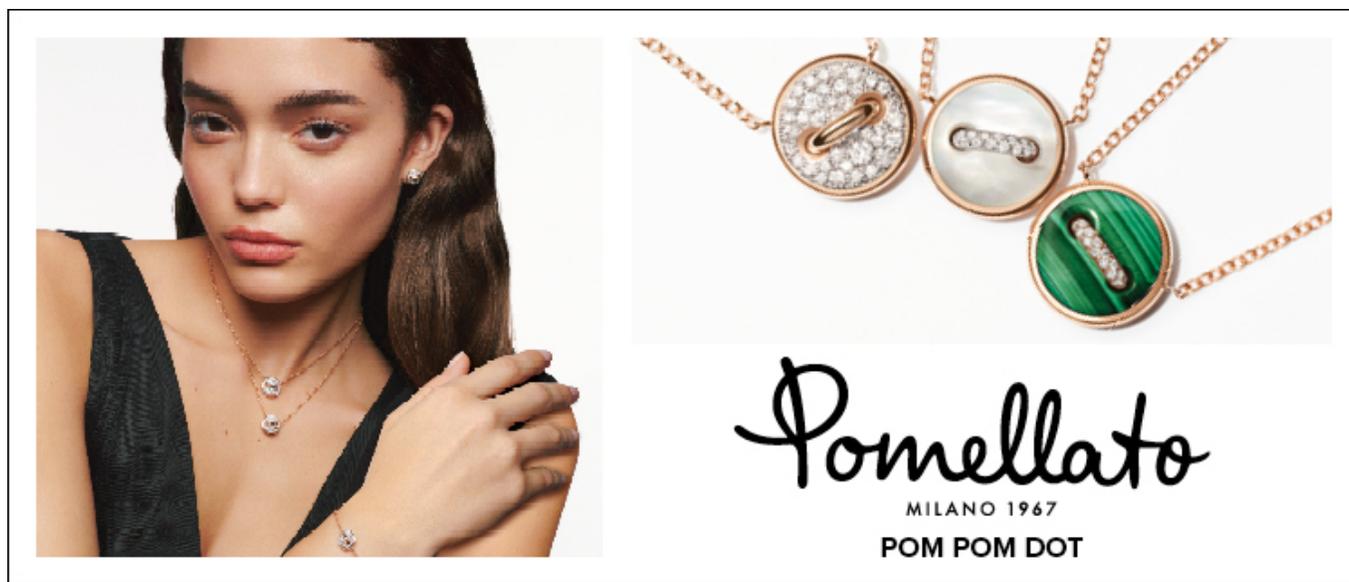
Americans of varied incomes have borrowed or drained their savings to rustle up \$50K to get a live, genetic replica of their favorite furry loved ones. Ron Gillespie, president of Perpetuate Inc., the world’s first genetic-preservation company for pets, is seeing an uptick in harvesting DNA cell lines needed for cloning.

Sometimes, owners clone pets while the original is still alive, in order to have a spare ready to go. The varied reasons driving ordinary people to do this have more twists and turns than the frenetic wagging of a puppy's tail.

On the macro level, cloning fits into the modern American psyche. Our penchant for instant gratification requires denying the inevitable, apparently including not just loss but death. If a pet dies, and the technology exists, why not replace Rover precisely *as he was*?

Here's how puppy-lovers cheat death: Scientists first take DNA from a skin sample of a live pet or one who has died within a 48-hour deadline. They create a cloned embryo by replacing the nucleus from a random donor egg with your pet's DNA. Add jolts of electricity, and the resulting healthy embryo starts dividing. Place it into a surrogate, and presto chango (or same-o, in this case)—an exact genetic copy of the first pet is born around 60 days later.

Though the success rates worldwide are impossible to calculate, Viagen alone has cloned more than a dozen species and hundreds of healthy puppies and kittens, not to mention an endangered Przewalski's horse for the San Diego Zoo.



For most large-scale operations that have cloned animals, profit is at play. Farmers

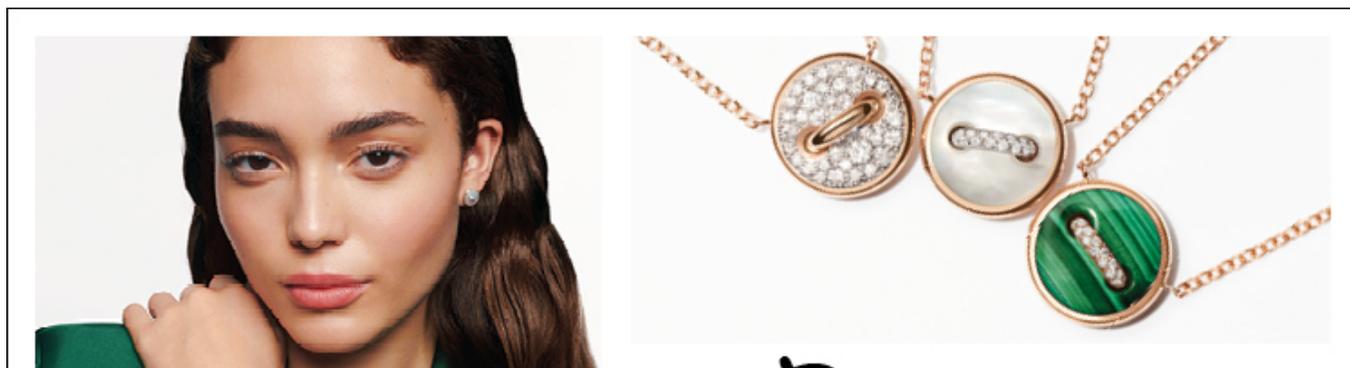
clone livestock to produce the best products, and polo players make carbon copies of their fastest ponies. Nacho Figueras, the most recognizable polo player in the world and former face of Ralph Lauren, argues the reasons run deeper: “It’s more sentimental than scientific,” he says. “For me, it’s about keeping these legends of the sport alive.”

Yet, the mere mention of cloning invites controversy. In a May 2023 Gallup poll, 61 percent of the people surveyed disapproved of animal cloning.

Animal activists deplore cloning’s use of the “canine underclass” caged in labs and forced to be surrogates, while PETA has declared that “cloning is a horror show: a waste of lives, time and money.”

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“It makes me want to pull my hair out,” says bioethicist Jessica Pierce, of the University of Colorado, who points out that one healthy clone can take one try or as many as a hundred shots with surrogate wombs. “We are in the midst of a global crisis where people and dogs and every species are suffering from heat and storms, and we are in a fragile situation, and people are cloning hamsters.... What are your priorities? What the hell are you doing?” Many concur with Pierce and believe it’s immoral to exploit lab animals to serve as unwitting surrogates and egg donors.





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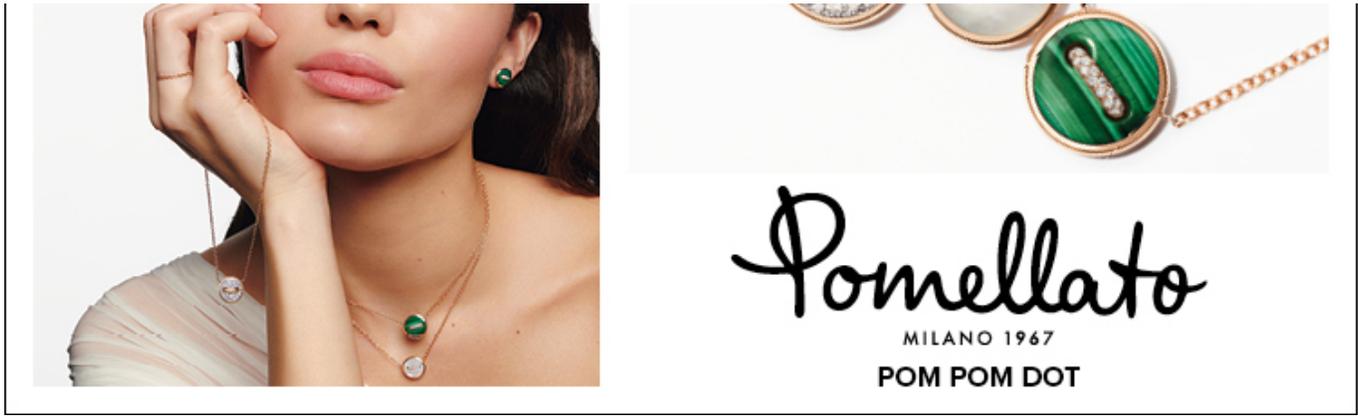
People can criticize the practice till the cloned cows come home, but it is legal in America and many places abroad. Cloning humans is illegal in more than 40 countries and is the third rail of bioethics—and we believe (with no way to confirm) that no one has ever successfully cloned a human being.

Let's not even go there. Oh, hell, let's go there for a moment: imagine meeting your identical twin who is 30 years younger than you. Or stranger still, imagine a mom giving birth to herself. Forget I.V.F. or our now commonplace ability to pick genders. “Why don't I just make me?” would be the apotheosis of narcissism.

For now, people who openly clone pets have reasons to counter the wails of the seemingly more rational animal-rights activists. “It can make a family feel closer,” maintains Gillespie. “A client in Michigan with a daughter who passed away cloned her dog as a reminder. And that's not frivolous in their mind or mine. It can give more quality to a longer life.”

“I could have lost a family member and been better after she was gone. It's not nice to say, but that's how I felt losing Peanut,” says West Westmoreland, a retired contractor, of his beloved dachshund. He had a motorcycle accident and broke his neck in four places, resulting in PTSD. “Peanut could tell if something was happening with my PTSD, get in my face, and kinda say, ‘Calm down. Everything's cool.’ And the new Peanut understood my PTSD episodes from day one. We have four other dogs, and Peanut 2 does not let me out of her sight. If I go to the garage for five minutes, she looks at me like, ‘Where the hell have you been?’”





Tammy, who did not want her last name used in order to protect her privacy, made two clones of her cat Jack while he was alive. She has worked as a veterinary technician and owned or taken in at least 40 felines in her lifetime. She said bluntly, “I don’t give a shit what people say about what I want to do.”

Some clones look alike and behave the same way, and others behave differently but look alike. But Tammy finds her cat’s clones uncannily similar across the board, if not downright bizarre. “Most cats hate cars. Like the original cat, the clones love cars, boats, and motorcycle rides in my backpack—no fear from day one. And also, just like Jack, they love floating around in their life vests in the pool.”

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This literal copycat craze is not a uniquely American phenomenon. The Reproductive Biotechnology Center, in the U.A.E., clones, among other animals, camels. “One sheikh was so sad when his pet camel died that he called me in the middle of the night and said, ‘Please, we need to do something,’” says Dr. Nisar Ahmad Wani, scientific director of the center, in Dubai. He made three clones for this client. “The sheikh told me his first pet camel used to roll down in the dirt after

taking water. Camels don't do that. And he said, "The three babies do the same thing every time they drink."

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Professionals are in on the practice as well. Joshua Morton is a former navy SEAL, and his company, Canine Tactical, is training dogs to go after active shooters alongside elite handlers. He claims, "I swear some of the learned behavior of the original pet is passed in the DNA, and it's fuckin' eerie."

Morton is even cloning his clones. "The puppies who are clones of the clones are more reactive and sensitive to gunfire and are way more intent on finding it, as I taught the first clones to be."

Most pet-lovers interviewed believe their pets had a time and place to live on this earth and could never be copied or replaced. Beth Stern is the well-known ambassador of the North Shore Animal League. She says her heart breaks every time one of her animals leaves her.

She counsels, "I wholeheartedly understand wanting to have the incredible

relationship you experienced before, but realistically, by fostering and adopting and encouraging others to do so, we're honoring the memory of our pets who have passed on by giving a wonderful chance at life to other animals in need." But, she adds, "as much as my heart might break when they leave us, I can't imagine trying to replicate them, because each is irreplaceable."

People offering thoughtful alternatives do so in vain. We've seen years of political polarity solidifying an already inflexible American psyche. Pet owners are a lot more intractable than voters. "I've worked all my life with my money, and I want to die broke and spend it the way I want to do it," says Westmoreland. "Like a tattoo. Hell, I want another one. I'm going to get it." Anyone trying to convince an animal-lover to change is barking up the wrong tree.

Holly Peterson is the author of six books, including [The Manny](#) and [It Happens in the Hamptons](#). She has contributed to The New York Times, the Financial Times, Vogue Living, and numerous other publications

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