

What You Don't Know About...

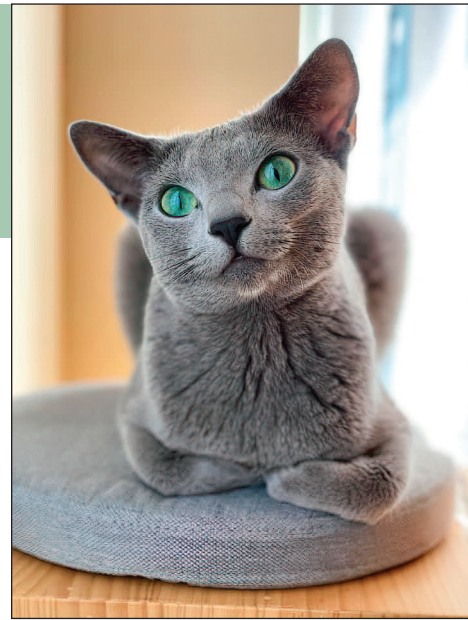
# Russian Blues

## Silver-Tipped Elegance

Candilee Jackson

The statuesque and regal Russian Blue is a standout in any environment. Once you've taken in his elegant structure, the next thing you notice is the amazingly dense, silver-tipped coat, paired with emerald green eyes that look deeply into the souls of admirers. It adds up to a majestic creature definitely worthy of the opulent royal palaces of the czars of Russia.

Gentle cats that are somewhat shy nature around strangers, Russian Blues are devoted to and affectionate with their loved ones. They are very sensitive to their owner's moods, and will greet you at the door, find a quiet seat next to you, or fetch a toy at playtime, somehow knowing instinctively what you want of them. "Fetching" is a favorite pastime for Russians and their owners. However, pull out the vacuum cleaner, and your Russian will quickly find a safer and quieter location. Relatively soft-voiced (except perhaps at mealtime), the Russian Blue appreciates a pat on the head, a win-



dow from which to watch the birds, and, of course, all the comforts of home. Minimal grooming is required: regular nail clipping, good nutrition, an occasional combing, and lots of petting, keep your Russian Blue pet looking spectacular.

### A Little History

Though stories abound, little is known about the actual origins of this breed. "Many believe the Russian Blue is a natural breed originating from the Archangel Isles in northern Russia, where the long winters developed a cat with a dense, plush coat. Rumors also abound that the Russian Blue breed descended from the cats kept by the Russian Czars. Assuming the Russian Blue did migrate from northern Russia, it was likely via ship to England and northern Europe in the mid-1860s." (CFA Breeds)

Russian Blue cats were first shown in 1875 at the Crystal Palace in London. Named "the Archangel Cat," they "competed with all other blue cats. In 1912, the Russian Blue was given a separate class for competition as breeders in England and Scandinavia worked to develop the foundation bloodlines for the contemporary Russian Blue." (CFA Breeds)

The breed was brought to the United States early in the 20th century, but it was not until after World War II that US fanciers "began combining the European bloodlines to produce cats with plush, silvery coats, emerald eyes, and the distinctive profile. From the 1960s, the Russian Blue began gaining popularity and has become a favorite at cat shows and at home." (CFA Breeds)

The YouTube sensation, Nyan Cat, was inspired by a Russian Blue owned by illustrator, Chris Torres. At the time, he was working as a volunteer for a Red Cross promotion, and was part of a group brainstorming ideas for advertising: some on the committee wanted a Pop Tart-like character, somewhat reminiscent of SpongeBob SquarePants, while others wanted a cat. The result was "an Internet-meme of a flying cat-Pop Tart hybrid flying through space, leaving a rainbow trail in its wake." (Fawcett)

### Breed Basics

Sometimes referred to as being "build on the rake," the Russian's back legs are longer than the front, and this feline is built for speed. "The Russian Blue is a sweet-tempered, loyal cat who will follow her owner everywhere, so don't be surprised if she greets you at the front door! While she has a tendency to attach to one pet parent in particular, she demonstrates affection with her whole family and demands it in return. It's said that Russian Blues train their owners rather than the owners training them!" (Hills Pet)

These cats are highly intelligent animals and require regular physical and mental stimulation, so it's important to give them access to toys at all times. (Hills Pet) Their love of play as well as the hunt keeps Russian Blues motivated so providing a variety of toys, especially interactive ones, is essential.

This is a kitty who does not like change, so establishing routine and a schedule for feeding, playing and napping are "must dos" on an owner's list. A Russian Blue can definitely be used as the family "alarm clock" as this

kitty knows exactly what time everything takes place in her daily routine.

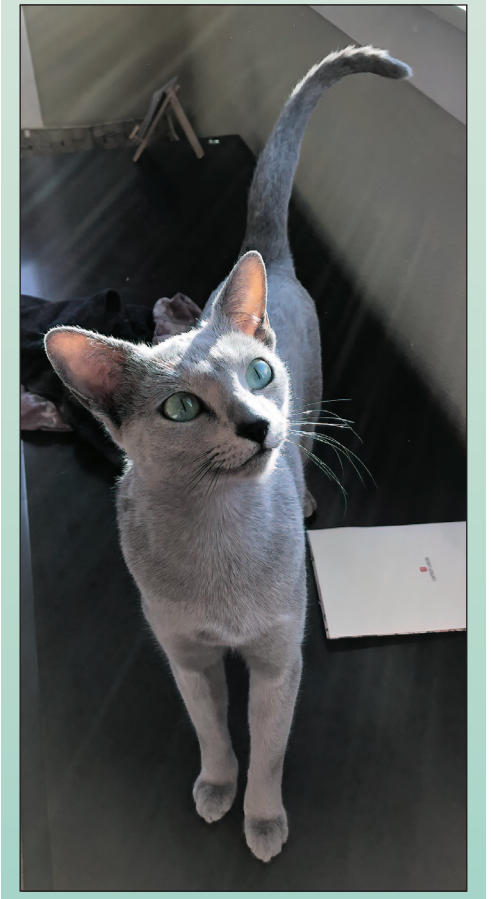
"The Russian Blue is highly intelligent, and has the memory capacity of an elephant; this kitty will remember where every toy, every stolen Christmas ornament and even stored treats are placed throughout the house." (Purina)

### A Breed Council With A Purpose

Annette Wilson, Breed Council Secretary and owner of Wynterwynd Cattery in South Haven, Michigan, was a fount of information, and enlisted the assistance of several Russian Blue breeders and pet owners for e-interviews.

As a novice exhibitor during the summer of 2000, this writer was surprised to learn of the wonderful cohesive bonding of Russian Blue breeders. Finding temperament issues in this feline, breeders set aside competitive mindsets, and gathered facts, figures and behaviorists to solve issues. Since the fancy is all about working together to achieve fun as well as awards, Russian Blue breeders took their knowledge to another level to create a beautiful show cat with a personality and temperament to match.

A breeder who worked through the change in Russian Blue temperament, Ariel Bartelmes, put it this way: "Breeders succeeded in increasing the friendliness in the ring to a great extent, though it is easy to backslide and it is something that has to constantly be watched, bred for very specifically. It took about ten years of breeding in a joint effort by everyone to get the lines happier overall. People chose a friendlier cat over the most



beautiful to breed for future generations, making them nicer in the next generation. =

Owner of Platina Luna Cattery in Greensboro, North Carolina, Teresa Keiger explained: "Oh, yes...breeders do get along well. Like our cats, we can be competitive, but we come together for the betterment of the breed. Or for a good dinner. I maintained a restaurant list in proximity to shows for a while (before Yelp). We track each other down if someone is late for a ring—because that's what you should do."

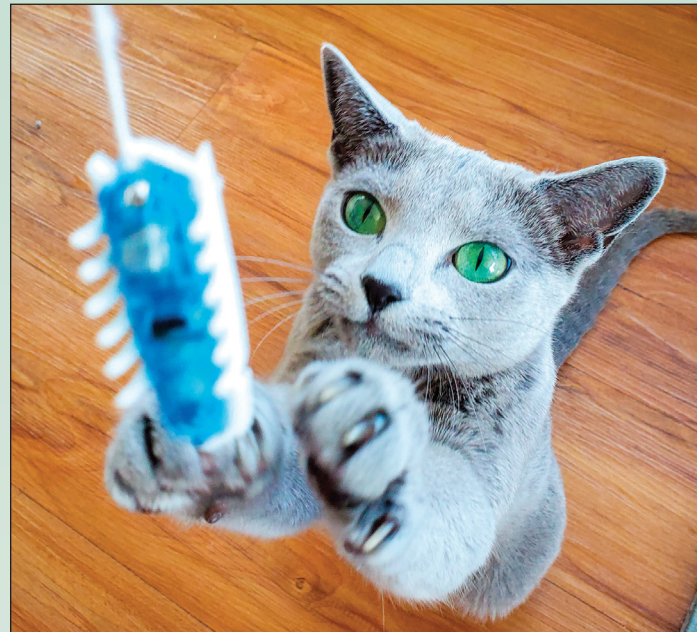
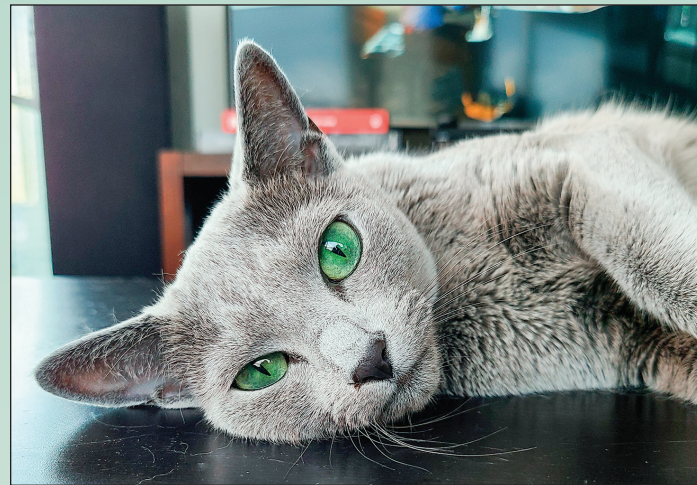
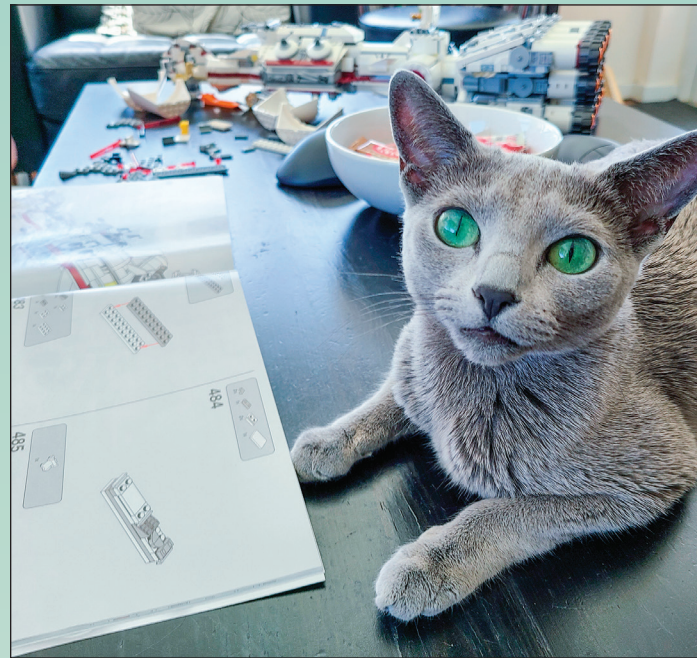
### Living With Russian Blues

We cat folks LOVE Internet sensations, and the Russian Blue crowd has their very own Internet Queen, Teeny Dina! This sweet little girl hails from Seattle, Washington, where she oversees the running of the home and hearth of her "pawrents," who serve as Dina's full time staff. Not only does Dina have a gorgeous website (followers always welcome!), but she also has an active Instacat (Instagram) account as well as a Facebook page with daily posts for her followers who can't wait to see what she is up to next. Breeder Teresa Keiger summed this up best: the various accounts are "a cat meme reposi-



Statuesque and regal (this page)...and complete goofballs (opposite bottom). The many moods of the Russian Blue.





Internet sensation Teeny Dina

tory"! Dina's website masthead says it all: "A retired Russian Blue show cat living my glamorous life in front of the cameras up in the clouds of Seattle, Washington."

Ariel Bartelmes of Shoreline, Washington, owns Sereshka Russian Blue Cattery, and explained life with Russian Blues in this manner: "Life with a Russian Blue is like having a tiny puppy that uses a litter box. They very much are people cats. They need to be in your arms, sleeping on your lap or watching you work. Many enjoy interrupting you to inform YOU who you SHOULD be petting and loving on by rubbing their face on yours, jumping on your shoulders, meowing gently until you pick them up and even reaching up on your legs to ask you to hold them. They are a 'fifty-fifty' cat: they love cuddling and their human time as well as being very spirited and playful. They are a great mix of both a lazy cat and a playful cat. At 2 a.m., it does get a little annoying sometimes, though."

Kris Ning's cattery, WinterIdol, is located in Shanghai, China, and Kris was eager to share her thoughts about her beloved cats. She first saw them in a Japanese magazine, and they reminded her of winter fairies, hence the name of her cattery. "They are a 'blue cat,' but it is a different kind of 'blue' from the other blue cat breeds because the silver tipping on them makes them shine," Kris stated.

"Russian Blues love to spend time with their favorite people, just sitting next to you, watching TV with you, and of course, sharing salmon with you!" Kris continued. "Many people say these cats are very smart, but I prefer to say they are very understanding: they like to spend time understanding people and things, especially understanding what you do and do not like. When I was traveling and not home for a few days, my cats would sleep beside my pillow as if they are waiting for me to come back. When they see me return home, they will run as a rabbit and let me kiss them!"

Mundelein, Illinois, is the home of Naissur Blu Cattery, owned by Dayle Marsh. She acquired her first Russian Blue in 1969 and registered her cattery shortly thereafter.

"What kept me enthralled with the Russian was not its gorgeous silver blue coat, or its emerald green eyes," stated Dayle. "It was the intelligence and the loyalty of the breed. As a child I was raised with a Doberman Pinscher dog. That dog was smart! I can truly say the Russian Blue is the Doberman Pinscher of the cat fancy. I believe if you once gain a Russian's trust you can teach it to do anything you can teach a dog!" she laughed.

Donna Fuller, Tsar Blu Cattery, hails from Hillsborough, California, and was taken to her first cat show by her husband in 1970. "After we had looked at all the exhibits, he eliminated Siamese and Burmese (too noisy), Abyss (too busy), and Persians (too much hair and flat

Editor's Note: Kudos to those who assisted in the launch of this article! Annette Wilson, Breed Council Secretary (Wynterwynd Cattery); Kate Lucas and Ariel Barthelemes (Sereshka Cattery); Shelly Perkins (Starblue Cattery); Yukiko Shimada (Snow Island Cattery); Kris Ning (Winteridol Cattery); Donna Fuller, (Tsar Blue); Barbara Schreck (Tylona Cattery); Teresa Keiger (Platina Luna Cattery); and Dayle Marsh (Nassir Blu Cattery).

face). He selected "...that grey one that looks like he's in charge." A few months later we got a pet and a bit later a breeding girl and that was the beginning of Tsar Blu."

### Swapping "The Cat Did It" Stories

One of the best parts of writing this recurring column is the sharing of great cat stories. Tylona Cattery, owned by Barbara and Tim Schreck, is located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Barbara shared a terrific hotel experience with her Russian Blue show cats. "The three girls we were showing were quite adept at garnering attention in the hotel room when we were out to dinner. They accomplished this by hitting the "emergency button" on the phone in the room, necessitating the front desk to respond and inspect the room. This resulted in an additional charge on our bill; to date none of the three has paid up her share!"

Donna Fuller added an interesting twist to just how smart Russian Blues are. "I have custom-built cages (wood and wire) which came with swivel latches. I added cupboard locks for added security. Several of my cats can open BOTH locks and take a stroll around the cattery. To keep the escape artists confined, I've resorted to putting bungee cords around the doors."

Ariel Barthelmes chimed in, "They love to get into everything and know what everyone else is doing. Do not expect to keep a bathroom door shut without a lock; they open doors, or if they are lazy, will just reach under the door and cry until you open it. Guests should be warned to lock bathroom doors unless they want an RB visit. I once found our RB inside the hamster cage. She opened the top and climbed in and just lay there purring while the hamster thought he was seconds from death. I also had a litter of kittens that were about two months old. I came home from work and they had gotten out of their pen, turned on the radio full blast and were listening to Pink Floyd while playing in the dirt of the jade plant they had thrown on the floor. We tell all our pet people to plan for a two-year-old human child," reported Ariel.

Teresa Keiger has determined that Russian Blues can not be seen in the dark, and their Houdini-like tendencies allow them to hide in plain sight by just sitting very still. "I can say this after tearing apart



a hotel room (including the bed) looking for my girl—only to find her sitting on a chair under a glass table. I swear, they also have mind control skills which allow them to transmit "Nothing to see here. Move along." Their silver-tipped blue coat is the purrfect Harry Potter invisibility cloak!

### A Last Word

The sparkling, silvery blue coat and brilliant green eyes of the Russian Blue draw immediate attention to this shorthaired breed. But Annette Wilson maintains that intelligence, adaptability, playful disposition, playfulness and the breed's determination to find the high points in any room make it a unique and delightful pet for most households.

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