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THESE ELITE \$125,000 GUARD DOGS ARE TRAINED TO DETECT DANGER BEFORE IT HAPPENS



Photo: Ted Wells

Don't think of one of Kim Greene's \$125,000 dogs as a pet, though they're ideal for young families. The shepherd mixes she breeds on a 167-acre ranch in Livingston, Montana are more like personal bodyguards you can keep on call, and on duty, 24/7. Greene's company, Svalinn, specializes in providing personal protection with a twist (and a tail).

It was while living in Kenya with her then-husband that she first stumbled on protection dogs—a common option in the East African capital, and the couple bought one to help guard the family home. She preferred the peace of mind conferred by a dog over a handgun or a security system.

"It works when the power goes off, or when there's no water," Greene tells Robb Report, "And unlike a firearm, it can't be used against you." Greene quickly realized there could be a market Stateside for elite guard dogs like these—and Svalinn was born. Its name is a nod to Norse mythology, where Svalinn was a protective shield, and she stresses that these pups aren't primed to be a personal Cujo. Instead Svalinn's focus is on anticipation rather than aggression.

Firstly, she breeds the dogs for their temperament, crossing German, Dutch and Belgian shepherds: the German bloodline primes them to be good family pets, while the Belgian confers a work ethic and

high tenacity, and the Dutch a little of everything. “We want to ensure the health of the dog long term—purebreds do not hold up in nature, and we’re not trying to get into the Kennel Club,” she says, “Those three lines in general are all highly workable, protective and eager to please their owner.”



Svalinn guard dogs go through two years of training.

Photo: Ted Wells

Once the puppies are born, they begin training at just eight weeks old; it will last for thousands of hours and more than two years. Svalinn’s program is intended to hone both their mental and physical faculties, though it’s the psychological training which truly sets these guard dogs apart. Greene and her team focus on finessing a dog’s ability to discern intent from other humans—for example, by using their ability to read biological rhythms and hormone spikes that might be associated with anger, long before any violence occurs. Of course, these dogs can also attack, if needed, but their prime mission is to help avert and avoid dangers, before they happen. “Aggression is the least important part. You can train any dog in the universe to bite, if necessary, but that is not the appeal of what we do,” she explains, likening her dogs to a special forces operator. “You know the guy—he’s lovable, and volunteering at church, and has perfect manners, but he also has a very deeply ingrained skillset.”

Each Svalinn dog is hand-delivered to clients, so Greene and her team of a dozen or so trainers can spend several days teaching them how to work with it—she likens owning a Svalinn shepherd to learning a new operating system on a computer compared with a conventional canine. Buyers must also commit to annual refresher courses to keep their handling skills primed. There’s no typical owner, either: her dogs live everywhere from the 37th floor of a high rise in the heart of a city to a houseboat. “At the end of the day, technology can fail, but our four-legged security goes with you everywhere—it can sleep in your daughter’s room at night, or travel on your jet with you,” she says. And what about sleeping on the bed? “In my house, there are no dogs on the bed,” she laughs, “But I’d tell you that about 50 percent of our owners end up doing that. Our dogs are stable, social and loving, and they want to be with their family all the time.”

