

The Great Danes' Suits

Playing Cards

By Monica Reifegerste

INTRODUCTION –

Brief Historical Summary of the Breed

They are called Great Danes in English, but *“Germany, not Denmark is his true home, and, since the Franco-Prussian War, Germans have adopted him as their national breed, under the name of the **Deutsche Dogge**.”* (Source: The Great Dane – His Origin – by E. D. Farrar)

The Great Danes' Varieties and their origin:

According to the German breed standard, adopted by the F.C.I. - Fédération Cynologique Internationale - and its member countries, from the historical point of view, originally, *“(...) the term ‘Dogge’ was at first understood to mean a large, powerful dog, not of any particular breed”*, presenting several samples of coat coloring.

*“Later, particular names such as Ulmer Dogge, English Dogge, Great Dane, Hatzrüde (Hunting Dog), Saupacker (boarfinder) and Grosse Dogge (Great Dogge), **classified these dogs according to color and size.***

In the year 1878 a Committee of seven was formed in Berlin, consisting of active breeders and judges with Dr. Bodinus as chairman, which made the decision to classify all the forenamed varieties as ‘Deutsche Doggen’. (Known in English as Great Danes) - Thus the foundation was laid for the breeding of a separate German breed.”

(Source: Deutscher Doggen Club 1888 e.V. - German Doggen Club, registered in 1888 - Breeding /Great Dane Standard)

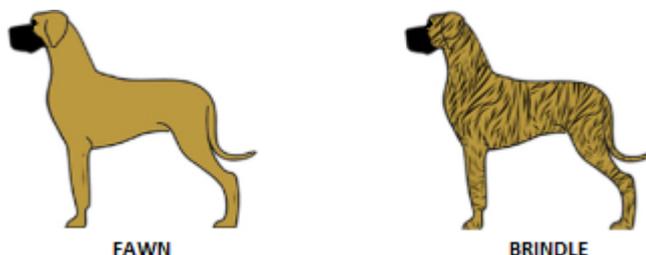
From these various coat color samples, in an effort to determine the colors that should compose the breed, the first official standard was laid down in Germany in 1880 where, from selective breeding programs, three independent and distinct varieties of this breed would consolidate up along with other attributes, established in the 1st Official Standard of the breed at that time and in years to come.

According to the Deutsche Doggen Club (DDC) breeding regulamentation and its official standard, danes are bred in three separate color varieties, and should not be mixed with each other, since this practice promotes endless sampling of coat colors, in detriment of the breed, as it mischaracterizes the color patterns which have been established and consolidated over the years, endangering years and years of selective breeding programs.

UNDERSTANDING THE GREAT DANE COLORS AND PATTERNS

Given these assumptions, when breeding Great Danes, we may obtain different colors and patterns in the offspring out of each of those three breeding strains, as follows:

I - Fawn and Brindle: the offspring may have fawn and / or brindle coat colors.



Fawn: Light gold fawn to deep gold fawn. Black mask desired. Never to be grey fawn, blue fawn or a sooty fawn color. No white markings.

Brindle: Basic color light to deep gold fawn with black stripes as regular and clearly defined as possible, running with the direction of the ribs. Black mask desired. Never with washed-out streaks. No white markings. (Source: DDC/FCI official Great Dane Standard)

In this variety should only be bred FAWN x FAWN; BRINDLE x BRINDLE; or FAWN x BRINDLE.

(See in DDC – Infos zum DDC – Downloads – Zuchtordnung - www.ddc1888.de/fileadmin/downloads/ordnungen/zuchtordnung.pdf)



BLUE



BLUE BRED BLACK

Blue: Pure steel blue, white markings on chest and feet permitted. Never with a fawn nuance or blackish blue colour.

Black: Jet black, white markings on chest and feet permitted. (Source: DDC/FCI official Great Dane Standard)

In this variety only **BLUE x BLUE**; Blue bred **BLACK x Blue bred BLACK**; or **BLUE x Blue bred BLACK** should be bred.

(See in DDC – Infos zum DDC – Downloads – Zuchtordnung - www.ddc1888.de/fileadmin/downloads/ordnungen/zuchtordnung.pdf)

III – Harlequin, Black and Merle: In this last strain, the offspring will have many different color patterns with black, white and various shades of gray that can appear in their phenotype and genotype. All these variables in colors and patterns are present in the gene pool of this variety. The main and basic patterns that happen to appear with those colors in this last variety are shown below:



HARLEQUIN



BLACK



MANTLE BLACK



PIEBALD BLACK (PLATTENHUND)



MERLEQUIN



MERLE



MANTLE MERLE



PIEBALD MERLE

HARLEQUIN: (White with black splashed patches): Basic color pure white, preferably with no ticking. Pure black patches well distributed all over the body, having the appearance of being torn. Grey or brownish patches or nuances of those colors in the black are undesirable as well as blue-grey ticking in the white.

BLACK: Jet black, white markings on chest and feet permitted.

MANTLE BLACK: (“Manteltiger”) in which the black covers the body like a coat (“mantel”) or blanket, and muzzle, throat, chest, belly, legs and tip of tail may be white.

PIEBALD BLACK: with basic white color and large black plates (rounded patches) so called “Plattenhunde”.

MERLE: (“GRAUTIGER”) they are neither desirable nor to be disqualified.

(Source: DDC/FCI official Great Dane Standard)

OBS: BLACK from Blue breeding should not be bred in the Harlequin variety, as well as BLACK from Harlequin breeding should not be bred in the Blue breeding variety." (See in DDC - Infos zum DDC, Downloads, Zuchtordnung -. II Zuchtverfahren, 2nd § °)

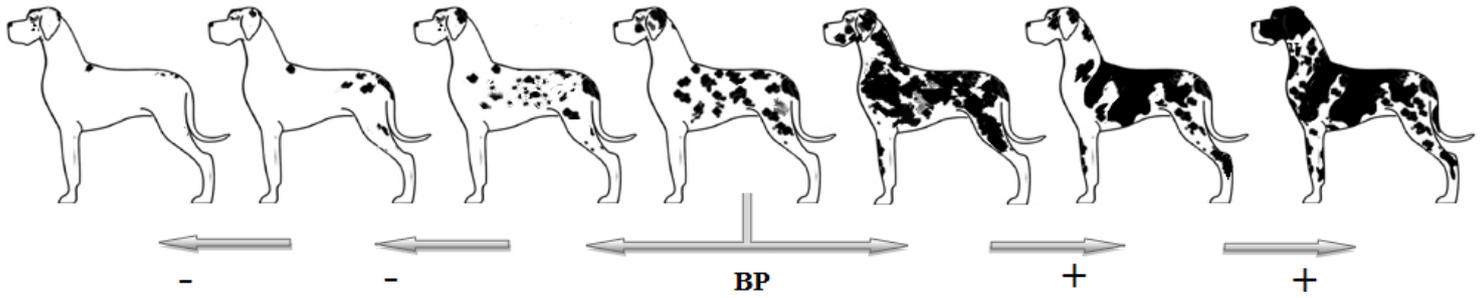
WHAT IS A MERLE?

The coat color known as ‘MERLE’ of the ‘Grey Tiger’ (in German called ‘Grautiger’) is, in fact, a pattern of color in which we find black or dark grey patches over a grayish base color, which can vary from a lighter gray color to a darker grey, or be a brownish grey base color. (In simple words, black or darker grey patches on a gray base color.)

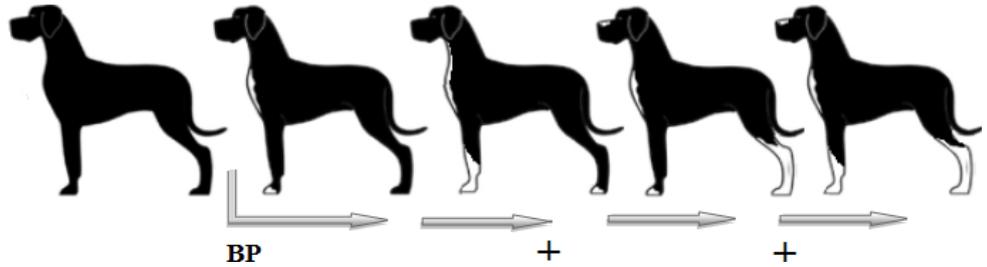


As we can see in the illustrations shown before, for each of the four basic patterns in black and white colors of the first row (Harlequin - Black - Black Mantle – Black Piebald), we can find the corresponding patterns in the second row, but with the colors: merle and white.

In Harlequins: black torn patches irregularly and well distributed (a few merle patches may be present). Here below we can see from heavy to light marked harlequins, where, sometimes, a complete white coat color may appear.

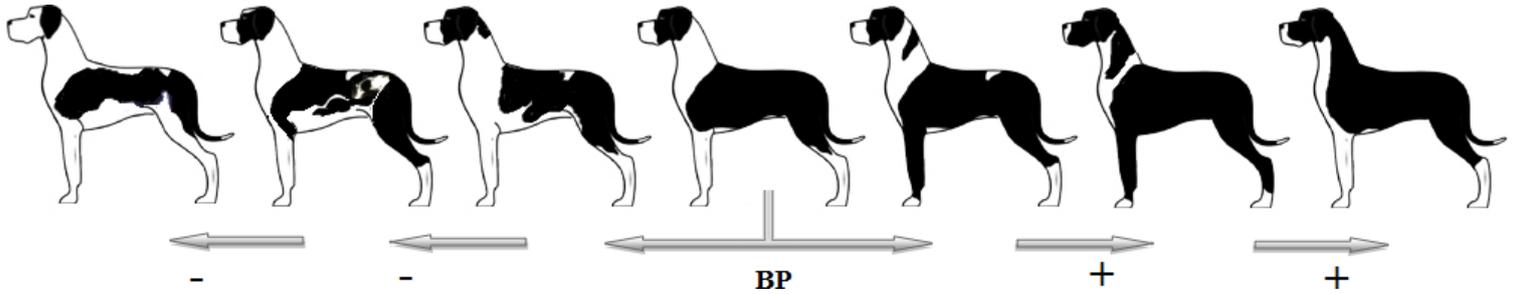


In Blacks: with more or larger markings as desired in the official standard (on chest, feet or muzzle).

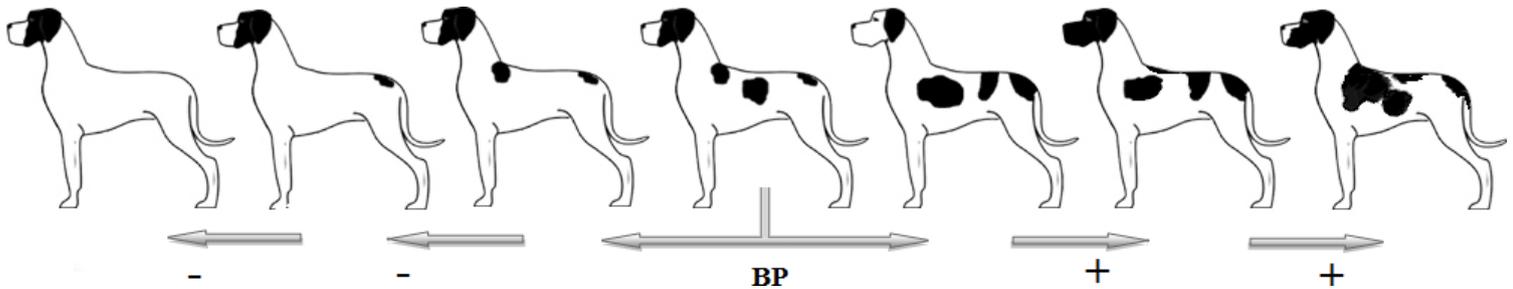


Faulty are nuances of fawn, or brown or bluish black color.

In Mantles:



In Piebalds: markings have sort of rounded well defined edges (like spots) different from harlequins, which have torn, irregular patches.



Many other variations can occur in any of the **eight** basic patterns (BP) of this variety – **Harlequin, Black & Merle** - such as the examples above and sometimes even two different patterns of the same variety, such as a Mantle Dane with some typical harle markings on its head or legs, can be found on the same dog, although those are more rare to occur in this breed.

All those variations that can be observed in these four WHITE and BLACK samples shown above, can also be seen in individuals that are WHITE and MERLE.

As an example:

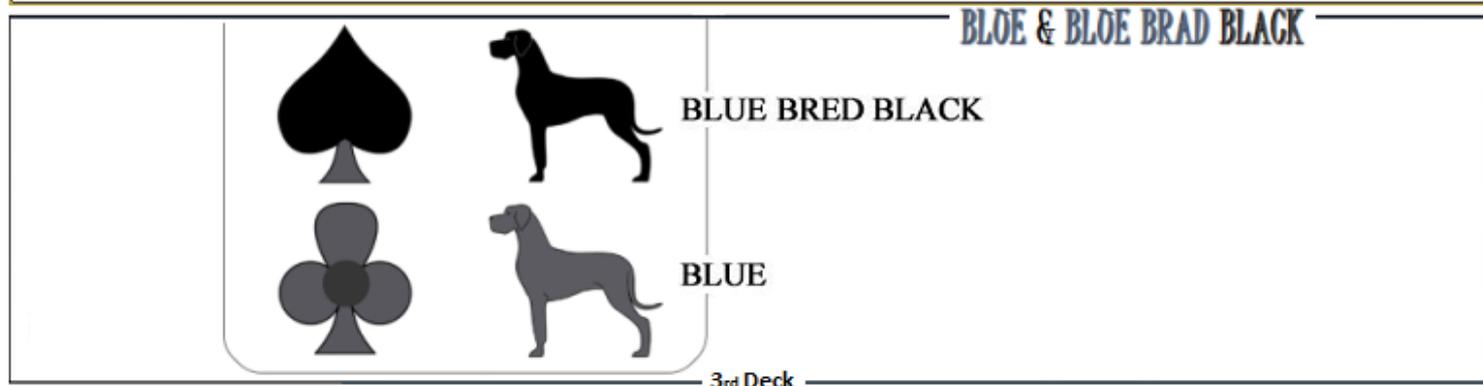
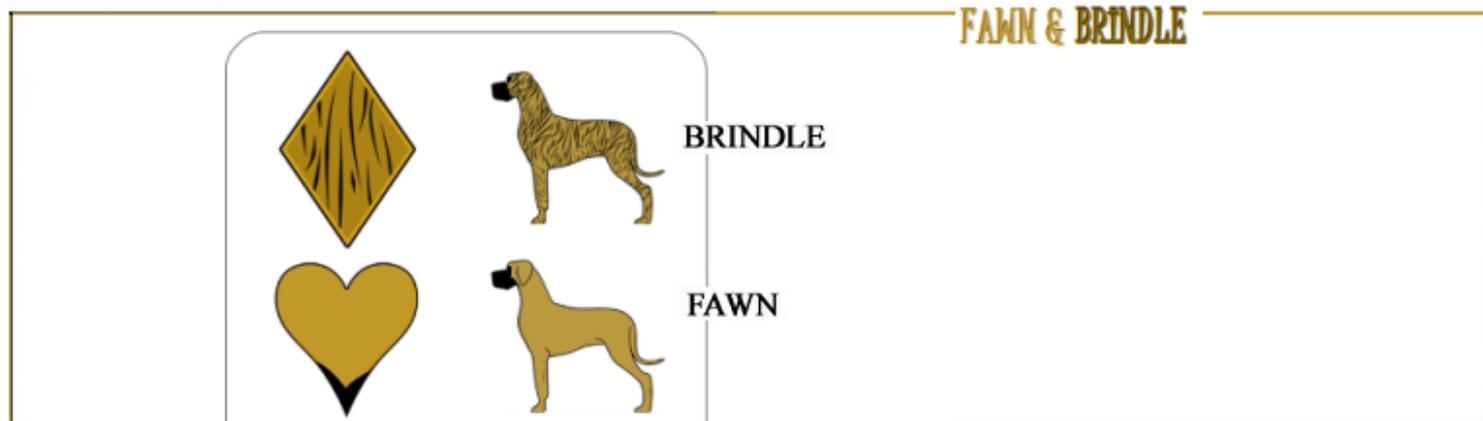
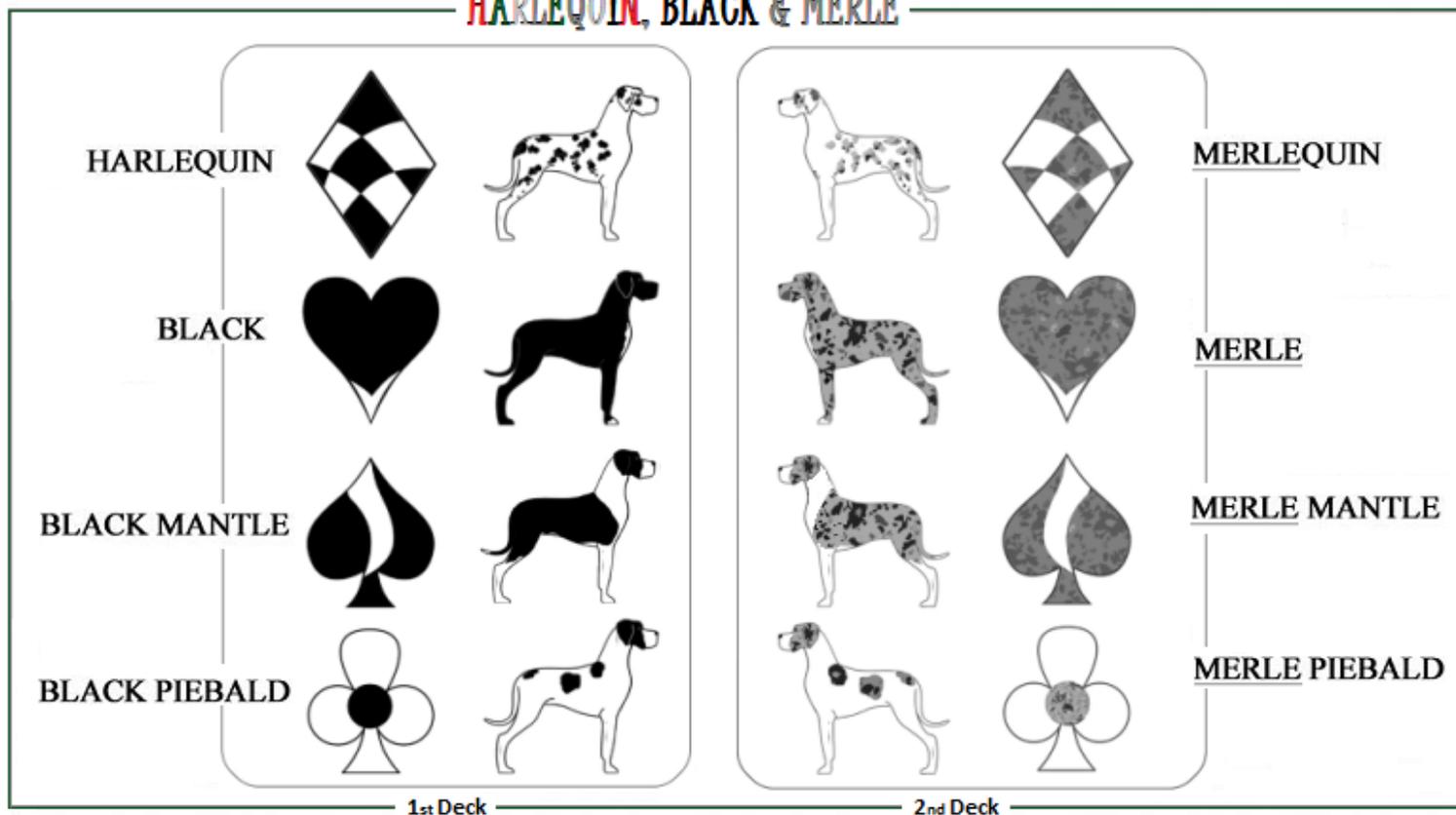
A lightly marked harlequin (nearly all white with very few tiny little black patches) is still a **HARLEQUIN**; In the same way, a lightly marked merle (nearly all white with very few merle patches) is still a **MERLE**, no matter how those patches look like or how they are distributed over the dog's body.

As we can realize, there are many patterns for these three colors - black, merle and white - to be distributed throughout the body of a dog in **this** variety. That in itself should be sufficient reason not to mix different varieties, after all when harlequins, mantles, blacks (out of harlequin breeding) and / or merles are bred with Fawns, Brindles, Blues, (or blue bred Blacks), all kinds of unusual colors and patterns may appear as a result.

In the official German standard, adopted by the F.C.I., those colors resulting from mixed color breeding - between different varieties - are listed under **DISQUALIFYING FAULTS**.

To simplify the understanding and help you to easily identify all the basic colors of the **three separate and independent varieties** of the Great Dane bred, the **Great Danes' Suits Playing Cards** has been created!

HARLEQUIN, BLACK & MERLE



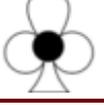
- The first deck has **four suits** representing the **4 basic patterns of colors**: Harlequin, Black, Black-Mantle and Black-Piebald from the **Harlequin, Black & Merle** Family;

- The second deck has **four suits** representing the **4 patterns of colors**: Merlequin, Merle, Merle-Mantle and Merle-Piebald, completing the first Great Dane's family: **Harlequin, Black & Merle**.

- The third deck has **four suits** representing the **two other families** or varieties of the Great Danes' breed and their colors: **Fawn/ Brindle** and **Blue/ Blue bred Black**.

We hope that everyone will have loads of fun playing with **The Great Danes' Suits Playing Cards**, learning more in a playful and entertaining way about this fascinating breed! (A board game about the breed is on the way!)

😊 Here are some hints about the meanings of some **Great Danes' Suits** ... can you guess all the others? 😊

	The black Heart (in a regular card game is red) symbolizes the Black Dane of the harlequin variety/strain. The white marking on the bottom tip of the heart represents the white markings allowed on chest and feet.	
	Spades (in a regular card game is black) represents the other Black Dane, a blue bred Black. The blue foot represents that although he has a black phenotype, he has a "foot" in the blue family, in other words, in his genotype he might have a blue gene from his ancestors.	
	The fawn Heart (in a regular card game is red) symbolizes the FAWN Great Dane of the Fawn & Brindle Variety. The black marking on the bottom tip of the heart represents the desired black mask described in the Standard.	
	The black Spades with the white band in the middle (in a regular card game is all black) represents the white collar of the Mantle Great Dane.	
	Diamonds (in a regular card game is red) represents the HARLEQUIN Great Dane. In fact, we borrowed a piece of a harlequin's trousers, who is known to be a clown which clothes were patched together, to symbolize the black patches over the white coat of the HARLEQUIN Great Dane.	
	Clubs - white with a black solid circle in the center (in a regular card game is all black) represents the typical markings on the Piebald Great Dane's body and head, that is, a white base color with markings that have sort of rounded well defined edges (like spots); the same symbol is used for the Merle-Piebald Dane, but then the circle has the merle color.	

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Some interesting facts about the Great Dane and its color patterns:

- Harlequins can produce Merles, as Merles can produce Harlequins;
- Just as harlequins can produce merles, merles can also produce harlequins, blacks, mantles and piebalds. All these color variations are part of the genetic heritage of this Great Dane variety;
- According to DDC breeding rules, harlequins should NOT be bred to other harlequins, neither merles to merles, nor harlequins to merles, since this breeding mates can often produce white puppies that are frequently deaf and/or blind;
- Due to the reasons above, HARLEQUINS or MERLES should **only** be bred to BLACKS or BLACK MANTLE Danes;
- Mantles can be bred to Harlequins without the risk of producing white puppies;
- A Mantle bred to another Mantle will not produce Harlequins;
- Mantles are strictly black and white, they cannot have any Merle markings or, otherwise, they should be considered a heavily marked Harlequin;
- When **all** the markings have rounded, well defined edges (spots) the Dane is most likely to be considered as a piebald, in opposition to a harlequin which has irregular, torn patches;
- Harlequins sometimes can be so heavily marked that they look like a Mantle, with the only noticeable difference that they might have some merle patches somewhere throughout their bodies;
- Acceptable, but less desirable are gray or blue ticking hairs showing through the white base color in Harlequins, which tend to give a salt and pepper or sort of dirty effect;
- There are other breeds in which we find a Merle coat color, such as Collies, Australian Shepherds and Corgis;
- Danes with a coat color known as harlequin (white base with torn patches) are often mistaken as Dalmatians by the general public. Great Danes are the only breed of dogs in which a typical harle color pattern occurs;
- A white Dane with MERLE patches should **not** be mistaken with a white Dane with blue or blue/grayish markings or patches, the latter being the result of cross breeding between different varieties, which are called "porcelain", such as other coat patterns resulting from color mix breeding (from different varieties) that have a white base color with fawn, brindle or blue patches and markings, also known as porcelain Danes.