

Pipe Making-101. A Bilingual Syllabus by Ben Rapaport

It's a known fact that pipe making is very specialized, a skilful mix of engineering, eye-and-hand coordination, art, and creativity. How does one acquire the essential skills to craft a pipe from an *ebauchon*? I can think of at least two ways: apprentice with a master or experiment (trial and error, i.e., practice makes perfect). And how might an experienced pipe maker improve or enhance his skill? He could assimilate and apply the guidance and lessons learned that other pipe makers have penned, posited, and proposed. This essay recounts the who, when and where of what's in print.

A great body of work about contemporary American, European, Japanese, and other briar pipe makers already exists. There are also lots of books in print on pipe smoking, many of which illustrate today's artisan briars. It is *au courant* to search the Internet or pore through 22 years' worth of *Pipes & tobaccos* magazine for information about various artisans, their individual talent and techniques, unique finishes, artistic nuances, and briar-grading and -dating schema (nomenclature, in the vernacular). On occasion, an Internet search for a pictorial essay reveals images of a noted pipe craftsman in his workshop sanding or polishing a ready-for-prime-time-sale briar, but this is information about only him or her. (If one desires to craft pipes *à la* Scandinavian, Jan Andersson's *Bo Nordh Pipemaker* [2008], *Scandinavian Pipemakers* [2012], Tom Eltang. *It's Good to be a Pipemaker* [2019], and Hummerston & Ehrhorn, *The Pipe. A Functional Work of Art* [2018] are great reads, but none were intended as a step-by-step, descriptive guide to pipe making.)

What are some easily accessed online resources? Illustrated instructional notes occasionally appeared in early trade magazines, for example: Richard W. Emery, "To Make or Repair a Briar Pipe" (*Popular Mechanics*, October 1948); John A. Linkletter, "The Art of Making Briar Pipes" (*Popular Mechanics*, February 1977); and Garth Graves, "Carve your own dream pipe" (*Popular Mechanics*, May 1977). It's unlikely that

any of these articles would be helpful today. Joseph. M. Gregorio, a Bronx, New York, pipe maker offered his ideas in a short folio, “How to Make Smoking Pipes” (1971). Rely wholly, solely, and totally on the Internet? There are articles in varying levels of detail on the Web. Here are a few that I found: (1) “How to Make a Smoking Pipe” (thepipeguys.com); (2) “Making a Tobacco Pipe with Hand Tools: A Preliminary Tutorial” (literaryworkshop.wordpress.com); (3) a personal commentary from Dirk Heinemman, “Creation of Heinemann Freehand Pipes” (heinemannpipes.com); (4) jcarr92, “Handmade Tobacco Pipe” (instructables.com); and (5) J. Alan, “Briar and the Pipemaker” (jalanpipes.com). And pipedia.org posts on topic: (1) Robert Everett, “Pipe Making For The Rank Amateur”; (2) “Pipe Making”; and (3) Dan Pipe, “Carve Your Own Pipe. A brief instructions manual.” Last, there are plenty of video clips offering similar information, such as “How It’s Made—Smoking Pipes.”

Note: Ben followed up with a link to this one as another video example:

<https://www.france24.com/en/20160506-you-are-here-secrets-pipe-maker-wood-paris-to-bacco>

But is there now, or was there ever a “how-to” manual or instructional guide containing *all the fundamentals* to make pipes—not the mass-produced, factory kind—those written for the weekend whittler or the would-be pipe maker? Yes and no. And if so, to whom do we owe this debt of gratitude for having illuminated this art and craft? As a pipe historian and bibliophile, I am not qualified to judge the relative utility or merit of any of the monographs mentioned herein. To start, in the last century, two English-language books on this subject found their way into print. The first was *The Art and Craft of Smoking Pipes* written in 1947 by Emil Doll, a former member of the Wood Industries, a Division of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He wrote this “Brief Manual and Reference Work for Pipe Manufacturers, Pipe Jobbers, Wholesalers, Retailers, Pipe Salesmen, Pipe Departments, All Chain Stores, Pipe Smokers Everywhere” while employed at the H. Behlen & Bros., Inc., Amsterdam, New York, a supplier of “everything for woodfinishing” (as the company’s letterhead indicated). In this small

volume are contained some of the secrets about pipe craft that are now pretty much in the public domain, such as manufacturing processes, staining, finishing, and even a formula for mastic putty. (The company also published companion handbooks, *The Art of Wood Finishing* (1944); *A Manual of Brushes* (1947); *Guide to Wood and Wood Finishing: All Fine Wood is a Way of Life Worth Preserving and Protecting* (undated); and occasional catalogs with the title, “Everything For Wood Finishing.”). If you were a pipe smoker or a pipe maker in the 1940s to the early 1950s, you would have noticed an advertisement for this book that appeared in every monthly issue of *Pipe Lovers* (January 1946–April 1950). A copy could be ordered from the magazine’s editor, George Cushman, at the bargain-basement price of \$1.95 postpaid! Today, this treatise is rather difficult to find.

In 1976, the second guide, *PIMO’s Guide to Pipe-Crafting at Home*, entered circulation. It was an informative handbook, written in easy-to-understand language, accompanied by simple line drawings. Its original intent was to entice a specific audience—individuals who dabbled in wood handicrafts—to buy the company’s briar blocks and tools.

Smokingpipes.com gave this review: “For those interested in pipemaking, *Pimo’s Guide to Pipe Crafting at Home* is a must-have. It’s suitable for the novice, with its history of pipemaking and informative discussion of the form and function of individual pipes, while experienced smokers can feel free to dive into their first project using the diagrams and detailed, concise instructions contained within. Each step is laid out in easy-to-understand detail, from choosing materials to the variances between briar and meerschaum, to ensure you have everything you need at your fingertips.” Alfred Baier, a pipe maker from Manchester Center, Vermont, bought the rights to PIMO in 1995, redesigned the book’s cover to give it a fresh look, reprinted, and merchandised it. It is still in print. Now, Vermont Freehand (vermontfreehand.com), aka Steve Norse, is “...home of PIMO Pipecraft and Pipe Makers Emporium ... the world’s largest selection of niche crafting supplies.”

The following is not widely known. Sometime in 1985, England's Jacques P. Cole, a member of the International Academy of the Pipe, sent me his draft manuscript for review and comment, *A World of Pipes. A History and Study of Briar Pipemaking*. Jacques was steeped in the pipe industry, having worked for his father at GBD, Saint-Claude and, in succession, at Comoy, Charatan, and Ropp. For years, he wrestled with perfecting his manuscript, but died, unexpectedly, in 2014, never having sent his labor of love to a publisher; his collection of books, paperwork, and pipes is now the property of the National Pipe Archive, Liverpool. Shortly thereafter, there was another undertaking to fill this information void. In either the 1988 or 1989 catalog of new Simon & Schuster Inc. releases appeared the dust jacket illustration and précis of *The Pipe Maker's Book* written by pipe maker Elliott Nachwalter. It promised to be an incisive "how to" exposition. For whatever reason(s), the book was not published, and only Elliott and the publisher know why.

The most recent contribution is not about briar pipe making, but it is about briar. Mette Oestergaard, *Briar for Beginners* (Werks Grafiske Hus A|S, 2017), is described on smokingpipes.com: "Learn all about the wonderful world of briar with *Briar for Beginners*. Written by Mette Oestergaard, the wife of Danish pipe maker Teddy Knudsen, this 29-page hard cover book offers a detailed introduction to briar wood itself (Erica Arborea), covering topics such as growing locations, harvesting methods, cutting techniques, and various applications. A note from the author: Many books have already been written about people working with Briar. With this book my intention has been to focus on the briar itself, where and how it grows and how it is harvested, cut and matured before the wood is finally ready to be used."

Books on pipe making did not begin with Doll and PIMO; these were not the first to document this science *cum* art. Looking back, all the authoritative guides originated, not surprisingly, in central Europe—Austria-Hungary and Germany to be exact—and date to a much earlier period. Carvers in England, France, and Holland were also making pipes

in various mediums at about the same time, yet it is strange that nothing of substance appeared in print in those countries around that time.

In the following paragraphs, I identify eight “how-to” handbooks, chronologically, citing the German title, followed by a literal English translation of each. I have abbreviated several titles and their subtitles that I consider verbose and cumbersome, a common occurrence in stilted German writing of the period. Note their publication dates: all were written from the earliest record when pipes were being handmade in ateliers or in home work shops, through their growth, expansion, and popularity in Western Europe. As in any field of research, when information on a particular topic enters the public domain, other contributions follow, and the knowledge base is enlarged. For example, the 1799 edition of Tomas’s tract (first in the list) was a mere 30 pages, and the last in the list, written by Tomasek, published in 1878, was 212 pages. Knowing their titles, but not their contents, is not of much use, but if you accept the premise that, typically, 19th century German writer-scholars incisively studied and diligently documented their research, each treatise was a significant contribution toward a more complete, more elaborate understanding of pipe making. Bear in mind, however, that around the mid-19th century, when St.-Claude was about to become the epicenter of briar manufacture, carvers in Germany and Austria were engaged in making pipes in meerschaum, porcelain, and in other woods, so none of the following works offer details on the fabrication of pipes in *Erica arborea*.

In 1799, in the infancy of the pipe as a consumer product, J. U. Tomas, Mechanicus, wrote “*Praktische Anleitung Meerschaumene Pfeifenköpfe zu verfertigen...*” (Practical Instruction to Manufacture Meerschaum Pipe Bowls...). An expanded, revised edition was published in 1806. As the popularity of pipe smoking surged in Europe, the industry expanded concomitantly, and the information floodgates literally opened. Several brief tracts were written in the early 1800s on the treatment of meerschaum pipe bowls, but nothing of consequence appeared in print until 1830, when an anonymous work was

published in Ulm, Germany, then a thriving center of wood pipe making: *Die Fabrikation der Rauchtabackpfeifen aus Holzmasern, Meerschaum, Thon und Türkenerde...* (The Manufacture of Smoking Tobacco Pipes of Veined Wood, Meerschaum, Clay, and Terracotta...). Three years later, Christian Friedrich Gottlob Thon wrote *Gründliche und vollständige, auf richtige Erfahrungen gestützte Anleitung, nicht allein alle Arten meerschaumener, sondern auch hölzerner Pfeifenköpfe fabrikmässig herzustellen...* (Weimar, 1833; Thorough and Complete Guidelines, based on Extensive Experience, for Factory-quality Mass-Production of not just all Types of Meerschaum, but also Wood Pipe Bowls...).

In 1856 appeared an anonymously written work published in Leipzig, *Anweisung den Cigarrenspitzen und Pfeifenköpfen von Meerschaum durch Rauchen...nebst einer kurzen Darstellung über Production und Fabrikation des Meerschaumes...* (Instruction on Meerschaum Cigar Mouthpieces and Pipe Bowls through Smoking...together with a Brief Description on the Production and Fabrication of Meerschaum). When pipe making was just about at its pinnacle in Europe, G. Koppa, a Dresden meerschaum pipe maker, wrote *Über Meerschaumwaaren* (Pirna, 1873; About Meerschaum Goods), and in the same year, Alois Meyer penned *Ueber Meerschaum-, Bernstein- und Drechslerwaaren in der Weltausstellung 1873* (Vienna; About Meerschaum, Amber, and Turner Goods at the World Exhibition, 1873).

Considered the most authoritative and elaborate volume is G. M. Raufer, *Die Meerschaum- und Bernsteinwaaren-Fabrikation. Mit einem Anhang über die Erzeugung hölzerner Pfeifenköpfe* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1876; The Fabrication of Meerschaum and Amber Goods. With an Appendix Regarding the Manufacture of Wood Pipe Bowls). The last of these 19th century manuscripts was J. N. Tomasek, *Die Pfeifen-Industrie auf der Höhe jetziger Zeit, oder die Fabrikation der Tabaks- und Cigarrenpfeifen aus Meerschaum und allen Arten Holz* (Weimar, 1878; The Pipe Industry of Today, or the Fabrication of Tobacco and Cigar Pipes of Meerschaum and all Varieties of Wood).

Today, nothing comes even close to any of the aforementioned books in their depth of detail, in both word and illustration. However, I doubt that any reader will make a mad dash to his local used bookshop to search for one of these old monographs; it's unlikely that any would be found in an American out-of-print or rare bookshop. One could also search online German antiquarian bookstores. It's possible that a few might be stashed in the Reference or Rare Books section of some public and university libraries, and a search of the WorldCat database (worldcat.org) will determine which library retains which books. Sadly, none of these was ever translated into another language. (I can read German, and I own three of these manuscripts, but I have never had the urge or desire to translate them.)

Whether any of these early German manuscripts would be a useful reference today to learn or improve one's understanding of pipe making is difficult to determine. Why? The materials, tools, and processes now engaged in pipe making have vastly changed for the better. Yesteryear's three-dimensional pipe designs (i.e., modeling, sculpting, carving, etching, and incising) from American makers such as Marc Darrah (*Pipes & tobaccos*, Fall 2003) and Lester Garlow (*Pipes & tobaccos*, Spring 2014) are no longer in vogue; the smooth finish is the "in" thing. And what is most relevant, briar is essentially the only medium used, although there are artisans offering alternatives, such as morta, rosewood, olive wood, etc.

To conclude, my purpose is simply to familiarize the reader about a time when information detailing the intricate processes and procedures to make clay, meerschaum, and wood pipes were readily available not only to the carver, molder, and turner, but also to the common man. After reading this brief account, you should easily conclude that, beginning more than 200 years ago, the art and craft of pipe making, at least in Europe, was an "open book."