

Pipe Bombs: good intentions, bad designs!
by Ben Rapaport (Spring 2019)

Harry Truman once said: “The only thing new in the world is the history you don’t know.” From the American Nobel Prize laureate, William Faulkner, another bit of wisdom: “The past is never dead; it’s not even past.” And, as the British literary critic Terry Eagleton asserted: “The past can be used to renew the present. Just buy it or not.” Following Truman, Faulkner and Eagleton, here is a slice of pipe history you may not know. This story is about both the past *and the present* ... a survey of pipe designs from then and now.

To begin, name the biggest fundamental breakthrough in pipe design, functionality or performance in, say, the last 100 years. Sorry, it’s a trick question. Many of today’s handcrafted briars are non-traditional, non-classical, aesthetically unique, even awesome-looking, but there’s been *no* fundamental breakthrough in this time frame; there have only been refinements and improvements. There’ll always be mass-produced briars from a handful of recognized makers. And there will always be a few old standbys, not your typical “go-to” formats—such as the vest-pocket pipe (e.g., Brebbia Rolex, Rattray’s Polly, Savinelli Roley, Vauen Pocket 3, etc.), or other mini-pipes, e.g., the one whose bowl is shaped like a wooden shoe and the John Surrey Touchdown football. But these are relatively refined, compared with those I address in this story.

Myriad pipes entered the market in the early- to mid 1900s, a multitude of formats, styles, and materials on offer, so here’s what this narrative does not address:

- The usual American suspects, such as Briarcraft, Dr. Grabow, Kaywoodie, Yellow-bowl, Mastercraft, Marxman, Medico, and WDC.
- The British invasion of classical briars from BBB, Barling, Charatan, Dunhill, GBD, Loewe, etc.
- Briars with aluminum stems, e.g., Cy Benz, Dana, Falcon, Guardian, Kirsten, Luminum-Kraft, Spiral-Kool, Thoro-Kleen, Vance, Zest, and several others.

- Bakelite, gutta percha, Lucite, pumice, and Redmanol pipes.
- Meerschaum-lined briars that I consider a neither-here, neither-there construct.
- The hundreds of “no-name” pipes in Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogs.
- Novelty briars, e.g., Jumbo Elm, Aladdin’s Lamp, and Locomotive from Marxman and other companies.
- Last, for all the patented pipes that never saw production here or abroad, I defer to S. Paul Jung, *19th Century Patents, Designs, and Trademarks for Tobacco Pipes and Related Material Issued by the U.S. Patent Office 1858-1899*, 2 volumes (1987). (By the way, Jung also delved deep into the American pipe industry and published *Tobacco Pipe Manufacturers and Distributors Found in U.S. Directories in The Library of Congress*, 1999.)

So what’s left? Asked and answered: all the quirky, kitschy, zany-looking concoctions, contraptions, and gimmicks, the Rube Goldbergian attempts at either changing the pipe’s outer appearance or reengineering the interior’s performance. Quite a few offered to the smoking public in the early to mid-20th century were, literally and figuratively, pipe bombs—not the homemade, improvised explosive devices—pipes that never got much consumer traction; their designs were of questionable functionality and of dubious benefits. A few were advertised as delivering a healthier smoke. Others were so butt-ugly that no self-respecting pipe smoker would have been seen puffing one of these in public.

Here are two examples from the late 19th century. At London’s Tobacco Trades Exhibition in 1895, the booth of a certain A. P. Gavard of York Road displayed a variety of pipes “...the leading idea of which is comprised in an inner bowl, made of clay or meerschaum and removable at will. Underneath this bowl is placed a pad of asbestos for the purpose of absorbing nicotine. Smokers who like to treasure a pipe—and who doesn’t?—can thus have all the advantages of a new, clean one each time they renew the inner bowl.” Another exhibitor was the Trombone Pipe Company that manufactured a

hygienic pipe. “Its main principle is that the smoke is carried along three channels—backwards and forwards—before it reaches the mouthpiece...” (*Supplement to Tobacco*, July 1, 1895).

You’d have to be *really old* to be familiar with all those listed in the following table. You may have heard of or seen a few, but certainly not all. What’s not known is whether any of these mass-market pipes were the “what’s hot” or the “what’s not” in their day. The following is an incomplete list of trade names in no particular order from U.S. and British factories; England produced more anti-nicotine and hygienic pipes than did U.S. manufacturers. Some information for the table is sourced to the magazine *Tobacco* (U.K.). Others were advertised in various issues of *Pipe Lovers* (1946–1950). For me, illustrating any of these pipes is less important than what the manufacturers promised—using marketing spins and advertising—about their pipe’s advantages, performance, and health benefits.

Some Late 19th to mid-20th Century Pipes in the Marketplace

Name	Promotion/pitch	Manufacturer
Ken Pipe	Consists of interchangeable bits, bit tube, condensation chamber, reverse baffle, and bowl tube	Smoker’s Guild of America, Chicago, IL
Needham Pipe	Dry smoke passage, moisture dam, condensation chamber, moisture drain, moisture chamber, and clean out plug	The Needham Pipe, Alhambra, CA
Briarcraft Smokemaster	Smoke is drawn through a metal tube, which is slotted at the bottom. An ordinary pipe cleaner, folded and inserted under the tube, absorbs moisture as fast as it forms.	Spring Valley, NY
The “Chin Warmer”	Stands on its own base, hangs close to the face, and is very light on the teeth	J. P. Clymer, Lancaster, PA
Charles G. Dawes Underslung, invented by Charles Herbert Lyons	Shank joined the bowl near the rim	Style was manufactured by many briar pipe companies
Toro Pipe	Smoke is air cooled by vacuum, permitting the pipe to stay lit for a longer period of time	Richmond Pipe Corp., Staten Island, NY
Kleensmok	The double bowl pipe that filters smoke thru tobacco	Kleensmok Pipe Co., Johnson City, TN
Harper Double Barrel Pipe	All condensed juices are trapped in lower reservoir chamber	Harper-Wyman Co., Chicago, IL

The Ricketts, Pipe of Tomorrow	Modern as a jet take-off, sleek as a Shooting Star	Chase & Capra, Berkeley, CA
Ayres Pipe	Revolutionary-designed conditioner made of heat-resisting aluminum ...smoke travels 34 inches.	Erskine-Mills Company, Elizabeth, NJ
Royalton Crown	"...condensing well and other safety features protect you from irritating juices and bitter slugs."	Henry Leonard & Thomas, Inc., NY
Danco Hollow Bowl	Double bowl traps bitter juices	Danco Corporation, NY
Van Roy Ajustomatic	Stem is "float-mounted"	Van Roy Company, NY
Siphon pipe	Pipe smoking made healthful ...constructed on sanitary principles	Siphon Tobacco Pipe Co., NY
Sport-briar (cigar-shaped pipe)	Overcomes the defects of ordinary pipes	Sport Briar Pipe Co., NY
Underfeed pipe	Loads from the bottom	James A Donnelly, NY
Wizard Inverted pipe	Most radical departure in the art of pipe construction ... For automobilists, yachtsmen, in high winds	Wizard Pat. Pending Co., NY
Glass pipe	The only pipe that gives that natural tobacco flavor ... glass is non-absorbent, why not a glass pipe?	Turco-American Pipe Co., Rochester, NY
Patent pipe	It not only absorbs, but absolutely filters the smoke	Biltor Pipe Co., London
Dr. Brown Folding Pipe	For the man who carries a pipe...it folds for carrying, and tales apart for cleaning	Brown Specialty Co, Hollywood, CA
Double-chamber pipe	A cool, clean, dry smoke is assured	Masta Pipe Co., London
The Sherlock Holmes pipe	The pipe that extracts the nicotine bite	R. H. Sherlock Co., Chicago, IL
Kirtland's skull pipe	Dry smoker opening to prevent burning of tongue	B. F. Kirtland, The Pipe Man, Chicago, IL
Eastman Scientific pipe	A turn of the bowl regulates draft control and shut-off valve	Eastman Sales Co., Chicago, IL
The Hardright pipe	Made of "Condensite" which is absolutely non-absorbent	Hardman & Wright, Belleville, NJ
Anti-Nicotine pipe	Get the pleasure without the poison	H. Menges, St. Louis, MO
Armored briar	Tested for durability... completely encased in Bakelite	Wally Frank, NY
Champagne pipe	The Champagne (4-cylinder) pipe is not a "feature" pipe; it is a pipe of merit	Champagne Pipe Co., St. Louis, MO
Underslung pipe	The famous upside-down pipe...water can't run uphill	Wally Frank, NY
Plimsoll briar	Solves every pipe problem; "spring-cleaned" in 30 seconds	London
Guardian briar	The nicotine destroyer with no inner boring	France
La Turbine	The pipe that cleans itself	France
Trapwell Ajustomatic Stem pipe: inner seal, screw thread,	Selected imported briar, honey and licorice processed	Sparta Pipes, Sparta, NC

condensing chamber and moisture trap		
The Percolator	100% perfect porous wood percolator	Percolator Pipe Company, NY
Dr. Brown Folding Pipe	The most practical and handy pipe you have ever carried	Brown Specialty Co., Hollywood, CA
The Hurricane Pipe	The perfect covered pipe	Nutt Products, Ltd., London
Wheat Meerschaum Pipe	One puff...gives more pleasure than ten from another pipe	The Floss Pipe Co., Nashville, TN
Patent Dividing Pipe	"...preventing the Nicotine from entering the mouth is entirely overcome."	Y. Heronimos, London
The 'Simplex' Pipe	Undoubtedly the best Anti-nicotine Pipe ever introduced	Samuel McLardy, Manchester, England
The Cantilever	Reservoir in tube, perpendicular mountings	W. H. Pierce & Co., Manchester, England
The Briar Spiral Pipe	The stem is fitted with a screw thread, which causes the smoke to travel 7-1/8 inches instead of 1-1/4 inches	S. N. & Co., England
The Trombone Pipe	Saves 25 percent in tobacco, compared to the ordinary pipe	Trombone Pipe Co., London
The A. D. Pose	A great boon for the busy Thinker, the reflecting Reader, the scheming Bridger, and the ardent Billiard Player. The Darling of the tidy Wife...Prevents damage to tablecloths, &. Obligated to stand upright.	Adolph Posener & Co., London
The Dredger	Split tube draws out for cleaning	Henry Howell & Co., London
Phitwell	"No more overscrewed pipes."	Sina Oppenheimer, Seckel & Co., London
The M. P. Pipe	Vulcanite mouthpiece is split longitudinally so that the bore is represented in each half of the mouthpiece by a shallow trough.	M. P. Co., London
The Burton Sani-Jet	"...removes everything from the smoke but the pleasure."	Burton Pipe Company, Detroit, MI
The Miracle Pipe	"...impurities extracted after one smoke..."	Wilson Dry Smoke & Distil Pipes, Saginaw, MI

There were many attempts to offer strange and unusual pipe-anatomy experiments; few, if any, I suspect, were best sellers, because the audience was already enamored with traditional briar shapes and formats. Taking liberty with "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," as I see it, for most of the early to mid-20th century, the apple (shape) fell far, far from the (briar root) tree!

And here's a gratuitous factoid about all those popular flint and petrol lighters—Evans, Ronson, Zippo and others—that were also the rage in the mid-1900s. Consider the Nimrod pipe lighter (U.S. Patent 2,432,265, May 17, 1946, granted on December 9, 1947), “the right gift for the pipe smoker,” invented by an ex-GI from Cincinnati, Ashley Ward Jr. Why would anyone name a manly pipe lighter Nimrod, a term often used sarcastically to mean a dimwitted or stupid person, a moron, or a klutz?

Now fast-forward to this century. Nothing surprises me much anymore: there's always someone who chooses to swim against the tide. You can't stop progress if, indeed, producing eccentric and offbeat pipes is considered progress. So have we come full circle? Not quite! The demand for artisan-made pipes has almost supplanted mass-produced pipes, but design-wise, some of these talented craftsmen have begun introducing some futuristic, exotic, and outré designs. Nowadays, there is no shortage of variety when it comes to pipe shape, style, and personality. Are some of these also pipe bombs? I am averse to labeling these new-age pipes bombs, yet so many are not traditional, conventional, standard-shape briars. “The Most Weird and Wonderful Tobacco Pipes” (www.havanahouse.co.uk) illustrates a few, but I prefer to cite some random examples from the Web that caught my eye. First, a new-age Underslung, the Freedom series of pipes, the invention of Daniel C. Bianchino of Bartlett, New Hampshire, advertised as “... the world's most unique and versatile smoking pipe,” three, rain- and wind-proof styles that light from the bottom: the Hirshan, the Americo, and the Harrow. Check out Nate King's Steam Punk and Gear Punk pipes; I am at a loss for words to describe them. There's Tom Eltang's Reverse Calabash Barrel. Scroll through the images on Downiepipes.com, his special-order configurations, such as the Capnomancer, Jonas, the Alien or Alien 3, Toothless, and Nemo; they're unquestionably conversation pieces. Seen the fantastical creations from Estonian Vladimir Minaev online? You won't forget 'em. Access Werner Mummert's website for more than a few “wild and crazy” unconventional shapes and bold, colorful finishes; one has an embedded thermometer, another looks like a rolling pin, yet another looks like a bunch of Legos.

Want more wild and crazy? Check out Roger Wallenstein's colorful creations or Hekthor Weibe's Freehand Radiator System pipes. See Geiger's setter, "Sandblasted Reverse Calabash Asymmetric Egg Cavalier" (smokingpipes.com). Kostas Gourvelos of Athens is another inspired trendsetter; recent productions include a few rather inventive designs: a saxophone, a pen, an inverted top hat, and he's brought back the cigar-pipe.

I also want to mention the slightly bizarro: the Bugatti Veyron titanium and carbon fiber hookah at an outrageous \$100,000 and the Porsche aluminum, stainless steel and glass shisha at a mere \$1,950. There's Tsuge's Metal Tankard Thunder Storm with aluminum windshield slides, and the "Ferrari of pipes," a sleek, aerodynamic design "with built-in-filter-replication indicator" from Hakan Bogazpinar, more streamlined than Caminetto's Evolution pipe. Something a little more outré is from Woodstonepipes.com: the "Wickie All-in-One, Folding Smoking Pipe and [butane] Lighter." Finally, have a look at an off-the-wall pipe, the odd-o-box (odoboxusa.com), described as "Handmade wood pipes featuring a quick loading bowl that feeds from a storage compartment, all in one neat little wooden pipe box" ... yes, a box! Are any of these ingenious innovations or curious inventions designed for more pleasurable smoking, ease of lighting, some other attribute, or simply produced as conversation pieces? I'll not venture an opinion.

I'm all for innovation, and I'm cognizant that the way progress moves forward is by someone thinking differently, trying something that no one else has tried, breaking the established traditions and rules. "There has been such an explosion of excitement surrounding pipes in recent years and so much exploration in engineering and design that it's difficult to predict what will come next," says [David S.] Huber ("Pipe Smokers: The Next Generation," tobaccobusiness.com, November 29, 2017). Pipe designers can start over with new or tweaked criteria or continue selecting a design to refine. But in all material things, form follows, not precedes, function. Form should never trump function. However user-friendly a design—even in pipes—taken to extreme, isn't really that great

for users. So what'll they think of next? I can only conclude from what I am seeing online with regularity that Yogi Berra was right: it's *déjà vu* all over again.