Pipe Smoking: A Lifestyle
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Pipe smoking has never gone out of fashion but the habit is enjoying a new vogue. The days when the guilty pipe smoker was banished to the garden potting shed are a distant memory. Young Europeans, from City of London fund managers to West Cork foresters are filling their briar and enjoying a common lifestyle. Pipe smoking is for people who want to give themselves space, or who are not afraid to stand out from the crowd.

And pipe smoking is not just a man's pastime. Back in the "Roaring Twenties" when it was daring to smoke in public, women were seen with a pipe at fashionable cocktail parties patronized by the golden generation of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Now once again it is a trendy thing to do.

Fund manager Peter Smith who works for one of the U.K.'s leading insurance firms has a display of pipes on his desk which would delight the heart of any pipe maker. When forester Michael Collard is planting trees around Bantry Bay in western Ireland his pipe is close to hand. "I smoke less than I do with cigarettes and I feel it is better for me," he says. For banker Ahmed Hassan, in London for a few days from the Persian Gulf, the trip to the United Kingdom was almost an excuse to buy a new pipe, even though there is a good tobacco shop in Government Road, Bahrain, with a sign outside saying "Thank you for smoking."

In some ways pipe smoking is a lost art for young people but it is rapidly being re-gained because it is easier and more fashionable to smoke the newer lighter tobaccos in the more fancy pipes. The flavor and aroma of tobaccos have improved, making them more attractive not only for the smoker, but for those around him — or her. Pipe design itself is going through a dramatic period. Although Corsican briar still provides the best bowls, their shape, the type and design of the stems are keeping pace with modern tastes.

There is a distinct revival and increasing demand for handcrafted pipes of all kinds offering discerning would-be smokers a widening choice. Pipe smoking is an art which brings pleasure to the smoker. The fine aromatic
The record holder is William Vargo of Swartz Creek, Michigan. Apparently longer marathons have been claimed but not under The International Association of Pipe Smokers Clubs' rules. Guinness adds darkly that the "piping and "gardening" are not unknown among would-be aspirants of the record book.

The experts may well have some tips to pass on about filling a pipe properly but there is nothing which cannot be learned by the novice. The newer tobaccos make it easier though as they are more flammable (which does not mean that they will flare in your face) they require less "pull." The bowl of the pipe must be evenly and lightly packed with the chosen tobacco after bowl and stem have been thoroughly cleaned. There needs to be a slight 'springiness' in the filling which should be given a final gentle press with the thumb before lighting.

Women are often a catalyst in the lives of pipe smokers. It is often the wife, girlfriend or partner, who might introduce the man to pipe smoking. They may find it an attractive alternative for several reasons - the smell of the tobacco, a touch of class for their partner's image, or an introduction to a new lifestyle. Smoking a pipe is one of life's rites of passage - and it's fun to smoke a pipe.

**From tobacos to briars**

The pipe was known to the Mayans in Mexico and many other ancient peoples, including the inhabitants of Pompeii in Italy, 1,500 years ago. They were perhaps the unhappiest pipe smokers of all, ending up getting buried in ash.

The conventional wisdom is that the British, French and Dutch adventurers who discovered the New World in the 16th century, adopted a primitive habit from savage people. The *Nicotiana tabacum* ("kindly weed") was probably unique to Europe but pipe smoking, of some other form of tobacco or aromatic herbs, was certainly not new. Quite apart from the Mayans it is known that other tribes in Mexico and Central America - Toltecs and Aztecs - were puffing away well before Christopher Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492.

In that year, on a slightly overcast 6 November, in the Bahamas, two sailors came across some Indians burning "magical" tobacco leaves. They were the first modern Europeans to see tobacco...
but the name came later. Columbus found Caribbean natives sniffing the magical smoke through hollow reed devices which they called "tobagos." The name stuck and the habit grew.

In no time at all the Spanish were importing tobacco for use in medicine. The first writer about tobacco appears to have been the Frenchman Jean Nicot, Ambassador to Portugal during the second half of the 16th century. From him derives the word nicotine.

Yet surely the most famous pipe smoker was the great Elizabethan Sir Walter Raleigh, who smoked a pipe before going to the scaffold. In true entrepreneurial fashion he brought tobacco back from the colonies and planted it on his Irish estates. Society was soon set alight with the new trendy habit of pipe smoking. The demand for pipes sparked off the first clay pipe industry in England—a tradition which is still carried on today. By 1602 when the Elizabethan age had drawn to a close, most of Europe had caught the craze, which was spreading farther afield to India, China and even isolated Japan.

Pipe smoking sparked off a chain of anecdotes. The first person to talk about "smoking like a chimney" in literature at least, was the Rev R H Barham (1788-1845) who also told a Lord Otto to "put that in your pipe and smoke it!" The writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the detective Sherlock Holmes, was perhaps the greatest publicist for the pipe smoker with Holmes having in The Red-Headed League a celebrated "three pipe problem" to solve.

The early pipe makers used pewter, silver and even walnut shells as well as clay. One of the most sought-after materials was the German-named "meerschaum" This is a natural form of silicate of magnesia. All the early pipes had small bowls because tobacco was expensive. Pipes got bigger as tobacco prices came down.

It was just over 100 years ago that the big break came. Pipe makers came across a new material—briar (it has nothing to do with roses). Briar is the bulbous root of a French-named shrub, 'bruyère,' which grows in some Mediterranean countries. A true briar root may have to be 200 years old before it is hard enough for making pipes. The best still comes from France and Corse.

Briar roots are cut into blocks and then divided into rough-cut pipe shapes. It is the grain, its pattern and color, which makes the finest pipes so sought after by smokers. No two hand-made pipes are the same. But then a pipe is so many things to the smoker. He might use it to resolve a conundrum or as a hand warmer on a winter's day. For the true smoker tobacco and pipe are inseparable.

Making better pipe tobacco

Tobacco is grown all over the world but most of it comes from the southern states of the U.S.—home of the biggest nation of smokers. There are more than 50 varieties of the tobacco weed but only three are used for making pipe smoking tobacco. *Nicotiana tabacum* with its reddish flowers, is cultivated in the U.S., Latin America, Asia, Turkey, France and parts of Africa; *Nicotiana rustica*, grows mainly in Brazil, Turkey, Hungary and parts of France. *Nicotiana Persica* is a third variety, grown originally in Persia.

In the early days each town would have its own tobacconist who prepared his own mixture from dried leaves imported in huge hogshead barrels. Today the major manufacturers still use the same kind of hogshead, although bales are more common.

As demand for pipe tobaccos increased in Europe manufacturers merged, or went out of business, due to increased competition. Douwe Egberts, now Holland's leading tobacco manufacturer, began from one such small shop in 1788. Scandinavian Tobacco in Copenhagen
Main types of tobacco leaf used in modern pipe tobaccos are:
Virginia: a yellow, sweet-tasting light tobacco.
Burley: a mild, yet distinctive air-cured leaf.
Oriental: an aromatic flavor.
Latakia: rich and strong, spicy; a little goes a long way.
Perique: used as a 'seasoner.' Rather heavy in taste and small.

was formed in 1961 when three old family firms from the 18th and 19th centuries merged. Harald Halberg also in Denmark is one of the few small family businesses which has succeeded alone for exactly 100 years.

The Swedish Tobacco group was formed when 125 small private companies were bought up by the government in 1915. Britain's Rothmans International, now one of the world's biggest tobacco groups, also grew out of a host of small companies including one of the best known founded by Alfred Dunhill.

Pipe tobaccos consist of three main kinds - mixtures, flakes and ready rubbed. The trend today is towards lighter and more aromatic tobaccos. All pipe tobaccos go through similar manufacturing processes but with small individual, and often highly secret, differences.

The factory's leaf buyer is one of the key people in the production of pipe tobaccos. It is essential for the factory to get the best leaf at the right price. And this is up to the leaf buyer.

He must pick the best leaves for his final products. He looks for the right color, shine, texture, mechanical strength and other properties. He must ensure that the crop has not been treated or affected in any way by chemicals, namely pesticides.

"You must remember tobacco is a wholly natural product," says a leaf buyer who will select only the most suitable crop for his particular needs.

At the factory the tobacco master will blend the different leaves together according to what mixture is required. Blending is a fine art - "rather like a composer writing music. He must get the right tones, a good melody with the correct harmony," says one blender.

The leaves are stripped from the stems, separated and passed through a variety of automatic processes during which they are threshed and chopped. At the same time a little sugar, molasses or glucose is added in some countries.

With the demand for more aromatic flavors the blender will add a combination of flavors to create special tastes - coffee, whisky and even raspberry.

During the production process the tobacco can be cut in several different ways so that the end product might be straight or curly cut, rolled or twisted.

The final stage of the process is the packaging which is one area where hi-tech vacuum packing and new-style plastic laminated foil pouches bring a modern touch to a 400-year-old process.

Tobaccos can now be kept for a considerable time in the new packs and do not dry out or lose their flavors. The packaging is also becoming less traditional as manufacturers seek to meet the changing image of the younger pipe smoker.

Power smoking for men

Choosing a pipe is not a chore for the hypermarket on a Saturday morning. The job requires time - and contemplation. A specialist (the best are in Europe) will always advise on your choice. It is possible to have a bespoke pipe, like a made-to-measure suit. A well-made, fashionable pipe is as much a part of its user's image as the latest leisure wear or pin-stripe.

Don't be baffled by the hundreds of models and designs available. Many of the variations relate only to minute detail. Just as the human face changes so does its ideal pipe, to make a perfect fit.

Comfort is a personal affair and pipe shops have special pipes for you to try. Shape is governed largely by the weight. A light pipe, which will have less "wood" or briar, is likely to smoke hotter and may have slightly less flavor from the tobacco. This is because it may burn stronger.
Most people like to try to achieve the long cool smoke which gives the most satisfaction. Pipe smokers seek all the time for a compromise between weight, shape and design.

Pipes with squat bowls tend to burn tobacco only in the center, the interior walls of the bowl should be straight sided wherever possible and the top opening should be wider than the bottom, or foot, of the bowl.

As important as the weight is the stem length. Long stems can give you "smoker's droop." Short ones are known as "nose warmers." For forester Michael Collard the attraction of a pipe in the driving Irish rain is that it can be smoked upside down or on its side, keeping the tobacco dry.

Mouthpieces for a pipe can be fan-tailed or twin bored. For those with a tendency to bite hard, the mouthpiece must be strong. Straight stemmed pipes may involve keeping a straight elbow and looking rather correct and erect.

A bent stem allows more freedom of movement with the arms. Psychiatrists say straight stems indicate a more direct approach to life, particularly among young decision makers.

At a board meeting a pipe can also be a useful baton to emphasize a point or bring the meeting to order with a short sharp tap on the table. The curved stem might suggest a more relaxed attitude to life, or even worldliness. An alternative, perhaps, for off duty hours.

The important rule in reading body language, even among pipe smokers, as American authors Bill Coplin and Mike O'Leary point out in their new book "Power Persuasion," is that slow and deliberate gestures come from "players who generally mean what they say." That is food for thought indeed.

Britain's Pipesmokers' Council provides a useful booklet giving many hints and suggestions for new pipe smokers. It answers all the questions you ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask.

"Available from all good pipe shops in the U.K. or from the Pipesmokers' Council, 1-2 Weighhouse Street, London W1Y 1YI.

*Former soccer star Jimmy Greaves, politician Lord Wilson, author J.B. Priestley, mathematician Albert Einstein, and trade unionist Lech Walesa. An unconnected list of names, on the surface at least, but they all have something in common — a love of pipe smoking, in the right place at the right time, of course.

First the pipe

Dozens of different pipe shapes and styles have evolved over the years and it is useful to have some idea of what they are before choosing.

The first question inevitably asked by the pipe maker, or seller, is "What kind of pipe?" Here are some of the main types:

**Bent** any pipe with a curved stem.

**Billiard** a classic pipe with a dead-straight stem. The height of the bowl should equal the length of the shank.

**Bulldog** the rounded bowl with a sloping stem has a distinctive curved band.

**Churchwarden** a pipe with a characteristic graceful bended stem well over 12 in. or more long.

**Poker** straight-sided bowl with flat bottom enabling it to stand upright.

**Prince** a short, squat bowl with an elegant, long, curved stem favored by the
late Duke of Windsor when he was Prince of Wales.

Apart from general shape, many pipes take their generic, or brand, names from the manufacturers. Perhaps the world’s most famous, and much sought-after by collectors, is the British Dunhill.

Alfred Dunhill began making pipes in 1907 and a few years later started putting a small distinctive white dot on the underside of the stems to indicate that this was the correct way for it to be fitted to the bowl. The Dunhill shop in London’s St. James’s, is a “must” for the serious pipe smoker.

Along with Dunhill are other pipe makers like W.O. Larsen, Nording and Stanwell in Denmark, Comoy in France, Armelli and Ascutti in Italy, and the BBB – Best British Briars. There are, of course, many more, some producing only a few exclusive models.

**Gifts for the pipe smoker**

So you’re hooked – now what should you give your life partner who’s into pipe smoking already or about to try it out? A $588 replica pewter tobacco jar from the wreck of the Elizabethan warship Mary Rose is one idea.

For the seriously rich a gold and diamond encrusted Alfred Dunhill pipe at $7,500 may fit the bill. For the urban professional in a permanent rush to meet deadlines, an ordinary leather tobacco pouch at $25 would make an acceptable gift.

It is a bonus for the pipe smoker that his lifestyle prop is also capable of becoming a pastime in its own right. Present giving time, whether it is Christmas, the Eid, or Jewish New Year, can become a real pleasure. Alfred Dunhill make special cased pipe sets, which feature a different pipe for every day of the week, costing between $1,000 and $3,350.

Astley’s in Jermy Street, London, a real specialist smoker’s den, has a fine selection for the pipe man and woman. Paul Bentley, whose family have been connected with the shop (founded in 1860) for several generations, is himself more of a traditionalist. He can offer modest practical gifts like a polished pewter pipe stand for $30 to neat smoker’s knives with bone handle facings for $35. Another useful item is a pewter ‘pebble’ with hinged lid for holding tobacco, for about $30. The same item in old silver, dating from about 1900, costs $150.

Most good pipe shops keep big selections of pipes from pipes for everyday use to presentation packs and rare antique pipes. These can be from $150 for a Viennese-made silver mounted pipe with cultured yellow amber stem to an 18th-century delicately painted Dresden china pipe at perhaps double that price. The choice is yours.