

To Turn Back Time
By
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(Note: part of the article is from the point-of-view of a pipe owner, Mr. Seiler and part by a pipe restorer, Mr. Lawing of Lawdog pipes)

THE PIPE (John)

A good friend recently gifted me with a Lane Era Charatan Supreme Cup and Saucer shaped pipe. Being a "Lane Era" pipe indicates that it was sold in the United States between 1955 and 1984. According to a Collector familiar with dating these pipes it is most likely from the late 1950's. The Cup and Saucer shape is a very rare and desirable to Charatan pipe collectors.



Condition of the pipe

This pipe was a well-used pipe and exhibited gouges and scratches in the finish, excessive or deep char on the rim of the bowl, a stem that does not fit, a heavy change in the coloration of the vulcanite stem, unevenness in the stain finish and many other issues.



You can see some of the issues in the above photographs. The vulcanite stem has heavily oxidized. The fit between the stem and shank is not good. The 'CP' stamping on the stem is almost gone and there is heavy scratch (gouge) below the stamping. There is unevenness in the finish due to the pipe being handled.



The inside of the bowl was excessively reamed. The top of the bowl is charred. It has some deep scratches and gouges. There were many scratches on the outside of the bowl.

CHOICE OF RESTORATIVE ARTIST (John)

Ideally, a pipe like this one would be returned to its original pipe maker or carver to get the best results. In our case, that was not possible as the Charatan of old is not the same as the company of today and the people that originally made this pipe are long gone.

For this special pipe, I wanted to “turn back time” to make the pipe to as close to its original condition as possible. So I needed a pipe restorer as being akin to an antique expert that restores a renaissance Italian painting that hangs in a museum.

In my opinion, there is a difference between a pipe repairman and a pipe restorer. The former is a technician focused in returning a pipe to the owner that is mechanically smokeable, and physically functional and beautiful. A pipe restorer is much more. He/she is an artist who is focused on performing the minimum amount of change to a pipe. It is returned to its owner in a mechanically smokeable form and physically returned back closely in the condition in which the pipe maker or carver desired when it was sold. There is a subtle difference.

How do you select a person to entrust with the restoration of a piece of art? You don't just go to the yellow pages and look for one. You can find information in a number of the on-line facebook groups or videos for some of them showing their work on UTUBE. Some advertise or are mentioned in articles found in pipe collectors' magazines such as “The Pipe Collector”. Many are chosen via word-of-mouth from friends. There are some recommended by pipe shops.

When selecting a person to perform a job, I considered a number of factors:

1. Reputation – what kind of reputation does the person have for his/her work in the pipe community? Do you have recommendations from other people?
2. What do you want done? Is it a pipe repair or a pipe restoration?
3. Has the person under consideration performed repairs or restorations and do they know the difference?
4. Will the selected person communicate and understand the work and the degree of restoration that you want them to perform? Do they keep in contact with you during the restoration process?
5. What will it cost? Some restorations may exceed the value of the pipe. You may just want a repair or a routine cleaning performed.
6. How long will it take? Some people have large backlogs depending on the work they do such as repair/restoration and/or making new pipes.
7. How picky are you regarding the quality of the work versus the cost?

After much consideration, Mr. Robert W. Lawing of Lawdog Pipes was selected to perform the restoration. He has a great reputation in the pipe community plus he had previously restored a Dunhill pipe for me. He was easy to talk with regarding the work that I wanted done and he believes not performing any work that would harm the pipe. To me, he is a great communicator, his costs were reasonable and his performance was timely.

PIPE RESTORATION (Robert)

When John's pipe arrived at the shop there are a number of processes his pipe went through before it starts the actual restoration. Most of the pipes that arrive to be restored by me go through the same process as detailed below (plus others):

1. The pipe arrives and is logged in. Name, address of client, maker of pipe and other identifying marks. This process also includes general out-of-the-box inspection for any obvious issues. This could be broken tenon, cracked shank, heavy caking in bowl, large dents or dings. These issues are noted on the log in sheet.
2. The pipe is then photographed from various angles to note any observed issues and to document general condition of the pipe. Then measurements are taken including length, bowl height, bowl depth, chamber diameter, outside rim, stem length from tenon to button and stem thickness. Once this documentation is complete I go to the next stage.
3. During this stage, the pipe is put in a rotation to begin the restoration process. A start date and a completion date are estimated and can change depending on step 4 and other outside-the-shop factors.
4. The start of the complete inspection begins in this stage. The pipe is completely inspected under bright lighting, and high magnification to note anything missed during the general inspection. It may include inspection of the bowl interior for issues (cake build up which may indicate issues including charring, prior repairs, fissures in bowl, carbonization). The stem is checked for oxidation level, tooth marks, button issues, and tenon issues.

The mortise and draft hole are inspected regarding any buildup inside the mortise, shank cracks or other issues as they may appear.

5. The final pre-inspection is an overall look at the pipe with a handheld light to check for any thing missed in prior step such as dents, dings, and draft hole condition. This is followed by a very close inspection of the rim and bowl interior.

Evaluation of the Pipe

The first issue I noted when I examined this large pipe was that there were numerous dents, ding and scratches on the bowl rim and other locations on the bowl and shank. So the process in my mind begins: How deep are the dents? Has the fiber in the wood been broken? I wanted to attempt to raise the dents on the rim without having to top (sand) the rim and re-stain and correcting the issue in the other areas.

The bowl had been reamed but not in a fashion that suited me. This problem seemed to extend to the mortise, draft hole and stem.

There was an issue in the shank/mortise/stem area which was a bit concerning to me as well. The stem did not seat completely into the mortise. There was about a 1/8 inch gap between the two and the fit of the tenon inside the shank was very tight. A quick check here revealed the issue that needed to be corrected.

The last issue was the heavy oxidation of the stem and the CP logo. Restoring a stem can be difficult in that I do not want to round any sharp edges at the stem shank connection, the stem side edges, reduce the button height or round the button edges.

After each evaluation, I had in my mind the process I would use to restore the pipe before any work began.

The Process

I started with the stem shank issue first. After an inspection there was excessive buildup of shank cake in the mortise area. This build up of tar caused the tenon to not seat completely into the mortise. The tars in John's pipe were rock hard and required a process to soften the buildup for removal. Once the tars build up softened I was able to use some tools to carefully remove the hardened tar and still preserve the integrity of the mortise and keep the diameter intact. The shank was cleaned and this step was completed.

The draft hole opening at the bowl end had buildup which restricted the draw and the draft hole itself was fairly restricted with tar buildup. The cleaning of the draft hole and the opening of it into the bowl was a slow process because I do not want to enlarge the hole itself. Clearing the buildup and leeching away the years of tar in the draft hole was time consuming but worth the effort in the end. Many pipe cleaners and soft brushes are used in this step. Once this step is completed I moved to the stem.

The stem on John's pipe had deep oxidation from button to tenon. One positive note was that it was very uniform. The problem area on this stem, and indeed any stem with a logo stamping, was the CP stamp. It was there and it had enough marking in it to show it was an original stamping. It is important to me that all stampings on the stem are preserved as much as possible. Various items are used in this step include wet/dry sandpaper, micro mesh pads, buffing sticks and a buffer. I was able to preserve the area around

the logo with careful sanding and the stem work turned out very nice. The interior air hole of the stem required a number of pipe cleaners to finish up the inside cleaning.

The final step on the pipe was the bowl interior and rim. The chamber of the pipe had been reamed back very close to the wood. It was uneven in many spots and had an odor of an unknown tobacco blend. Cleaning with Everclear, a quick soak of the interior of the bowl, and some light sanding finished up this task.

The restoration of the rim of the bowl was a different story. There were many scratches, dents, dings and marks on the bowl and rim. I do not like to top a bowl by sanding and re-staining. If the fiber of the wood is not broken the dents can be raised with steam. Sometimes the steaming process will lighten the wood a bit, but the dents can be raised. So the first step on the rim and bowl was to use the steam process and see what the results would be. After carefully proceeding (not too much steam and at the correct temperature and with the right pressure), I was able to raise most of the dents on the bowl to an acceptable level or removed them completely. I followed this same process on the issues found on the other areas of the bowl with varied amounts of success, but all in all it turned out nicely.

The final couple of steps were to do a complete inspection and final polish of the pipe. The final inspection revealed a couple of areas that need to be corrected and after completing them I moved to the final polish.

The final polish consist of three parts, a hand polish and buff then a four coat polish with carnauba wax with a light touch on the buffer. Then the pipe will sit in the shop for at least 24 hours

and head to the final inspection before shipping back to the client.

John's pipe was preservation and restoration of pipe history and it was my pleasure and honor to have him let me handle this endeavor. The entire process from start to finish was...well let us just say that "it was a labor of love".

RESULTS (John)

The restoration turned out beyond my wildest hopes. Most, but not all, of the scratches and dings are gone. If he thought there could be damage to the pipe, Lawdog did not overdo its removal. The top of the bowl is almost flawless. The stem is back to about 90% of the original and the shank-stem fit is much better. The finish is more uniform and almost new in appearance.

As Cher sang "If I Could Turn Back Time" - and for this pipe, time was turned back!



Top of Bowl (before and after)



Stem (before and after)



CONCLUSION (John and Robert)

Pipe restoration is an intricate, detailed, and time consuming process. For the collector that wishes to restore a pipe to almost new, it is well worth the effort. If you cannot do the work yourself then you need to find someone that has the talent, experience and patience to do so.