

## A Tale of Two Pipes

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I have been an avid reader of "THE PIPE COLLECTOR" for many years - in fact, since its inception. I have enjoyed Richard Esserman's columns. My friends and I have discussed what we call "Esserman Moments", defined as when a pipe returns to you after many years of absence after you traded it or sold it, or when you realized that you were just meant to have a certain pipe and got it via a strange route. This is my "Esserman Moment" and I hope you enjoy it.

As a matter of record, I collect Castello shape #84 pipes. This pipe is known as a hawkbill shape, aka a "donkeynut" (but the nickname "donkeynut" is another story for another time). Not just any size, but a Castello G, GG, GGG or larger. My collection of this unique shape has been shown at the now sadly gone CORPS show in Richmond, VA in the fall of 2010 and at the CPCC show in Chicago, IL in the spring of 2011. Since that time, I have sold off most of the non-Castello pipes and the smaller Castello donkeynuts, less than a "G" size. One night in 2010, I found myself at the North American Society of Pipe Collectors' (NASPC) meeting in Columbus, Ohio. (Authors note: I say 2010 as both pipes were dated 2010, they would have been brought into the US in May, 2010 at the Chicago Show, and the NASPC show is in August.) I was in Rick Hopkin's room. Rick is a well known purveyor of pipes and carries many new and estate high grade pipes. I also found myself in the presence of the well known pipe personage, noted author, and collector of high-end straight grain pipes Fred Hanna in Rick's room. He had many high grade pipes on display. We were both admiring Rick's pipes, especially the selection of Castello #84 hawkbills. Fred was eyeing up a beautiful straight grained fiamatta grade Collection 2K hawkbill, made in 2010.



Castello Fiamatta Collection 2K Hawkbill Pipe (Photo courtesy of Fred Hanna)

With my budget limitations, I was looking at a very nice GGG Castello "Castello" grade hawkbill, also made in 2010.

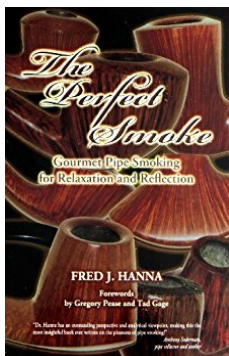


Castello GGG Castello Hawkbill

0levels above, in terms of grain quality, than a “Castello” graded pipe. Correspondingly, it is several levels higher in terms of cost. You can also see the difference in grain in the photos above.

In my humble opinion, the Castello shape 84 is the true, classical hawkbill designed pipe. It is well designed, carved, perfectly engineered, of a nice size, and the quality of the briar is phenomenal. I was discussing the merits of Castello pipes with Fred and some of the specifics in the design of the hawkbill shape. Some of these specifics include the lineup of the top of the bowl and the juncture of the bit and shank being both in the same plane, and how the stem more, or less follows a banana curve (not a french curve) in shape. He was discussing his knowledge of the quality of the grain of the pipes to me. We had a most enlightening discussion. I ended up purchasing the Castello Castello” graded pipe and Fred purchased the “Fiamatta Collection” graded pipe. I mentioned to Fred that I would enjoy adding his pipe to it’s “sister” if he ever decided to sell the pipe and add it to my collection. Subsequently, in a later article in “The Pipe Collector”, Fred graciously mentioned our experience on that fateful evening and how I helped “educate” him on Castello donkeynuts.

2012 was a great year for pipe smokers when Fred Hanna published his noteworthy book entitled “The Perfect Smoke - Gourmet Pipe Smoking For Relaxation and Reflection” through NASPC Press.



Fred Hanna's Scholarly Book on Achieving the Perfect Smoke

Fred’s book is a classic that all pipe smokers should read and have it as part of their reference library. Low and behold, on the last page of Chapter 1 (page 50), there is a photograph of the Fiamatta graded Castello 2K hawkbill pipe. It is available in the Kindle format for such devices.

Fast forward to 2017, Bill Kotyk and I were traveling to the NASPC pipe show in Columbus, Ohio and I mentioned to him that "I wondered if Fred Hanna would be at the show and if he still had that great fiamatta graded hawkbill." I told Bill that I would like to obtain the pipe some day. We got to the show and set up our wares and had a great time on Friday evening. In passing, I saw Fred Hanna in the hallway and he mentioned that he wanted to get together at some point in time. After closing for the evening, we went out to the patio with a group of fellow pipe smokers from our Pittsburgh area pipe clubs to enjoy a bowl. Fred found me there and mentioned that he had a pipe and wanted to know if I might still be interested in adding it to my collection. It was the fiamatta graded Castello 2K hawkbill from many years before. He said that he would like to offer it to me but did not quite know a fair value to place on it. We found Chance Wittamore, an internet purveyor of pipes. He offered his opinion on the value of the pipe. Fred and I did a bit of negotiating and reached an agreement. The transaction would be consummated on Saturday morning. Fred also told me that on Thursday evening at home as he was going through his pipes that he might want to sell or trade that he had a moment where he thought "I wonder if John Seiler would still want this pipe". Interestingly enough, Fred had not been at the NASPC show in two years and I missed last year.

I discussed the proposed transaction with several people, my friend Bill Kotyk and others. All thought it was a good deal, especially with the 'history' behind the pipe. Saturday morning came and the pipe was passed from Fred to myself.



The Passing of the Pipe

Of course, that is good looking Fred Hanna on the right, and the proud owner of a long-sought Castello GG Fiamatta hawkbill on the left. Fred left the show around noon and I did not have a chance to smoke the pipe until after dinner. Fred had asked me to let him know how it smoked. I sent him a one word message on my cell phone "GREAT" meaning that it smoked great. I expected no ghosting

by the pipe from his English tobaccos that he had smoked since it was smoked so lightly. I smoke strictly Virginia tobaccos and as such, it was not a problem.

My collection of larger Castello hawkbill (donkeynut) pipes now consists of 20 pipes from the rusticated sea rocks, to the smooth pipes. The top three pipes are now this Fiamatta graded pipe, a Flame (F2) grade donkeynut pipe, and a Collection 4K Hawkbill. During August I had smoked the 19 hawkbills that I had at that time, each with McClelland Red Cake (#5100) and was amazed at the variation from pipe-to-pipe. All were quite good smokers, with some being a bit better than others.

So that is my "Esserman moment" when a pipe I had desired years ago, came to me as a worthy addition to my pipe collection, perhaps maybe as a top-tier member. Was it meant to happen or was it just chance? I think it was meant to happen.

**Afterword:** I dedicate this little article to Mr. (Col.) Michael Davis and Mr. Mike McCain (deceased), both long-time collectors of "donkeynuts" who started me many years ago on the path of collecting Castello Hawkbills pipes. They had a great influence on me in my selection and appreciation of pipes, but not in tobacco as I smoke virginias and they both enjoyed English blends.