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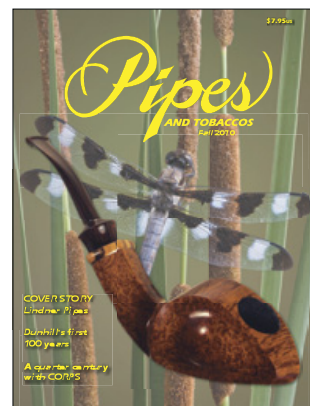
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ON THE COVER

Michael Lindner's highest pipe grade is the dragonfly.
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*"Pipe
Paradise"*

-Pipes & Tobacco Magazine Winter 2006



Fluffy spinning doom

Buffing wheels are intimidating, living creatures. When stationary they're soft and fluffy, but once you trip that power switch your lifespan may best be measured in a few rpms. Buffing wheels growl, they whir, they vibrate—and without provocation they will grab a pipe and launch it pitilessly into a wall or your forehead to disintegrate into briar and vulcanite shrapnel that you'll be extracting from your anatomy for days. They are the polar bears of the machine world—they're fluffy and maybe even cute, but anyone who tries polishing a pipe on a polar bear should be prepared for carnage.

Many people buff pipes without fear of maiming themselves or causing catastrophic damage to nearby windows or load-bearing walls. I'm not one of those people. Machines have been complicating my life since childhood—I've had near-death experiences with lawnmowers, socket wrenches, electric toothbrushes, garage door openers—anything with one or more moving parts has had a go at me. A machine's complexity is irrelevant—my mother once found me suspended from the upstairs railing hopelessly entangled in a Slinky.

So I prefer polishing a pipe by hand, but sometimes the lilting call of fast oxidation removal is irresistible, especially when I need a quick photo of one of the magazine's museum pipes that needs stem polishing. On those occasions I find myself standing at the buffing wheel praying to escape with most of my limbs or a mercifully quick decapitation.

My anxiety is not entirely due to a predilection for crippling myself. There's also my immobilizing fear of Dayton Matlick, the owner of the magazine, who loves the pipe collection more than his own life, let alone mine (he'd trade all of my internal organs for a used corn cob pipe and toast the occasion with champagne). I've caught him talking to the pipes and gloating over them like Gollum in a Ring of Doom outlet store. He has described in graphic detail my biblically proportioned smiting should any of the pipes be damaged. If you've read Dante's *Inferno* you have glimpsed the happiest of my potential futures.

So when the buffing wheel snatched a J. Davis blowfish out of my hands, before its first bounce I'd already visualized my escape to Uzbekistan. But Dayton invariably confiscates my passport when relinquishing the keys to the pipe cabinets, so I needed a domestic strategy. Barricade myself in my office and go down with guns blazing? No, I've not been allowed firearms since I shot my telephone after our copy editor called and questioned my use of the word *edentulous* to describe a pipemaker's eyebrows. I needed another plan.

Whenever inappropriate violence or cowardly desertion have failed me, treachery and deceit have been my closest friends. I would hide the damage. I scooped up the pipe—now in two pieces, broken at the shank—and was fitting the pieces together when from behind me an ominous voice resonating with pestilence and destruction intoned, "What was that noise?"

Still holding the pipe together I turned and there stood Dayton, looming in the doorway like some great slouching beast. My soul cringed as I perceived his true nature as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. "Noise? Nothing. I swear I didn't shoot anything."

"It sounded like wood bouncing on a floor."

"Oh. Sometimes I bang my head on the floor to improve my concentration."

He nodded at the pipe. "What do you have there?"

I backed away, holding the two pieces tightly together. "Some cheap no-name pipe. Nothing special."

His eyes narrowed. "They're *all* special," he hissed. "*Especially* that Jody Davis." And he was gone.

The pipe is now locked in its glass cabinet and looks fine. From the other side, though, you'd find that it is held together with a wad of gum, two staples and some duct tape.

Dayton clearly suspects something. He still has my passport and I've caught him glaring at me as though imagining how my skull would look on his desk. I may soon be just another sad buffing wheel statistic.

Ch...k

Pipes

AND TOBACCOS

A quarterly magazine celebrating pipes of
all kinds and fine tobaccos

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P&T Readers RESPOND

Thanks P&T

While at a local tobacco shop, I picked up a couple of *P&T* magazines. I read the article "Air Pocket Packing" by Fred Hanna in the Winter 2007 issue. The article described a completely different way of packing a pipe than I was using so I tried it and lo and behold it works. The smoke is cool and the taste is great. I'm still a bit sloppy with my packing but I'm sure I will improve. The only thought I had before was to pack it, light it and light it again. No more of that stuff. Thanks for the article.

In the Spring 2010 edition of "Pipelines" I read about Frank's *Pipe Lore*. I remember the magazine first-hand. I think my stepdad was a member of his club and it was the only place where Dad got his pipes. His favorite was a stubby little pipe called "The Bulldog." While in high school I made a combination humidor and pipe holder for him for Christmas. He used it until he joined the Army Air Corps in 1942. He was too old for the draft but he enlisted anyway. He was killed in the North Atlantic on his way to Iceland. He was the first of four generations to enlist in service for America.

I am 85 years old and have been a pipe smoker on and off for more than 70 years. I lost track of *Pipe Lore* until I read about it in your great magazine. Thank you so much.

Tom Everett
Spring, Texas

Cabinet pride

Many moons ago I started to search for the perfect pipe cabinet. Frustrated in my search, I decided to commission one to my own standards. Well, it is

finally (almost) completed and I have included some photos. Even if I say so myself, I think it is quite outstanding. It still lacks a couple of shelves and some tweaking of angles of the shelves, but it is currently being filled slowly and daily. It has low-voltage internal LED lighting and a circulating fan, both of which are independently switched.

Mitch Michelson
Cyberspace



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A N D M O R E 

*UPS GROUND

A century of excellence

A century after Alfred Dunhill opened his first pipe workshop, Dunhill pipes continue to be synonymous with English excellence

Inheriting a legacy of excellence can sometimes be a frightening endeavor. Protecting that heritage while at the same time building on it is a daunting but rewarding task, especially when the tradition involves a much-beloved brand name such as Dunhill, revered by pipe smokers and collectors for 100 years.

Ever since Alfred Dunhill opened his first pipe workshop inside his London tobacco shop, the pipes that would bear his name became synonymous with English excellence because he resolved that he would make pipes of superior quality. Dunhill insisted that his pipes be made from only the finest briar available and that their mouthpieces be completely hand-made. He was one of the first to affix a symbol, a small white spot made from ivory, onto the mouthpiece so that smokers could more easily identify what side was up. He also developed an aluminum tube insert

that would keep the pipes' interiors clean in an era in which efficient pipe cleaners didn't exist. He invented the sandblasted pipe that was lighter in weight, more robust and cooler to smoke. He developed a method of oil-curing the briar, wicking out the impurities inside the wood and making it more difficult for the pipes to burn out. He then priced his pipes according to their superiority, which increased their desirability.

Mention Big Ben, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Hyde Park or Buckingham Palace, and most people will immediately conjure up images of British greatness. As far as pipes are concerned, Dunhill has reached the same status as those cultural icons, thanks to Alfred Dunhill's diligence and vision.

Guarding the flame a century after Alfred Dunhill provided the spark are Kalmon S. Hener, the general manager of Alfred Dunhill Ltd.'s smoking accessory

division, now known as the White Spot Division; Stephen Wilson, the production manager who has been with Dunhill for more than 40 years; and approximately 20 employees who make pipes and leather goods at Dunhill's legendary factory on St. Andrew's Road in Walthamstow, an area in northeast London not far from White Hart Lane, home stadium to the English Premier League's Tottenham Hotspur Football Club.

A soft-spoken German, Hener came to Dunhill in 1996 after heading Hugo Boss' duty-free sales division. Drawn to history, and especially antique-collecting, Hener accepted a job with Dunhill because it would allow him to relocate to London and make it easier for him to visit its famous antique market on Portobello Road. His collecting focused first on vintage fountain pens, but then he became interested in watches. When he started working for Dunhill, his interests changed yet again, this time to pipes and pipe memorabilia. A dedicated pipe enthusiast, Hener is fond of saying that smoking cigarettes is like sprinting down the street, smoking cigars is like walking down the street, and smoking a pipe is like sitting on a bench beside the street because of its relaxing qualities. He especially likes smoking a pipe in the winter because he finds something consoling about a warm pipe bowl in his hand on a cold day, and he describes his ideal setting as easing into a chair in front of a comfortable fire with a pipe in his hand and a Labrador retriever at his feet.

As general manager of the White Spot Division, Hener oversees the product development, sales and marketing efforts of Dunhill's pipes and pipe accessories, cigar and cigarette accessories as well as Parker and Charatan pipes, which are made in



One of the White Spot's newest accessories, the Ascot Pipe Caddy, holds an assortment of Dunhill pipes.

a separate factory in Chatham, Kent, and then sent to St. Andrews Road for grading and stamping only.

While Parker and Charatan pipes may be graded and stamped at the same factory at which Dunhill pipes are made, Hener and Wilson both adamantly point out that production of those pipes is completely different in all other aspects.

"It's not the same product at all," Hener explains. "Parker and Charatan pipes do not undergo the same curing process as White Spot pipes, and Parker pipes have fillings while Dunhill pipes never have fillings."

"A Dunhill pipe has a completely hand-made mouthpiece for each pipe, while Parker has prefabricated molded mouthpieces," adds Wilson. "A Dunhill pipe that is rejected will not become a Parker or Charatan pipe. We buy different wood for those pipes that is not of the same quality as the briar used for Dunhill. I've been here 40 years and I can tell you that the same quality standards in place in 1969 are still in place today. The product that we make now has the same quality associated with it as it did 40 years ago. We are using the same processes and the same materials. Out of 100 blocks of wood that we start turning, only 3 to 7 percent will become a White Spot pipe. The pipes that we reject are cut in half and burned because we don't make them into seconds or thirds. There's only one quality for a Dunhill pipe—it either is a Dunhill pipe or it's not."

While Hener and Wilson are both insistent that there is little in common between Parker, Charatan and Dunhill pipes, they more passionately refute reports that Dunhill pipes are made anywhere other than the factory on St. Andrews Road.

"The rumors that our Dunhill pipes are made in St. Claude, France, are completely false," Hener bluntly states. While conducting a tour of the factory floor, Wilson shows two employees working with band saws, cutting blocks and shaping them into rough bowls, and adds, "I think that those rumors started from other companies who are jealous of our position. They're envious of our position and reputation in the market and they want to try to knock us down a little."

Indeed, Dunhill's position atop the pipe market is strong. According to Hener, 2009 sales in the United States alone were up by more than 60 percent, making it the top market for Dunhill pipes. And 2010 has so



According to Hener, all White Spot pipe bowls are turned at the factory in north London.



Combining his love of history and antiques, Hener has conjured up a series of very rare pipes that collectors with distinguished tastes have treasured. Every year Dunhill produces two to four special series pipes. There's always a Christmas pipe that sells out each year but then there are the pipes that Hener has created that link English history with the history of English pipemaking.

A few years ago, Alfred Dunhill acquired some teak wood that had been on the HMS *Victory*, Admiral Horatio Nelson's flagship at the decisive Battle of Trafalgar. The company used the teak, which had been replaced during a refurbishment of the *Victory*, for tampers that would accompany the pipes, which featured a sterling silver band engraved with Nelson's signal to his fleet as it prepared for the battle: "England expects that every man will do his duty."

After the Battle of Trafalgar's release, Hener says that people didn't realize that it was the first pipe in a trilogy that will celebrate significant moments in English history. The second pipe in the series, commemorating the Battle of Britain, is due out in 2010, 70 years after outnumbered British aviators fought off the might of the Nazi Luftwaffe. These limited-edition pipes will encompass parts of an original Rolls Royce Merlin engine that would have powered a WWII-era British Spitfire fighter that Hener acquired at auction. The Battle of Britain pipes come with a pipe tamper in the shape of a Spitfire's propeller blade, made from the engine's aluminum and engraved with Winston Churchill's famous comment on the Royal Air Force's brave pilots: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few." The stunning wooden presentation box is shaped like the cross section of a Spitfire wing.

The final pipe in the trilogy will be released in late 2015 to mark the 200th anniversary of the Allied victory in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Hener says it's too early to tell how that pipe might be presented, but he is searching for suitable provenance material from that battle, and he's already thinking of ways to incorporate the wood or metal from it into a pipe and tamper set.

But Hener's special series pipes aren't limited to important times in English history. For instance, there's the Moon Landing pipe that was released to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing. Like some other special series pipes, the Moon Landing pipe is encased in a box made



(Top): The first in a series of limited pipes to celebrate great moments in British history, the Trafalgar pipe featured a tamper made from teak used on Admiral Horatio Nelson's flagship, HMS *Victory*. (Bottom): Released in 2009 to mark the 40th anniversary of Man's first moon landing, Dunhill's Moon Landing pipe features Neil Armstrong's historic first words from the moon's surface engraved on the silver bowl ring.

far shown another very healthy increase.

"It seems to us that there is a small resurgence of the pipe," Hener comments. "Overall, there is a trend toward the pipe. Over the last five years we did very well. We increased our worldwide sales by 1 to 3 percent every year with the exception of 2008, when we increased sales by 11 percent, and then this year where, against all expectations, we will end up far ahead of last year. Other strong countries for us include Germany and Italy—Russia was one until recently but they will come back—Ukraine, and then some parts of Asia, such

as Hong Kong, China and Taiwan for the high grades; those are real collector markets. We are highly profitable and we have even taken on an apprentice, so we are planning for the future. Our success depends on staying true to our high quality and manufacturing standards as well as to the style that defines our pipes and on bringing out interesting products that customers can appreciate and find desirable. The ideas are here—it just depends on our production capabilities and the market."

And Hener is the man who dreams up the ideas that keep Dunhill at the top.

to look like a book, with the gray leather made to look like the moon's surface, and a depiction of Armstrong's descent from the lunar module on the front. The bowls feature a hand-chased sterling silver cap ring that represents a moon crater and is engraved with Neil Armstrong's message to NASA as he stepped off the lunar module's stairs onto the moon's dusty surface: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." The solid sterling silver band is engraved with the starting date of the mission to the moon and the tamper is made to look like a Saturn V rocket and is constructed of white Erinoid. Limited to only 40 pieces worldwide, there is also one very special Moon Landing pipe with an 18-karat gold band and rim and a sapphire set into the nose of the Saturn V tamper.

"You can argue about what has been mankind's greatest accomplishment," Hener says, explaining how he settled on creating a pipe set that would celebrate the moon landing. "Some might say that the invention of the wheel or of fire is man's greatest accomplishment, but I think landing on the moon is. After 40 years, it's still difficult for me to imagine that you can go on a spaceship, land on the moon and walk around on it."

These special pipes and others that Hener has produced and is planning for the future attract a collector's market, one that has been strong throughout Dunhill's history.

"There are those who buy the pipes to smoke, others who buy them to collect and then there are even connoisseurs who buy two pipes—one to smoke and one to collect," Hener says. "There is a demand out there and we believe that it's growing for these types of products. Most brands only rely on smokers, while we serve smokers and collectors alike. For the collectors or for someone who wants to buy a wonderful gift, these limited editions are special treasures to cherish and wait for that set the standard in and for the industry."

And that standard is one of excellence—which has been Dunhill's strategy from its birth.

"We try to make the best product possible, and a very large percentage of the wood that we bring into the factory never becomes White Spot pipes because our quality control standards are extremely high. Obviously such a product justifies a premium in price to reflect the manufacturing cost, so it will always be positioned at



(Top): Hener acquired this WWII-era RAF radio while visiting a London antique shop to help inspire him to create the newest historic series that commemorates the Battle of Britain (bottom). The Battle of Britain set comes in a box shaped like the airfoil of a Spitfire fighter and a tamper stamped from the aluminum of a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, the power plant for Spitfires, that Hener acquired at an auction.

the upper and top end of the market both in quality and price. There are some independent pipemakers who make fabulous freehand pipes, which I admire, but we are in a different model, we mostly make classic pipes—that's what a Dunhill is known for and our signature; we do quality pipes that are very light and have the best smoking characteristics from the very beginning. Taking into account the large number of different shapes, sizes and finishes we manufacture, we have relatively good availability, although we can never produce enough pipes to satisfy all demand, but that's what

we have to live with."

Hener emphatically believes that the pipe world is secure, and thus Dunhill's place in it will also be safe.

"I think that pipe sales will continue to go up over the next five years," he says. "There seems to be some younger people taking up pipes. The younger ones aren't necessarily Dunhill pipe smokers right now but they might be in the future. With the quality of Dunhill pipes and the history of the brand, it's my belief that it's the dream of every pipe smoker to own at least one White Spot pipe." P&T

An online original

Smokingpipes.com celebrates 10 years

The day Vanderbilt University freshman F. Sykes Wilford was denied a part-time job at a used bookstore near campus was a great day for pipe smokers.

"It would have been fun," says Wilford. "But I guess my life would have turned out much differently." Had that bookstore hired him he would probably now be an academic like most of the rest of his family. He would be teaching 11th century European history instead of running what may be the largest online retail

shop for pipe smokers in the world, Smokingpipes.com, as well as one of the most beautifully appointed brick-and-mortar stores you could hope to see, Low Country Pipe & Cigar in South Carolina.

Shortly after his bookstore rejection, Wilford was in Elliston Place Pipe & Tobacco near campus in Nashville, picking up some pipe tobacco or cigarettes or something—he doesn't remember what exactly he purchased that day. He does remember turning back as he was leaving though, and as an afterthought casually asking, "You wouldn't have a job opening here, would you?"

Soon he was working 20-25 hours a week and learning a great deal about being a tobacconist. "I fell in love with the pipes and pipe tobacco—and with cigars too, to a degree. I knew I could work in this industry forever." It may not have been the greatest way for a college student to earn extra money, though—a hefty percentage of his pay was immediately spent right there on tobacco and new pipes. "I remember buying what I considered my first real pipe, a Brebbia bent bulldog. It retailed for around \$75 at the time. It was awesome." He also developed his taste in pipe tobacco. "That was another great thing about working there. I could smoke anything in the shop while I was working."

The only thing missing for him there was the lack of what he considered essential technological advancements. After about a year he decided it was time to forge ahead on his own by combining his love for pipes with his enthusiasm for technology. "At the shop we were still

doing a yearly inventory with pen and paper," he recalls. "There was no real-time inventory system. It boggled my mind." This was in 2000, when the dot-com bubble was peaking and everyone thought the Internet was poised to change the world. Wilford felt the pipe community could benefit from that technology as well, and he started Smokingpipes.com from his dorm room.

Wilford had already achieved senior standing after only two years at Vanderbilt, but the pipe business was taking more and more of his time—to the point where his senior year took five semesters to complete. "By the time I graduated," he says, "my academic responsibilities seemed more of a sideline and the business was central. It was not a part-time job; it was 50-60 hours a week, then doing whatever it took to get by at school." It was a terrific relief when he graduated: "Now I could do one thing properly as opposed to doing two things poorly." He moved the business to South Carolina and devoted all of his time to Smokingpipes.com.

He's telling this story while sitting in his office upstairs from Low Country Pipe & Cigar, the brick-and-mortar store that his Internet business helped him build in 2005. "I always wanted a tobacco shop," he says. "It's the greatest toy anybody could have." From one of his windows can be seen the building he recently leased to add warehouse space and shipping and receiving facilities and serve as extra offices for his 25 staff members. But back in 2002 there were no buildings, no physical retail shop, no multiple floors of offices. He had only a web-



Sykes Wilford presides over one of his greatest aspirations: Low Country Pipe & Cigar.

site and a couple of people on staff to help him run it. But most important, he had the drive and sense to keep learning new skills to keep improving his website, and he had an inherent love for pipe smoking and pipe collecting that motivated him to make Smokingpipes.com a central Web presence for people around the world with an interest in pipes.

"We were buying pipes from domestic distributors, people like David Field, Steve Monjure, Rob Siegel, Alan Schwartz—they could have just ignored me, but they didn't, and I'll always be grateful." There was at the time a certain resistance in the industry to Web-based businesses. Today, when most tobacco retail shops maintain and depend upon their own websites, the Internet is an integral part of business. But only 10 years ago many retail shops felt threatened by the Internet. "There's always a resistance to any new technology," says Wilford. "The feeling is that it won't last, it's not real, it's not the way my grandfather did business and therefore it can't be good—and there's a certain legitimacy to that view: You don't want to risk damaging your brand on an unknown.

"But I think the Internet has been undeniably good for the pipe industry; it's helped it survive. Outside of just a few places, there were no concentrations of pipe smokers anywhere, not enough to support a dedicated pipe shop. So you had cigar stores that sold occasional pipes, and that dynamic does not create the necessary expertise in the staff and doesn't give consumers the selection that they deserve and now have with the Internet."

Even more important for the pipe smoker than a good selection of products, says Wilford, has been the proliferation of pipe information that the Internet provides. "*P&T* magazine is the only consumer print magazine of note in the pipe world—and that's because it's not a very big world. The Internet really helps supplement what *P&T* does in print. Without it the continuing drain on the pipe-smoking populace would not have been arrested."

Thankfully, the decline in pipe smoking does seem to be turning



Smokingpipes.com consistently offers pipes from some of the top pipemakers worldwide. A Kent Rasmussen smooth freehand, top, features a decorative mastodon ivory shank cap. Below that is a Smio Satou volcano with bamboo. (Photos by Bobby Altman)

around. Wilford notes that his customer base is growing with younger people, more enthusiasts in their 20s and 30s. "At pipe shows just six or eight years ago," he says, "the primary hair color was gray. But now I'm seeing more and more younger folks,

people closer to my own age, and that's great for the hobby."

Fundamental for those newer pipe smokers are mid-range pipes by such manufacturers as Savinelli, Brebbia, Stanwell and many others, and those mid-priced pipes made up the bulk



of sales in the first year or two for Wilford. Then in 2002 came a defining moment, one almost as serendipitous as his finding employment in a tobacco shop: He decided to visit Japan.

"A friend from college was working for me at the time. He was a huge Japanese film buff and he had always wanted to go to Japan—kind of bizarre for a guy from Louisiana. Also, the World Cup was being held in Japan in 2002. So we wanted to go, and we started thinking there must be a way to justify the trip from a business standpoint." They already had a relationship with the Japanese pipe company Tsuge, and they knew pipe collector Barney Suzuki and had heard stories about some great carvers in Japan. They went.

On that first trip Barney Suzuki introduced Wilford to Hiroyuki Tokutomi and Smio Satou. Satou had been doing pipe repair for Tsuge for a number of years. "He had made pipes in an almost friends-and-family sort of way," says Wilford. "He'd sell some at little pipe gatherings and pipe shows, maybe 15 or 20 pipes a year. He was doing something else part time and making pipes part time and doing repairs part time." Since meeting Wilford, though, Satou is now primarily a pipemaker who also does some repairs, though he makes only about 40 pipes a year.

Tokutomi at that time was doing *netsuke*, a Japanese ivory carving art form, and selling a few pipes in Japanese pipe shops. He wanted to

make pipes full time, but *netsuke* was what paid his bills. "Tokutomi's attitude was, 'If you'll buy pipes, I'll make pipes,'" says Wilford. Having found a client like Wilford who would buy everything he could make, Tokutomi immersed himself in full-time pipe-making, working 75-80 hours a week. "I really think that for someone to tell him, 'no rules, just make pipes,' was the coolest, most liberating thing ever for him," says Wilford. "There was no question in my mind that I could sell these pipes. They were incredible; they were brilliant. These men were geniuses and it was obvious. It was unbelievable that almost no one knew who they were. There was all this mystery about these great Japanese carvers."

So, thanks to the World Cup and to a friend's enthusiasm for Japanese film, Wilford now had new sources for top-grade artisan pipes, pipes that most people in the U.S. and Europe were unfamiliar with. Now things really started to change for Smokingpipes.com. "Getting the Japanese carvers on board was a watershed moment for us," says Wilford. "Our success with them got Teddy Knudsen to notice us and we started selling his pipes in 2003. Peter Heeschen joined us at about the same time. Then, in 2005 and 2006, Lars Ivarsson, Nana Ivarsson and Jess Chonowitsch came aboard."

That upper echelon of ultra-expensive pipemakers accounted for a huge percentage of Wilford's business in 2003-2004. "We grew very quickly through those years," he says.

"In 2003, our business tripled; in 2004 it more than doubled; in 2005 we grew 50 percent." The company's early growth was primarily in high-grade pipes, but for the last few years the rest of the business has caught up. "Last year the super high-end pipes accounted for only 15 percent of total sales, whereas they had been 55-60 percent in 2004—but that's not because those sales declined, it's that everything else grew. Tobacco is now about 25 percent, for example. We've also grown very quickly with factory-made pipes—we're still talking about premium pipes, not basket pipes by any stretch of the imagination—Peterson, Savinelli, Stanwell ... they've all grown in sales very nicely."

Accommodating growth like that with a Web-based business requires a specialized staff. Most important for pipe smokers is information—it's hard to buy a pipe, especially one costing many hundreds of dollars, without being able to pick it up and handle it in person. That's why Smokingpipes.com provides multiple photos of each pipe as well as measurements and a detailed text description. For that to work you need talented photographers, experienced pipe people to describe each individual pipe with the details they know collectors want, and you need Internet technology staff to make sure it all works on the website in a seamless fashion—and you're doing this with hundreds of pipes a week.

"Staffing has always been a challenge for us," says Wilford. "There aren't a lot of people out there who know a lot about pipes in a specialized way. There are many people who have been smoking pipes for years, but we've always needed people who are very serious pipe enthusiasts, people who love the products and enjoy researching everything about them. Adam Davidson has been a great help to us—as a talented pipemaker himself he brings that perspective to his descriptions and his quality control responsibilities. Brian Levine has many years of tobacco experience and is a noted collector. Susan Salinas oversees the estate restoration staff that brings seven or eight dozen estates to the site each week. Alyson Ranalli manages a

burgeoning coterie of creative types who do everything that is required to get a pipe on the website and publish the newsletters twice a week. We have a great staff now and each individual is essential. But just as important as the skills and experience each person brings to the company are their individual personalities—everyone fits in with the atmosphere of this place. We really are a family—we’re just a bunch of people doing what we love and having fun.”

Wilford doesn’t handle daily operations. “I tend to be somewhat disruptive when I try to do that,” he says. “I set corporate philosophy, corporate aesthetic, I write code, I write for the website, make decisions. When I try to get into the details of daily business, my staff tells me to go away. I’m much better at running distinct projects than making sure everything is running smoothly each day.”

It’s a well-run, finely tuned company, and its remarkable growth and success over the last 10 years shows that it reflects a business model that works. Wilford knows, however, that a carefully structured corporation is not enough to succeed in such an intensely personal hobby as pipe collecting. It is the members of the pipe community who have made the company what it is—the distributors who helped him in the beginning and maintain their support, the pipe collectors who show continued interest in the products, the everyday pipe guys who regularly purchase tobacco and pipes, the pipemakers and manufacturers who provide product. As his 10th year in business arrived, Wilford knew he wanted to do something to thank all of these supporters.

That’s why the pipe party to rival all pipe parties was thrown at the Chicagoland International Pipe & Tobacianna Show last May. “We wanted to do something to thank everyone,” says Wilford, “and the Chicago show seemed like the logical place. We thought about doing something here in South Carolina but the logistics were a nightmare. Most everyone already attends the Chicago show. We originally conceived a sit-down dinner with all the people we’d done business with for years, the



An extra-long Hiroyuki Tokutomi with a perfectly shaped seven-knuckle bamboo shank. (Photo by Bobby Altman)

people we were close to, but we didn’t want to leave anyone out—we wanted to thank everyone. So we ended up doing a dinner Friday night for about 80 people in the industry—pipemakers, distributors, some collectors, our long-term supporters—and then doing the Saturday night party for everyone at the show.”

It was a terrific event that Saturday night in the smoking tent. Live music, an open bar, hors d’oeuvres, dancing, smoking—the smoke was thick enough that you could rest your pipe on the air itself, but no one seemed to mind. It’s an impressive proposition to host an open bar at a pipe show because alcoholic beverages taste great with pipe tobacco and, let’s face it, everybody smokes a lot at pipe shows. Hundreds of people were there partying into the early morning and Wilford was in the middle of it all, happy to be part of such a happy community. “If you’re going to do something, do it right,” he says. “No half-way measures. It was really spe-

cial for me to have all of those people in the room.”

That party was the culmination of his first 10 years in the industry, and Wilford now looks to the future. “We have some great new innovations, some really impressive stuff that we’re getting ready for the website,” he says. “I don’t want to be specific right now because if it doesn’t work out, well, that would be embarrassing!” We can be assured that whatever it might be, it will coincide with Wilford’s original determination to bring the best of modern technology to the staunchly traditional world of pipe smoking. P&T

Low Country Pipe & Cigar/Smokingpipes.com is located just north of Myrtle Beach and may be contacted at 2 East Hwy. 90, Little River, SC 29566; 843.281.9304 or toll free 888.366.0345; www.smokingpipes.com; info@smokingpipes.com.



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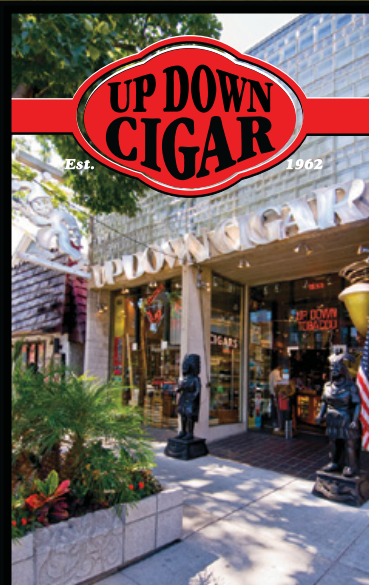
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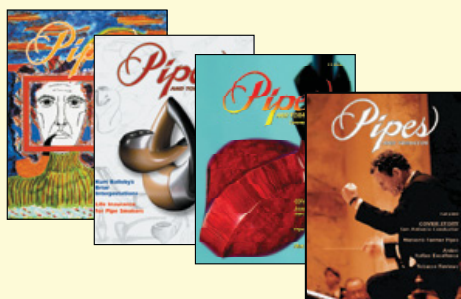
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BY CHUCK STANION

Contrasts

Michael Lindner started as a street punk you'd climb a fence to avoid and became a world-class pipemaker you'd feel fortunate to know

Let's enter the realm of blood-curdling horror for just a moment. Imagine you have a 16-year-old daughter whose evening date has just arrived. Now imagine that date as the worst nightmare you can conceive. He's a punk rocker in a leather jacket with spikes, metal studs and jackboots. He has a surly attitude and a fake ID and views the world as an unworthy adversary. He's an antisocial high school dropout who hangs with Detroit street gangs, drug addicts and petty criminals—but he's about five times smarter than an average street thug so he's that much more dangerous and totally immune to your logical arguments regarding appropriate behavior with your daughter. Yours is not the first gun that's been held to his head tonight and he's unimpressed with your threats of evisceration and painful death—he risks worse than that every day. How do you turn this dirtbag's life around?

Simple. Just put a pipe in his hands.

In a few short years you'll have a polite, sophisticated, articulate, clean-cut pipemaker who crafts some of the finest pipes in the world. That dirtbag whom you'd rather run over with your car than let date your daughter was Michael Lindner in his teens, but you'd never guess that now. Today he projects geniality, speaks with an Ivy League vocabulary and, most important, smokes pipes.

OK, it wasn't actually pipes that first pulled him off the streets. Pipes were a second step for him. The first step came at an after-party for a concert featuring the death metal/punk band GWAR when a friend of Lindner's decided it was time to go outside and throw bricks at cars. One of those cars was, naturally enough, a police cruiser.

As police cars converged on the scene and the party goers fled in all directions under the spotlights of circling helicopters, a friendly skinhead with the unlikely street name Flapjack escaped with

Lindner to a car parked a block away where they could watch the spectacle unfold. "What the hell are you doing here?" said Flapjack.

"I wanted to avoid being arrested," said Lindner.

"That's not what I mean, you idiot. These kids come from terrible backgrounds: Drugs and crime and abuse and ignorance. Not you. You have options; they don't. You have huge potential. What the hell are you thinking?"

Lindner shakes his head in bemused reverie as he recalls that moment. "They were the right words at the right time from the right person," he says. "I was going down a dark, dangerous road back then. I never did drugs but I was drinking way more than anyone can survive for long. I'd had friends who had overdosed; I'd had friends who were murdered. That guy probably saved my life." Significantly, Lindner later learned that Flapjack moved from Detroit to

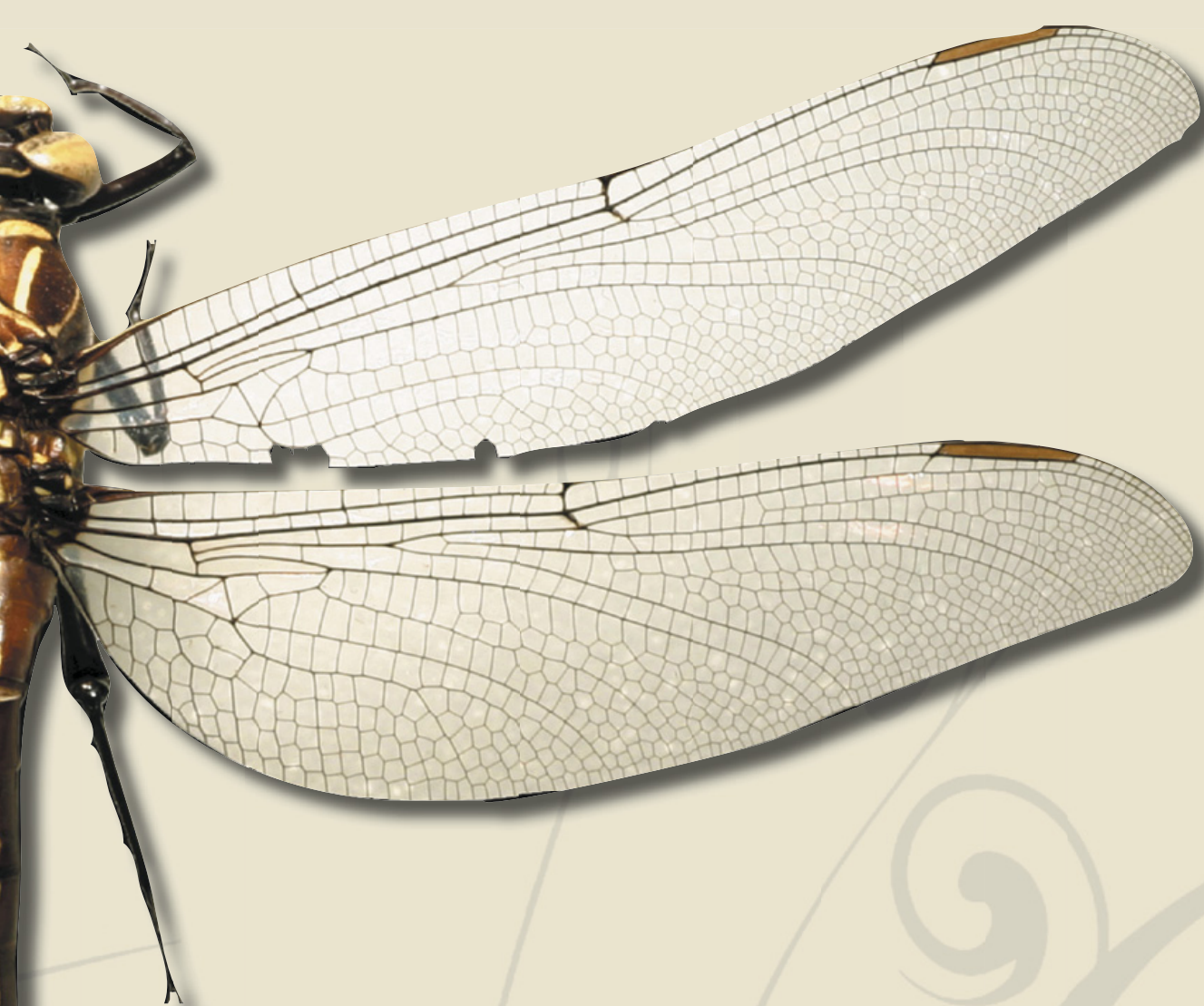


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Chicago and became a police officer in a special unit dedicated to getting kids out of street gangs. "I like to think," says Lindner, "that I was his first success."

Lindner left the punk scene and, working with his natural love for music, taught himself about car audio systems. He learned all the electronics; he taught himself the physics behind speaker enclosure engineering. "I would tinker in a car for hours, fine-tuning the sound so it was as close to live music as possible." He did that for five years before feeling the urge to run his own business. He bought a janitorial service from his parents and became a successful entrepreneur. The business grew to 15 employees and kept accepting larger and larger contracts. He expanded too quickly and annihilated the business. So he built it back up again from zero; this is a guy who is accustomed to ups and downs. "You have to remember that Detroiters have an irrepressible determination," he says. "You can't keep us



Photo by Shelly Davis



Lindner calls this shape the Satori, which loosely translates as “sudden enlightenment and a state of consciousness attained by intuitive illumination,” based on a basic tenant in Zen Buddhism. The grade is a Dragonfly 4, the highest grade Lindner has produced. Although it was finished in 2009, this piece took three years, on and off, to complete. Lindner would work on it for 15-20 minutes at a time, set it aside, come back to it a month later and so on. He estimates an investment of approximately 30 total hours in this piece.

down; we expect to have to fight for everything. Nothing comes easy.”

He’s not had it easy, perhaps, but he’s sometimes been lucky.

In 1994 he and a friend named Don stumbled onto an estate sale. “We were standing in this yard at this sale,” says Lindner, “and Don, who smoked and collected pipes, pointed across the yard and said, ‘Those are display racks.’ I looked and saw a rack that said ‘BBB, Best British Briar,’ and I said, ‘So?’” Lindner had smoked cigars since he was 17 but had never smoked a pipe and knew nothing about them.

“It’s highly unusual for an individual to have racks like that,” said Don. There were three retail store display racks: the BBB rack, one for GBD pipes and a third that Lindner does not recall. “Let’s see if they have any pipes,” said Don.

Indeed they did have pipes. “My par-

ents owned a tobacconist,” said the lady running the sale. “It was on Lafayette in downtown Detroit and after the riots in ’67 the area was just decimated. They decided to pack everything up and retire. All the inventory is in boxes in the basement. Would you like to see it?”

“So we followed her to the basement,” says Lindner, “and Don started going through these boxes of pipes. I had no idea what he was doing but he’d take a tray out and open it up, then set it aside and take out another tray. He went through this process for about 15 minutes and then pulled me aside and said, ‘How much money do you have on you?’”

With Lindner’s \$65 they had \$110 between them. Lindner had no interest in the pipes but Don assured him he’d pay him back the next day. Don paid \$100 for 45 pipes in four trays and urged

Lindner to walk quickly with him to the car. “How much are these worth?” asked Lindner. “Just shut up and keep walking,” said Don.

Later that day Lindner opened up the trays and for the first time looked carefully at the pipes. He picked them up, turned them over in his hands and examined the workmanship. “It was like I’d been struck by lightning,” he says. Each one was a unique sculpture. “They were incredibly beautiful, like perfectly cut jewels.” He was quickly recalibrating his opinion of pipes. “Hey, Don,” he said. “Tell you what: Instead of you paying me back that \$65, how about I keep eight pieces and you keep the rest. But I get to choose the eight.” Don thought that was fine.

Lindner still has some of those pipes. “I didn’t know one pipe brand from another; I just picked the ones that most appealed to me.” But he had good taste even then. He ended up with six Sasienis (including four 4-dots, one of them a 1948 patent) and two Savinelli Punto Oro silver mounts. “That,” he says, “is how I became a pipe smoker.”

It wasn’t any easier for Lindner than it was for any new pipe smoker; the first few smokes were wretched experiences. “I started with a Savinelli billiard,” he says. “I’d been advised to smoke Dunhill 965, and I didn’t like it at all. So I tried some other stuff, some raspberry delight or some such thing, and that was worse, it just didn’t give me what I enjoyed about cigars. I figured the billiard was just a dud, that it was just a poor smoker.”

When he later stumbled across some Balkan Sobranie, he knew it was a rarity and on a whim decided to try it. “I smelled it and it was heavenly; the aroma was wild and exotic, like nothing I’d ever experienced.” But he didn’t know what it might do to his pipes, so he decided



This Spider 3 graded blowfish was produced in 2009 and is a chameleon: from one side, the pipe is completely sandblasted—from the other, completely smooth. The shank cap and stem inlay are both figured Italian olivewood, which is grain matched so that the striations in the olivewood line up perfectly when the stem is aligned properly.

to avoid risk and try it in his Savinelli billiard, which had already been assaulted with tobacco he hated and that he thought was simply a bad smoker. “I lit it up and it smoked incredibly. I had an amazing epiphany. I realized that different tobaccos smoke differently in different pipes.” The Savinelli wasn’t a dog after all. The experiences possible with different combinations of pipes and tobaccos were endless.

This revelation so intrigued him that he started buying pipes on eBay. He’d buy a group of four or five pipes and try them all, find maybe one of the lot that he liked, then buy some more. “Pretty soon I found myself with a pile of pipes I didn’t know what to do with, so I started cleaning them up and relisting them on eBay. I soon realized that I was buying five pipes for \$50, selling four of them at \$50 each and that there might be a viable business here.”

He sold pipes like that on eBay for a year and a half. In February 1999, he started a website called The Pipe Rack (www.thepiperack.com). He posted monthly updates for the first couple of years, but current updates are weekly. It started with inexpensive estate pipes in the \$50-\$70 range but eventually included new pipes as well, and now the

site offers estate pipes from \$50 up to hundreds of dollars. “What really motivated me to develop the Pipe Rack was my frustration with buying pipes from owners who claimed they were in perfect, mint condition but [they] turned out to be otherwise—not buffed, not reamed, not cleaned appropriately, with toothmarks on the stems. So I decided that every pipe I sold would go through a very specific process of rejuvenation; every pipe would be reconditioned to a level I would want my pipes to be.”

Word spread that the Pipe Rack was a source for pipes in excellent condition at good prices. “The business started to grow and grow,” says Lindner. With that growth came an expansion of his knowledge regarding pipe repair as well as the history of brands. “I was fascinated with Sasienis because they were among my first pipes. I did a lot of research on the brand and at one time had close to 150 pre-war patents plus a number of post-war pieces. I went to the trademark and patent offices to learn as much as I could. I developed a timeline for Sasienis and an expertise of their history. I enjoyed that aspect of the hobby.”

Often Lindner would purchase old Sasienis with replacement stems, and he had the natural desire to inlay the appro-

priate logo dots. “It was no mean feat to get those just right,” he says. “Jim Cooke was the only one doing it right, and he’s insane about details—and I mean that in a good way. His reproductions were so good he had to start marking them on the tenons so they wouldn’t be mistaken for originals.” About that time, though, Cooke announced that he would no longer do reproduction or refurbishing work. Lindner had honed his own skills until he could satisfy the perfectionist in himself to that same high degree. Despite only rudimentary tools at his disposal, he built a reputation in the hobby as someone who could achieve the impossible. The reproduction work could only enhance his pipe business, so he started buying the machines and tools necessary to streamline that pursuit.

But once again something strange happened that would alter the direction of his life.

He now had The Pipe Rack and was refurbishing a lot of pipes. With reproduction stems as a goal he set up a workshop with a dust collector and the necessary machinery, including a lathe—“A beautiful 1930s Atlas Craftsman that had been fully restored,” he says. “Now I needed stem blanks, so I called Mark



This freehand Poker features a plateaux rim, mammoth ivory shank cap and brindled mouthpiece. It was made around 2002 and is graded either A or AA.



Lindner characterizes this pipe as the epitome of the Pickaxe shape and probably the best one he has so far completed. It was made in 2001, and although it predates his grading system, he says it would qualify for the Dragonfly grade. It won the *Pipes and tobaccos* professional carving contest in 2001.



This shape is called the Scorpion, although some refer to it as a Wave. Lindner made this pipe in 2001 before he started grading; it was one of his first explorations of Danish design.

Tinsky of American Smoking Pipes. He said no problem. Then, for some weird reason, I said, 'You know what, why don't you send me some briar, too.' I don't know why I made that request—I'd not planned it. So he sent me two or three pieces of briar as well."

Now here's the strange, metaphysical part of the story. "As soon as I saw the briar," says Lindner, "I saw the pipe." We're not talking about some vague notion of an approximate potential shape, but a very specific pipe. "It was plain as day. As soon as I looked at the block of wood I saw the pipe inside, in three dimensions. I mean, I looked at one side, then the other, then the end, and I said to myself, 'That's odd.'"

Lindner speculates that he had handled so many thousands of pipes for The Pipe Rack, had carefully studied so many shapes as a collector, had concentrated so intently on how grain and shape worked together, that he intuitively understood the most plausible opportunity a block of briar presented. "I don't know how," he says. "But I made a pipe that day." He even crafted a hand-cut stem for that first pipe. Every Lindner pipe ever carved has featured a hand-cut stem.

Seeking constructive criticism, he posted a link to photos of the pipe on alt.smokers.pipes, an Internet newsgroup for pipe smokers. The response was remarkable. Not only was the feedback positive, but he received embarrassingly high offers for the pipe. "I wrote back, 'This is my first pipe; trust me, you don't want it.'"

His first pipe show as a pipemaker was Chicago in 2001, where he sold all but three of the 25 pipes he brought with him. His creatively styled pipes and finishing techniques made an impression with collectors. "I continued to fine-tune my techniques," says Lindner. "I still made a lot of mistakes—I didn't sell those mistakes but I made a lot. There was a learning curve and it took about four years to get through all those beginner's mistakes. Every Lindner pipe sold was properly engineered, it's just that I was also gradually filling a basket with failed pipes that weren't properly engineered. But by 2003-2004 I understood where I was and what I was doing—thanks in no small part to some great pipemakers who were kind enough

to give me advice: Jim Cooke, Paul Bonacquisti, Trever Talbert, John Eells, Jody Davis.” While pipemakers were generous with tips, Lindner still had to learn to apply what they shared on his own and decide what to apply, what to modify and what to reinvent. He had an intuitive understanding of machinery and an artist’s eye for proportion and shape, and he quickly learned the rudiments but spent years refining them.

The late Bo Nordh was also influential. “Much of my early design work was obviously influenced by the Danes, but Bo Nordh of Sweden truly impressed me. Bo was an innovator and that’s one of the reasons I respect him almost more than anyone else. When I first saw a Bo Nordh it looked like he had taken a blank piece of wood with no grain and painted the grain where he would most have liked it to go after he cut the shape. I hope to be there one day—I’m nowhere near it now, but maybe when I have 40 years more experience. I spent a lot of time looking at photos of his pipes on the Swedish pipe club website. I saw the elephant’s foot and felt it was a really great design. Then I stopped thinking about it and six or eight months later when I made my first Pickaxe shape, that was my hazy memory interpreting the Nordh elephant’s foot. They are very different pipes but you could say they’re cousins.”

It’s important to Lindner that his pipes be distinctive in style. He even tries to minimize influence when he can—at pipe shows he will visit with other pipemakers but rarely examine one of their pipes closely. “The biggest challenge that North American high-end carvers face today, I think, is not about finishing or engineering, it’s about finding their own voice. It’s easy to define an Italian or a British pipe, or Danish design. But what is American design? That’s a tough one. In my opinion the one who is leading the charge in making a truly North American pipe is Jody Davis. He’s got it. That’s not to say he’s the best American pipemaker, nor should it imply that he isn’t, but certainly he has a handle on what his style is. His pipes are recognizable as American design.”

Lindner’s own style has become subtler over the years. He still creates very different designs but also concentrates on the traditional shapes. “Back



A Lindner standard, this shape is part of a flower series of art shapes and is called the Nightshade. It’s a C2 grade from 2010 and is probably Lindner’s most popular shape. Note that the stem is recessed into the plateau shank end so it looks like the stem is “growing” out of the pipe.



A pencil shank, taking a traditional French design (inspired by older clay churchwardens) and updating it with a larger bowl and a plateaux rim. It was made in 2010.



One of Lindner’s first blowfish, this is an A grade from 2002 or 2003. Although very traditional in design, it was the start of Lindner’s using a heartlike shape for the bowl.



This smooth magnum is one of only three smooth Lindner magnums produced. It is an A grade Frog (the Frog being the Lindner stamp for magnums; a Bat stamp is used for double magnums, which are truly enormous). It was made in 2010.



in 2003,” he says, “I wanted to do wild things and make a big impression, but I’ve now taken a step back in my design aesthetic and styling.” Approximately 70 percent of the 100 pipes he makes in a year are traditional shapes, and 20 percent of those are magnums. “There’s a reason the billiard has been around for 150 years; there’s a reason it’s still one of the most popular shapes: It’s the premier smoking device. It truly is a machine for smoking.”

Traditional shapes offer very fundamental lessons in engineering and good

design. “Until you understand those basics,” says Lindner, “as a pipemaker you really cannot go forward. You have to understand the basics before getting fancy.” One of the most important aspects of those fundamental precepts for Lindner is the lip button. “If you look at any Lindner from 2001 onward, that button is exactly the same because it’s a signature. That’s something I learned from the Pipe Rack, thanks to W.Ø. Larsen’s Pearls and Straight Grains. Pearls and Straight Grains were made by any number of people—Peter Hedegaard, Tonni Nielsen, Sven Knudsen—there were about a dozen high-end carvers making those grades for Larsen. The only way you could identify the individual maker was by looking at the lip buttons. The button is the signature of the pipe maker.”

Good materials also contribute to a fine pipe. Lindner chooses his briar himself in Italy and allows it to air cure for at least three years before using it, letting it expand and contract with the differing humidity and temperatures of the seasons all the while. He uses German Ebonite or brindle rod stock for his stems, which are always hand-cut. So he uses the best available, but he’s also compulsive with his finishing. The sanding process is a meditative

activity for him. “My mind goes blank, I forget all the troubles outside of that pipe; it’s very relaxing.” He spends hours sanding with one grit sandpaper, then a finer grit, then that grit wet, then a finer grit dry, then wet, finer and finer. And he actually likes doing that.

It’s a long way to come for a punk on the nighttime streets of Detroit. The only professional frustration in his life now is the competition for his time between his pipemaking and his running of the Pipe Rack. Both are demanding, full-time jobs, and he does them both alone. But both have been intertwined in his life for so long, each has influenced the other to such an extent, that it would be hard to give one up. “If one goes, though,” says Lindner, “it would be the Pipe Rack. Lindner pipes are here to stay.” P&T

Lindner pipes are graded with letters ascending from E and going to AA, with three regular production grades in sandblast and three in smooth. In addition, there are two top grades: The Spider grade for top-graded sandblasts and the Dragonfly grade for top-graded smooths. He produces only a handful of Spider grades per year and less than one Dragonfly each year.

Sandblasts

E grade: Entry-level sandblast, always crosscuts
D grade: Exceptional crosscuts, radial (back to front) crosscuts and off-center ringblasts
C grade: Ringblasts
Spider: Exceptional ringblasts, art shapes and smooth/blast hybrids

Smooths

B grade: Traditionally shaped crosscuts
A grade: Flame grains and exceptional crosscuts as well as art shapes
AA grade: Straight grains and art shapes
Dragonfly: As close to perfection as can be attained; few to no noticeable sandspots, exceptional grain

The Pipe Rack may be contacted at www.thepiperack.com; 800.670. PIPE. Lindner Pipes may be contacted at 31183 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, MI 48150; www.lindnerpipes.com; 888.592.9100.



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CORPS

The Richmond pipe show has attracted pipe enthusiasts from around the world for 25—soon to be 26—consecutive years

On a Tuesday night in mid-1984, the owner of a Tinder Box was called at home because of a situation at the Richmond, Va., mall where her shop was situated. “There are pipe smokers everywhere!” said the panicked mall employee. “They’ve spilled out into the center of the mall. There’s a cloud of smoke fouling the whole concourse—shoppers are complaining!” The tobacco shop owner, imagining a scene of rampaging pipe smokers tearing up shops and terrorizing children with profane smoke rings, drove to the

mall to see what was happening.

It wasn’t exactly an invasion of pipe smoking Hell’s Angels; no mall patrons were running for the exits or expiring of smoke inhalation—but it was an undoubtedly unusual scene. Two dozen pipe smokers had gathered around the entrance to the Tinder Box and had dragged some benches from elsewhere in the mall to sit on while smoking and conversing. The shop itself was crowded with them; there was a definite haze in the air.

The shop owner confronted her

part-time Tuesday night employee, Linwood Hines. “Listen, I don’t want all these people in my store. If you’re going to do this you need to start a club.”

“We sold a lot of Charatan freehands in that shop,” says Hines. “People would come in from Washington, D.C., from Maryland, from all over. That was when you could still smoke everywhere, so they would stand around and talk and smoke and it could get crowded. And they bought stuff too, so I didn’t see the problem.”

With the social venue of the Tinder Box removed, Hines, along with John Eells and Mike Harrah, started talking about getting a pipe club together. They left notices at the local tobacco shops. Hines worked full time for Philip Morris, as did Eells, and they decided to talk with Bob Moore, who was head of the community relations department at Philip Morris. Moore was a pipe smoker who sympathized with their plan for a pipe club. He called WRVA, a local radio station, and arranged radio time to promote the club. He also offered them the executive meeting room in the manufacturing center at the company to hold their club meetings; he would



Pipemaker Jeff Gracik receives an award for best pipe in show from CORPS president Craig Norris



Plenty of conversation takes place at a CORPS pipe show.

even arrange refreshments.

"The stars just seemed to align in our favor," says Hines. "We had around 30 people at that first meeting and even more at the next." Hines was made the first president of the club and served for about eight years before rotating the position on to the next person.

It didn't take more than a couple of meetings before the club started to speculate on the possibility of holding a pipe show. Pipe shows were relatively new at the time. Bruce Spencer's Pipe Collector's International would hold its first show the following winter. Basil Sullivan, whom Hines had learned about through Tom Dunn's *The Pipe Smoker's Ephemeris*, sponsored the Indiana Briar Friars biannual show. Frank Burla of Chicago was hosting collector gatherings around that time as well. But no one in the Richmond club had personal experience.

"I did go to a fly-fishing show though," says Hines. "That show confirmed that you can sell tables at a show—it was a revelation. That was how we could fund it. I was also intrigued that the people at the fishing show called themselves a conclave. What a cool word. So Mike Harrah and I came up with the name Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers for our club."

The idea of hosting a pipe show seemed logical because there were

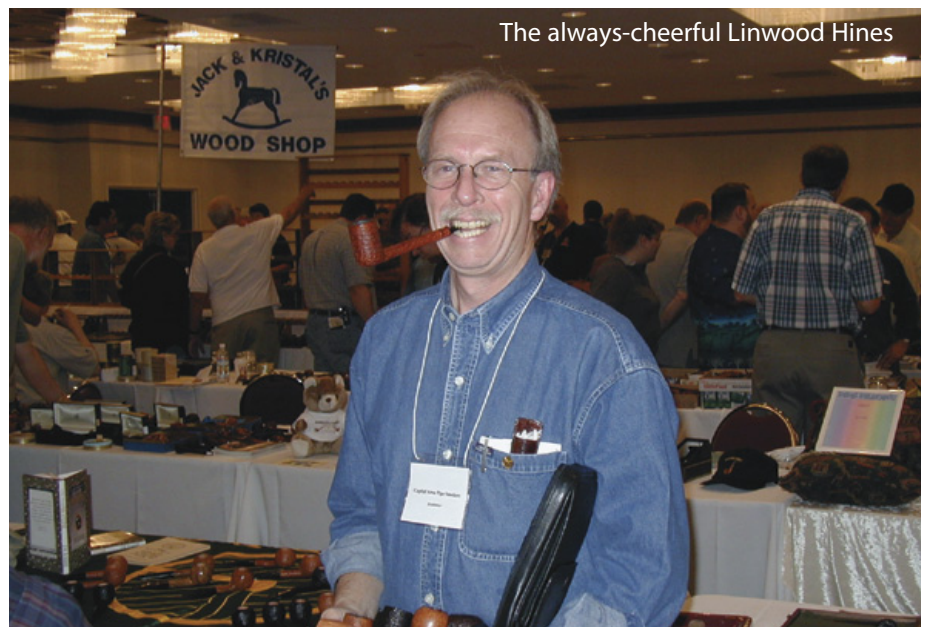
some enthusiastic pipe traders in the club. "I traded a lot with Richard Jeness," says Eells. "He loved trading; he was a cross-country trucker and went everywhere. He had some great pipes—I got my first Svend Bang from him."

"He used to park his rig in front of my house," says Hines. "It was longer than the house. I had only cheap pipes but he would come in and trade cheap pipes with me. You could tell the ones he'd smoked in his truck with the window open—they were burned all down the side. But he'd try to trade them."

"Then there was Charlie Pettus," says Eells. "Charlie sold typewriters, mainly to federal and state govern-

ments. He would travel around and buy pipes a half-dozen at a time."

"He had mainly Charatans," says Hines. "Someone told me it was because Charlie's initials were on the stems. He bought so many from the Tinder Box that Herman Lane visited once to see the store. I guess Charlie had met him before, but I didn't know who he was. 'Hey Linwood,' says Charlie, 'I want you to meet Herman Lane.' I thought it was a joke. 'Linwood is the reason you're selling so many Charatans here,' says Charlie. 'You should give him a pipe, ya cheap bastard.'" Hines was shocked when he learned it really was Herman Lane, and even more surprised when a few



The always-cheerful Linwood Hines



Pipemaker and CORPS founding member John Eells (seated) converses with pipemaker Paul Bonacquisti

weeks later a high-grade Charatan was mailed to the store as a thank-you for Hines.

"So we had a lot of characters who loved pipes in the club," says Eells, "and we decided to have a show. Everybody chipped in some money and we had flyers printed. Linwood traveled up to the Washington, D.C., area to talk to pipe shops and convince them to come. Georgetown Tobacco, Earthworks, John B. Hayes."

Since they were in the tobacco capital of the world and so much pipe tobacco was manufactured there, the club had visions of huge sponsorships rolling in from American Tobacco, Sutcliffe, U.S. Tobacco and Philip Morris. "But they totally ignored us," says Hines. "However, we got a letter all the way from Italy that gave us a big motivational charge. It was from none other than Alberto Bonfiglioli, and he said he was coming to the show—and he's been to every show since."

CORPS managed to sell about 30 tables for the first show. "And we had CORPS members display their pipes too, even if they had only a couple," says Hines. "So it was a success. Not a financial success, but it was a neat

experience, so we agreed to do it again the next year." And the next, and the next, until now 26 years have gone by.

Why do they do it? "It's the personal experiences and relationships that have the most value," says Hines. "Just the idea that great pipemakers like Alberto would support the show for so long, and that blenders like Mike McNiel of McClelland or Craig Tarler of Cornell & Diehl would make special blends for us—it's incredible. These people are geniuses. Mike and Mary McNiel probably know as much about tobacco as anyone in the world, and they will actually go the trouble of picking up the phone to talk with people like us. It's humbling."

One special activity CORPS has maintained over the years is an auction at each show to benefit children's charities. It was about the second year that someone asked about donating some tobacianna that they didn't want to ship back home, and the charity auction was born. "The first year we did it somebody donated a pipe rack," says Hines, "and a name was carved in the top: William F. Porter. We had no idea who William F. Porter was, but that's the name we attached to the auctions."

Membership in CORPS costs \$25

a year and includes free entry to the pipe show as well as the Friday night dinner. "We automatically lose money on that," says Hines, "because the dinner costs us more than that per person. But somehow it works out." With more than 400 members, it's a pretty robust club, though more than half are not up to date with their dues. "We'd certainly love to hear from anyone who would like to get caught up on their dues," says Hines with a smile.

Early this year, in a meeting suite at the Holiday Inn Koger South in Richmond, where the pipe show has been held for many years, about a dozen officers of the CORPS met to discuss the 2010 pipe show. "Most of our planning meetings start," said Craig Norris, current president of the Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers, "with the question, 'Do we want to have a show this year?'" He was met with catcalls and jokes, and a doughnut was thrown at him.

"And we always decide yes," said Bucky Metcalf, a past president for various terms in the club's history. "Of course we're going to have another show."

That's been the answer for the past 26 years. P&T

Back to basics

What's in a grain?

The botanical processes that produce briar burls are complex and even chaotic

The most engaging adventure for a collector of any cherished treasure is, quite ironically, a mission in which failure is nearly assured. It is a quest for the quarry of a hunter's keenest desire, an object that may or may not exist. It is a collector's equivalent of the Holy Grail, a search for an elusive, beatified entity. The ultimate goal for many smokers and collectors is the pristine straight-grain pipe: a flawless work of art, donning dense yet delicate and precisely distributed grains that caress every curve of the briar from top to bottom.

Its very implausibility is what makes the perfect straight grain the most pursued of pipes among so many. "There's no such thing as a perfect straight grain. I've never seen one—no one has ever seen one as far as I know," says Fred Hanna, of Longmont, Colo. Even though he realizes the perfect straight grain is an impossible goal, Hanna enjoys getting as close to the ideal as possible. He has assembled an array of straight grains that turns heads whenever it is displayed—including his own. "I want every pipe I own to knock my socks off every time I look at it," he says. His assembly of straight grains is as unusual as it is striking because the collection gathers around grain pattern, as opposed to a particular shape, finish, size or nomenclature, which form the standard typologies for most collectors.

What it takes to be 'straight'

While the ideal straight grain may be out of reach for all who seek it, a pipe must nev-

ertheless satisfy some pretty stiff standards to join Hanna's collection. "It has to have beautiful angel-hair straight grain that I can see in a three-dimensional sense," he says. "It has to be so rich and thick that it leaps off the surface of a pipe. It needs a tight grain, and the light and dark strands need to be really pronounced. They need to be delicate—but perceivable—strands.

"Whether the straight grain is 360 degrees around the entire bowl isn't as important to me as whether the grain itself is really straight and fine and stands out. It has to have really good straight grain on both sides, and it's even better if it has straight grain on the front. A pipe with 270 degrees of incredible straight grain around the bowl is usually enough, and if you can get it on the shank too, that's fantastic."

As with anyone seeking a straight grain, Hanna knows he must concede some ideal qualities in exchange for others when choosing a pipe. The incredible difficulty of any single pipe to possess every attribute required to be a true straight grain seems to nudge some to stretch standards too much. Using lax criteria to label unworthy pipes as "straights" is a practice that distresses Hanna and others who strive to be true to the ideal.

Uniform grain in wood comes from steady, even development over successive years of growth for a tree. For the burl from which briar comes, it would mean steady and even growth for decades. There are so many variables affecting the growth rings of wood that numerous fields have spawned from dendrology, which

is the name for the general study of trees and shrubs. Among them: dendroclimatology studies the effects of climate (as the name suggests) on growth rings; dendroecology examines environmental impacts, chiefly caused by human populations; dendrogeomorphology evaluates how changes and shifts in the surrounding landscape affect the growth of trees and resulting rings; dendroentomology looks at tree rings for the influence of insect populations; and dendropyrochronology investigates the relationship between wildfires and tree rings—and there are more such fields of study. Given the expansiveness of well-documented influences that alter the growth of tree rings, it is no wonder uniformity for any sustained length of time for any tree is such a rarity.

A mutation and adaptation that benefits both tree and man

Beyond all these factors that can disturb steady, uniform growth of grain in trees, the real kicker for the white heath is this: The part of the heath tree from which briar comes is itself, by its very nature, irregular. The briar burl that a heath tree grows at its base and that is used to fashion smoking pipes is essentially a mutation of cell growth—an aberration. But it is a mutation that has become a valuable adaptation for species like the heath, which grow in climates that can be quite hostile to trees and shrubs. Donald Farrar, professor emeritus of botany at Iowa State University, helps illuminate why a burl—in particular—would be one of the last places to look for



This Ser Jacopo gemline exhibits fine straight grain.



Tom Eltang's golden contrast finish helps make the bird's eye in this cross-grain pipe especially prominent.

uniform patterns in wood. Typically, a tree signals to its trunk when to manufacture different types of cells at different times of year. "In the springtime is when leaves grow rapidly, the tree needs a lot of water. And there's a lot of water available. So it makes large wood cells to transport all that water," says Farrar. This springtime process produces what's called earlywood and typically results in the lighter bands of a tree ring, which grow faster and form a broader ring. From late summer and into fall, "The tree is not growing. It's carrying on photosynthesis and conserving water, so it produces smaller wood cells." This latewood generates a darker, thinner ring in the trunk.

But at the base of the tree where the burl resides, the process is quite different. "The signals get messed up within the tree," says Farrar. "When a tree makes burl, it's confused. It doesn't make regular patterns in the wood—they're all over the place."

Ultimately, burls have become essential to robust growth among heath trees and other species that grow in similarly harsh climates. Within the chaotic growth of a burl, there is also the aggressive produc-

tion of apexes, which are the points in the burl that give rise to shoots. These apexes serve as starting points for a new tree even if the rest of the tree—trunk, branches, foliage and all—is destroyed. The mutative growth resulting in a burl, says Farrar, has become a valuable survival strategy, especially among trees that are routinely damaged by wildfires. "This is an adaptive growth because it makes a big burl [at ground level] so that when a fire comes, the tree can still survive. In Mediterranean-type climates, it can be quite wet in the winter and spring—then parched dry in the summer. The shrubs and trees can become very flammable resulting in wildfires—wildfires long before there were people. We have wet thunderstorms (in the United States), but in the Mediterranean, they can have dry thunderstorms, and a lightning strike can start a wildfire."

Even if an entire stand of heath trees is destroyed by fire, the shoots rising from the apexes in the burl, in time, will regenerate the entire tree. It's an adaptation that has helped the heath tree overcome adversity—and one that has led to the discovery that burl from the heath is an ideal mate-

rial for smoking instruments. "It's interesting how an adaptation that is a good thing for a tree can then wind up being a useful thing for people too," says Farrar.

Those life-regenerating apexes in the burl are especially important to those who cherish bird's-eye patterns in a pipe. Each of the individual apexes will become one of the tiny rings to be ultimately revealed by the pipe carver as bird's eye. Heath trees that produce the best defense against fire by generating numerous and highly developed apexes will also produce a highly developed and intricate pattern of bird's eye. Although stunning straight grain and beautiful bird's eye often go hand in hand, they are somewhat separate processes: One does not necessarily ensure the other. And a good straight grain, many say, does not ensure a good smoke.

It's the briar, not the grain

Despite all the challenges a heath tree faces in producing straight grain, the relatively frenetic growth of the wood in a burl makes for dense structure and tightly compacted cells, which results in exceptional tensile strength and slow transference of heat. There are some disagreements in the pipe world that will likely never be resolved, and whether a fine grain that fully covers a bowl adds to the smoking qualities of a pipe is one. Hanna puts his opinion succinctly. "It's the briar that makes a good smoke, not the grain."

Tantamount to smoking quality are meticulous briar harvesting practices, proper processing and storage, attentive care of the burls and effective curing and aging. Pipe carver Will Purdy of Louisville, Colo., would agree. Quality briar will smoke well, regardless of the grain. "I don't think grain makes any difference in how a pipe smokes at all," says Purdy. "I started smoking a pipe in 1976, and I bought some pretty cheap pipes—whatever I could afford when I was 18 years old. I would modify them a little bit, maybe open them up a tad, and they would smoke just fine."

The popularity of sandblasts for their cool smoking quality is testimony, some say, to the fact that grain is, at best, a secondary factor in smoking quality. It is rare, indeed, that briar with exceptional fine grain is sandblasted, which obscures the clarity of the prized patterns. There are certainly stark exceptions among some pipemakers, who set out to create superla-

tive sandblasts and find a welcome challenge in conserving the pattern in the grain and even bringing it greater life by blasting.

Pipe artisan Brad Pohlmann of Jacksonville, Ore., says it just might be the cross-grain patterns with superlative bird's eye that smoke the best—if grain has any effect at all on smoking quality. While Pohlmann is quick to point out it's just a theory, he has a rational basis for his point, which is worth pursuing. Briar expands and contracts when heated and cooled. Pohlmann believes expansion is facilitated best by a cross-grain pattern in which two things occur: First, the horizontal pattern of a cross grain allows for expansion of the grain vertically—parallel to the grain. Conversely, expansion in a straight grain would be constrained by the circumference of the bowl, in which the layers of the grain would presumably push against each other as opposed to opening up. Second, ample bird's eye exposes the interior "openings" in the veins of the individual grains all the way from the interior of the bowl to the outside of the wood everywhere that bird's eye is present. More numerous and distinct individual bird's eye means better breathing qualities in the wood under this theory.

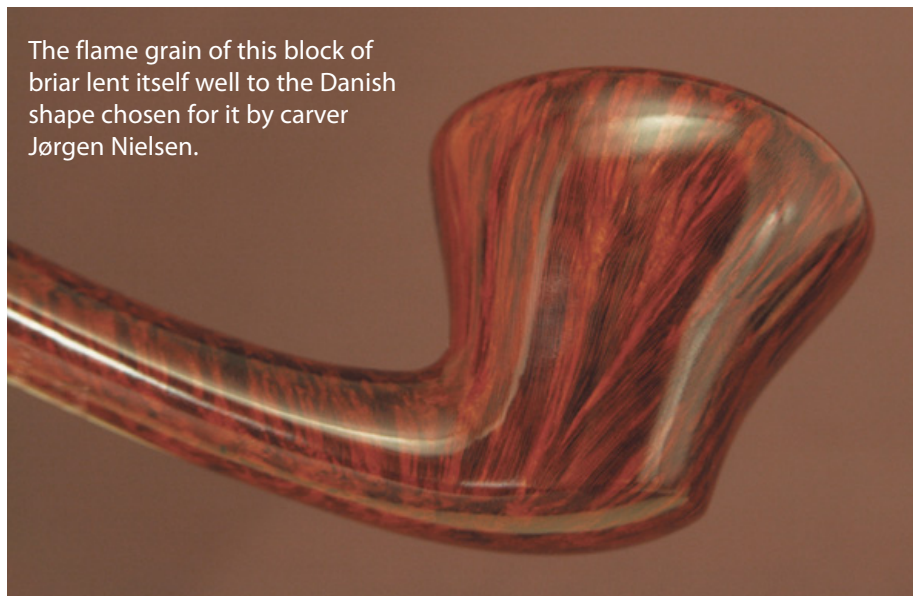
"In all honesty, I prefer cross grains to straight," says Pohlmann. "I think they contract and expand better, and with the grain end-to-end inside of the bowl to the outside, it seems it would transfer heat better—and it will absorb moisture more easily. A great bird's-eye grain is like millions of veins going from inside the wall outward. It's 'open' for moisture to flow. But if you have a straight grain, what you basically have is a bunch of tubes running up and down—there's no place for the moisture to go. Some of my pipes that ended up being among my best smokers all have fantastic bird's eye, and all are cross grains."

Pending scientific testing that might confirm his theory, Pohlmann suggests his opinion could be mostly "an emotional [attachment]. It's one of those questions where we can all disagree, and it's fun to argue back and forth about whether grain really affects how a pipe smokes," he says.

Birds, spiders, turtles, chicken and salmon

Hanna enjoys the aesthetics of a pleasant bird's-eye pattern too, but in different places. "I love a nice bird's eye—but on the

The flame grain of this block of briar lent itself well to the Danish shape chosen for it by carver Jørgen Nielsen.



top and the bottom of the pipe, not on the sides." Variations in bird's eye make it a fascinating pattern. "Sometimes the bird's eye is in clusters, or sometimes it's more evenly distributed. There can be stark, beautiful, big circles around needlepoint dots—or lots of really small, tight bird's eye that is so thick it covers the wood." And straight-grain patterns can be far more distinct from one another than some recognize. "Some people think straight grains are boring, but the variation in straight grain is endless."

Grains that don't qualify as straight, cross or bird's eye generally fall into the category of flame grain. As the name suggests, the individual grains of a flame grain flare out from one another. They begin close together at some point in the pattern, usually toward the heel of the bowl, then grow steadily in distance from one another. Such patterns can produce nice nuances and continuity between bowl and shank when the genesis of the flame is situated between them. The flame reaches upward and outward, hugging the contour of the bowl in one direction and the shank in the other. A flame grain centered on the bottom of a pipe in the middle of the heel can create a striking spiderweb pattern on sandblasts. Viewed from the bottom of the pipe, the web radiates outward and stretches up the exterior of the bowl in all directions. The grain is tight at the center of the pattern and gradually becomes looser, mirroring the configuration of a spiderweb.

While there are many grain configurations that can emerge from a well-carved pipe, it is still the pristine straight

grain that remains the Holy Grail for many smokers and collectors. Naturally, many artisans rank their straight grains among their highest grades. For Purdy, the highest rank a pipe can achieve is the Turtle grade. He hopes to get at least one Turtle out of a block of plateau briar, which is the outer portion of the burl (and thus, the oldest and most desirable). Instead of starting with a design in mind, Purdy allows the grain to dictate the direction. "Generally, I carve to the grain, which is how I came up with the majority of my shapes that I call my signature shapes." On occasion, he encounters a piece of briar with diffident grain that doesn't call out for any particular shape and harbors substandard patterns. In that case, instead of the Turtle grade, the briar will never see the flame of a pipe smoker's lighter and is destined for hot coals as its final resting place. "That's when I use it for grilling chicken or salmon," says Purdy. "Briar makes a great wood and great flavors for the grill."

With the high demand for pipes sporting exceptional straight-grain patterns or stunning bird's-eye configurations, pipe carvers are eager to please customers and satisfy their own artistic impulses by producing superlative designs that incorporate grain in creative and eye-popping ways. "The artisan pipes of today are the best they've ever been," says Pohlmann. And as pipes and their carvers get better and better, the elusive chance—however slim it might be—of capturing that perfect, pristine straight-grain pipe also gets better and better. P&T

Jon's Pipe Shop

Gerard Ezvan leaves academia to enter the premium tobacco trade

Back in the 1960s and 1970s it was perfectly natural for any college professor to indulge a passion for pipe smoking—both at home and in the classroom. For many on campus in that era, tobacco was the essential lubricant for long-winded orations to students and late nights spent correcting papers. But how often in collegiate history has any instructor taken a leap of faith and deserted teaching entirely to follow his hobby into tobacco retailing?

Gerard Ezvan, the owner of the venerable Jon's Pipe Shop in suburban St. Louis, made just such a fateful career switch himself in the mid-'70s and has never regretted the move. As the owner of a parallel wholesale firm called F&K Importing & Distribution, and a leader in the

tobacco industry's struggles against government anti-smoking legislation, Ezvan has emerged as one of the leading lights in the world of pipes and cigars. With a briar clenched ever-presently in his mouth amid a rapid-fire discourse on unfriendly elected officials, soaring tobacco taxes and discounting Internet rivals, Ezvan is also one of the industry's great characters, a bundle of energy who is negotiating for new cigar brands from the Philippines one moment and sending off a voluble letter to the editor the next.

It isn't easy to catch him sitting still, and indeed he hosts a visiting journalist with epic rants against all that is wrong with Washington and government while simultaneously paying off invoices and field-

ing calls from pipemakers in France and Germany. "Gerard can be a little hyper around here," says Jon's employee Bob Winkler, with a tone of bemused understatement. Ezvan himself admits, "I work long hours and don't sleep much," which is odd considering that with his shock of still-brown hair and slight, boyish build he looks decades younger than his true age of 60. He's been a tobacco retailer for some 35 years, but that's no big deal, he points out, considering that Jon's, founded as the Friedman-Klinge Cigar Co. in downtown St. Louis, has been around since 1926. By all accounts it's the second-oldest store of its kind in the marketplace, exceeded only by John Dengler Tobacconists in the nearby suburb of St. Charles, which got its start nearly a decade earlier, in 1917.

Hard to believe today that tobacco retailing was once among the most stable businesses to own. Founded by the partnership of Friedman and Klinge, the original store downtown in its heyday was busy sending runners out all day long to offices around downtown, selling cigarettes, cigars and other products. Not one of the firm's eight employees back then was laid off when the Great Depression hit. But the audience was moving out of the city, and in 1954 the Klinge son-in-law who inherited the business, Gene Globig, set up a second store in the prosperous Missouri suburb of Clayton, in a little storefront of 1,100 square feet that Jon's, named for Globig's son Jonathan, still occupies today. The place has been little changed since



then, with ancient oak cabinets over a century old—most of them with the original stain—housing cigars and pipes in the same place today as then.

Ezvan's father never smoked, but his grandfather back in France, in Brittany, handed him a new Chacom pipe at the age of 16 and invited him to try it. "From that first day I positively loved the feel of a pipe in my mouth," Ezvan recalls. "I never smoked cigarettes. Today I'll have a pipe in my mouth all day long, though I'll take time out for at least one cigar in the afternoon." Tobacco never hurt his grandfather, a former French navy officer who smoked and chewed all his life before dying at the age of 89.

In 1975 Ezvan emigrated to the U.S. to go to work at the University of Missouri's St. Louis campus as an instructor in languages. He had grown up in Africa as the son of a naval engineer and spent much of his time around the sons and daughters of English expatriates, and so his command of English was good. So was his nose for fine tobacco, which brought him into Jon's one day in 1975 looking for new supplies for the Petersons he was smoking by then. The courtly Globig gave him a gruff greeting at first sight, but within minutes Ezvan was warming to both the proprietor and his shop. Within months he had quit teaching and started work as a salesman full time. To his amazement, he found that he had a facility for selling to strangers.

By then Jon's had proliferated, with branch stores located in Champaign, Ill., West Lafayette, Ind., and Columbia, Mo. In 1979 Ezvan bought the West Lafayette store, though he remained in Clayton while a manager oversaw operations. Globig's two children—Jonathan had become an environmental engineer, toiling on the Alaska pipeline, while his sister, Margaret, had moved to Chicago to work for *Playboy*—were not interested in taking over Jon's, and so in 1980 Globig officially retired and sold the Clayton headquarters store to Ezvan. The Champaign and Columbia stores were both sold off to other investors, while Ezvan would soon close the





West Lafayette location to concentrate on Clayton.

Closing the West Lafayette location also allowed Ezvan to concentrate on his burgeoning import business. He started by importing pipes, mostly from houses in St. Claude, France, later to be followed by Jobey and Vauen from Germany. Bari came along a bit later, too, with Ezvan developing a fascination for the Danish maker's giants, which could be had for a bargain \$125 in the '80s.

As his business grew Ezvan found a neat symbiosis between importing and retailing. "The shop became my laboratory," he explains. "If I was uncertain about a new product—a pipe or cigar or whatever—I'd put it in my shop first and test it with my customers. Their feedback helped me decide whether it could have an audience around the rest of the country."

As he has built the business Ezvan has always tried to take the high road. He has just four employees, but he provides medical insurance and pensions to each of them. He respects manufacturers' retail prices wherever he can. That became difficult when a discounter, J.R. Cigars, set up shop a half-block away in Clayton more than 20 years ago. More recently Ezvan has begun selling direct over the Internet, and he has had to do some selective discounting of his own to be competitive.

Jon's big advantage is the rich demographics in Clayton, a wealthy enclave where even townhouses are priced above \$2 million in some cases, and customers have plenty to spend on the best tobacco brands. Jon's is a licensed dealer in Dunhill pipes, Davidoff cigars and DuPont lighters—the holy trinity of the 3 Ds, as Gerard puts it. He was a fledgling salesman in the mid-'70s when he persuaded Globig to put Pleiades cigars from the Dominican Republic on the shelf for the first time at the price of \$3 per stick.

"It was the first time anybody had sold a cigar priced over \$2 in St. Louis," Ezvan remembers. "Gene thought I was nuts to try them, but they sold out. Then I talked him into importing \$125 DuPont lighters. Gene told me that if we didn't sell them all that I'd have to buy them myself. But they sold. I always had confidence I could sell high-end goods like that."

He still has that confidence today. Ezvan has been a Dunhill supporter ever since he first journeyed to the London flagship store on Jermyn Street as a young man in 1970 to buy his first straight billiard blast. He remembers that he did not have a tie on and was refused entry at the front door. He repaired to a haberdasher down the street, acquired a tie and came back to claim his prize. "I still have that Dunhill today. It turned out to be a real good smoker," Ezvan says.

Jon's is also a big seller of Petersons and imports Former pipes from Hans Nielsen in Denmark that retail for \$700 and more. In fact, Ezvan sold some 38 Formers at the last Chicagoland show, including a perfect straight grain bent that went for \$3,500.

But the meat of both the retail and wholesale pipe business is in more popularly priced lines. His best-selling line is Vuillard from France, priced from \$73 to \$168 at retail. No. 2 is Jobey, priced from \$60 to \$70, followed by Peterson from \$85 to \$300 and then Savinelli from Italy from \$100 to \$600. Ezvan figures he sells a couple of Dunhills a week. He keeps an inventory of just over 1,000 pipes at any one time, not close to the 8,000 pipes Jon's had in stock during the 1980s. But back then pipes and pipe tobacco represented some 60 percent of overall sales. Today cigars and accessories command the lion's share of business. The average pipe goes out the door at about \$85, roughly the same as five years ago.

On the import side, Ezvan has also brought in French names such as Ewa, Pierre Lamy, G&D (basket pipes retailing for \$30 to \$45 apiece) and Pierre Morel, the last priced at \$335 at retail. As a Frenchman, he's been a fervent supporter of the St. Claude factories. "In 1979 Chacom had 160 employees in St. Claude," Ezvan observes. "Today they have about 30. It's very sad. I like to do everything I can to help their business."

At the same time, both Jon's and F&K have been notable for out-sized selections of German products. There are dozens of Vauen pipes in all shapes and sizes, priced from \$85 to \$330. The firm carries Sillems dress pipes from Germany in all black with sterling silver bands at \$310 each, alongside distinctive Sillems lighters in sterling silver with hand-crafted etchings priced as high as \$475. The Vauen tin tobaccos go as high as \$15 for a 50-gram tin. The Sillems leather pipe carrying cases go for as much as \$570 each for a satchel holding seven pipes.

Ezvan also distributes Mac Baren tobaccos, but he figures that on the wholesale side 90 percent of his

products are sourced in France and Germany. Family life has kept him from traveling as much as he'd like to promote his import brands, but now that his son is entering college he hopes to have more time to hit the road. His big show of the year is the IPCPR, in New Orleans this year, along with Chicago and Las Vegas. "I'd like to get out and visit more of my customers in person," Ezvan says. And yet he has little inclination to chase the big mass merchant chains. "I prefer to sell to independents like Jon's," he says. "They are very important to our industry, though the fear is that if taxes keep rising, the livelihoods of many independent tobacco merchants will be threatened."

The independents appreciate Ezvan. "He really knows the business inside out," says Larry Muench, the co-owner of John Dengler. "I'll call him on the phone and he'll know from memory every pipe he has in stock. It's impressive."

Cigars have become an important part of his import mix. Ezvan is importing proprietary brands such as Antonio Gimenez from the Philippines (Isabela Cuban seed filler, Isabela binder and java wrapper) priced at \$2.76 a stick retail, excluding local and state taxes. There is also Aguila from the Dominican Republic, priced between \$4.50 and \$6 a stick, and Callisto from Nicaragua, priced under \$3. As a gimmick, the legislation-minded Ezvan has also packaged bundles of 25 cigars priced at \$40 retail with a sheet containing every U.S. senator's name and phone number in Washington.

"I like to bring in my own cigars. Retailers can take a better margin on them because they're not whored around," Ezvan says.

At Jon's, of course, it's the big names that sell best. Davidoff takes a central position in a giant cabinet priced at an average \$15. Ezvan has started selling the new Puro D'Oro from Davidoff and has high hopes for it. "It's a spectacular smoke. I expect it to sell very, very well," he says.

The other big sellers at retail include Zino, Montecristo (up to \$12.60 per cigar), Padron (the 80th Anniversary doing well at \$30),



Romeo Y Julieta, Arturo Fuente and an up-and-coming brand called Kristoff that got its start in Chicago a few years ago. Overall, Jon's stocks 2,800 SKUs of cigars, though the shop has room to display only 1,200 of them. The rest are kept down out of sight, awaiting their turn.

Ezvan's own favorite is the Davidoff Grand Cru series top priced at \$12. He favors Lonsdale shapes and mild to medium-bodied flavors. He admits to consternation over the current movement to fat and full-bodied smokes. "I find this very odd," he says. "For years cigars were made with Connecticut leaf and were light to medium bodied. Now everybody is competing to see who can produce the strongest cigars. I hope this doesn't backfire on the industry."

His customers trust him and his staff implicitly. Mike Dolan, 50, a customer for 24 years who is a neighbor to the Clayton store, likes full-bodied Punch and Perdomo smokes that he keeps inventoried in a half-dozen humidors at home. "I don't buy cigars over the Internet at all. I come here for the old-time atmosphere and the advice I get from the staff," Dolan says. "They know what I like and have succeeded in expanding my palate over the years."

Curiously, Dolan doesn't smoke pipes much, but his 19-year-old son has taken up briar smoking. It appears to be a harbinger. Salesman Winkler reports, "We're starting

to see more young college students coming in and smoking pipes here. Pipes are becoming the in thing with college kids. They don't seem to be smoking cigars at all."

In fact, the pipe sales at both Jon's and F&K Importing are trending up this year. Ezvan is heartened by the improvement yet worried about changes on the legislative front. Missouri does not have a statewide no-smoking law, but the city of Clayton initiated a ban that took place on July 1 this year—with tobacco stores exempted—and St. Louis County, where Jon's is located, has also put a ban in place starting Jan. 1, 2011.

Ezvan has been frustrated by these developments and has mounted letter-writing campaigns and other events to stir protests. He believes that most retailers have been too passive in accepting smoking bans, and he has given up on the commitment by Big Tobacco cigarette companies to fight the fight. He pledges business as usual at Jon's in the meantime. "There will be no changes here. Business will go on as it always has," he says. In the case of Jon's, that's a long and storied legacy to draw upon. P&T

Jon's Pipe Shop is located at 42 North Central, Clayton, MO 63105; 314.721.1480; www.jonspipeshop.com.



BY TAD GAGE AND JOE HARB

Trial by FIRE

McClelland Tobacco Company Club Selections

If you've smoked a pipe for more than a decade, you've probably lamented the loss of at least one favored blend that was discontinued. In a refreshing turn of events, McClelland Tobacco Co. has reintroduced a number of favorite blends offered in the 1990s through Bob Hamlin's Pipe Collectors Club of America (PCCA) and Barry Levin's Personal Reserve Series and added a couple of new offerings. Proceeds from tin sales will be shared with the Chicagoland Pipe Collectors Club

(CPCC), Greater Kansas City Pipe Club (GKCPC) and Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers (CORPS)—all very active clubs that also host and keep alive the tradition of an annual pipe show. We reviewed nine of the 18 blends, listing the original marketer and introduction date (when appropriate) and the club associated with each blend.

Beacon Extra (New—GKCPC)

GAGE: The tart, fruity aroma of this lightly broken flake is reminiscent of the original Beacon first issued by the

PCCA. Beacon original was reintroduced in 2009 as part of McClelland's Collector Blend Series, which includes resurrected old favorites and new offerings like Wilderness and Legends, created by 2010 Doctor of Pipes recipient Fred Hanna.

With Extra, McClelland kicks up the amount of Louisiana Perique contained in Beacon. The blend is aged in cakes before being sliced and tinned as a rough broken flake. The dense slices include aged Virginia leaf and obvious veins of deep brown Perique, flecked with bright yellow lemon Virginia. The moisture content was fine out of the tin but can be dried down for a couple of days if you prefer a slightly drier mixture. I generally like to fully rub out broken flakes, yet despite its density, Extra smoked cool, dry and even to the final puff when lightly packed as a broken flake and not rubbed out at all. In fact, I preferred it this way. For those who aren't fans of McClelland's bold and fruity stoved Virginias, this does not have the big fruit and balsamic vinegar character.

The interplay between the raisin, black pepper and slightly musty character of Perique played well off the sweet Virginias. Fully rubbed out, the mixture's flavor was consistent from beginning to end, delivering everything you could ask for in a Virginia/Perique blend. Left as a broken flake, the blend seemed slightly sweeter in the first half and slightly more peppery in the home stretch. It's a must-have for any VaPer lover and a fine candidate for cellaring.

HARB: As some of you know I like Perique, so I was excited to see what effect an extra amount would have on

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the original Beacon, which is already a good Virginia/Perique blend. A similar matured Virginia is used in Beacon Extra and it is also aged for an extended period, then liberally spiced with Louisiana Perique and presented in a partially broken flake. The aroma emanating from the freshly opened tin announced the extra Perique at first sniff. There was also the tart and sweet fruity aroma of quality matured and aged Virginia tobacco. The composition was similar to the original Beacon, with bright Virginia, light tan and mahogany Virginia and aged brown Virginia. The flavors that emerged in the first puffs were the sweetness and delicate tartness of the matured Virginia, with more fruitiness and hints of raisins from the Perique. The smoke was rich, mellow and smooth at the start, and these characters remained throughout the bowl. The Perique added a distinct tingle of pepper spice on the tongue and on the palate. As I progressed down the bowl, the Perique continued to add to the depth of flavor of the Virginias. The component tobaccos in this blend are well balanced and work very nicely together as they do in the original Beacon. If you like small dollops of

whipped cream on your pie, stick with Beacon, but if you like to slather a heaping spoonful, give the Beacon Extra a try. I don't think you will be disappointed.

Boston 1776 (PCCA—1993—GKCPC)

GAGE: As the original 1776 holds a prominent place in my collection of tins aging in my basement for a decade, I can't claim to be impartial about this broken sliced cake of red, lemon and orange Virginia leaf—aged at least five years before tinning—swirling in bird's eyes around some bright flue-cured lemon Virginia. The tin aroma conjures thoughts of grapes, cinnamon and aged vanilla bean. Despite my fondness for the original, I wondered if this new offering could compete.

Not only did it compete, it bested the original and went toe-to-toe with one of my old tins I couldn't resist opening for a comparison. This is quite an accomplishment, one I credit to careful leaf selection and even more extensive bale aging than the original. Like a relatively simple meal using the finest ingredients, 1776 stands on the quality and character of the tobacco. The blend

smoked cool with no bite, although it begs to be smoked slowly and savored to keep the temperature low. I detected an array of flavors including orange zest, woodsmoke and merlot wine.

Lightly piquant and refreshing, it lacked the intensity of stoved Virginia mixtures like Dark Star. I enjoyed it best in a briar because it lent an applewood character to the tobacco. The best part of the smoke is delivered in the final one-third of the bowl, where sweetness and wine notes intensify. Because of the aged leaf, opening a new tin is like enjoying a cellared tobacco, yet this certainly will age well for many years to come.

HARB: This blend was originally created by McClelland in 1993 to celebrate the exceptional tobaccos produced in the U.S. and the 240 years of American history of standing up for freedom with the goal of fair and equal treatment, guaranteed by law, for all citizens. Chosen for this celebration and reintroduced this year is a blend of lemon, red and orange Virginias that were aged for five years, pressed into flake form and cut into thin strips about 2 inches long. The aroma from the tin is that of sweet,



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zesty and tangy tobaccos with delicate Virginia undertones. The flakes consist of medium tan to dark brown tobaccos that are easy to rub out into thin ribbons. The pipe smoker is free to choose how fine or coarse to rub out the flakes depending on preference, size of bowl and whether the blend will be smoked indoors or outdoors. For the first trial, I rubbed out the flakes to a fine consistency and loaded the ribbons into a medium-size bowl, which revealed a tangy sweetness with both the delicate and deeper Virginia notes. More coarsely rubbed in another trial, I felt the flavor profile shifted to the deeper notes. In a smaller bowl, I felt the tang was sharper and brighter and the sweetness more intense. In all the trials, the smoke was smooth, delicate and mellow; the tobacco burned cool without bite and left a soft gray ash. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Boston 1776 as an excellent candidate for your to-try list.

Caramel Rush (New—CPCC)

GAGE: Regular readers will sigh when they read, once again, my assertion that aromatic tobaccos don't have to be bad.

Aromatic flavorings are used to cover a myriad of sins in lousy base tobaccos, but quality flavorings and great leaf can really elevate an aromatic smoke. I believe Craig Tarler of Cornell & Diehl and McClelland make some of the best aromatics available, and it's because of good leaf and high-quality, "natural" flavoring components—not that glycerin-laden gunk that characterizes so many aromatic tobaccos.

In the tin, Caramel Rush has an intense buttery and nougat aroma. My wife and I are not big dessert freaks, but after smelling a few puffs, her mouth was watering and she was ready to head out for a crème brûlée with a crusty caramel top. A short ribbon mixture of black Cavendish and a preponderance of Virginia leaf delivered sweetness without bitter aftertaste, and there were definite top notes of butter, brown sugar, honey and vanilla nougat. While the first bowl blew me away, I was less enamored with subsequent bowls. I still tasted the fine base tobaccos and quality aromatic flavorings, but it wasn't the same experience. I'll say without hesitation that if you're a connoisseur of aromatic blends, this is an excellent choice.

HARB: This is a new entry in McClelland's Pipe Club series, and it is aptly named. Popping the tin releases lots of caramel aroma, like a rush of Werther's in a can. The composition is mostly black Cavendish, laced with tan and light brown ribbons. The tobacco was a bit too moist for my preference, so I let it air and dry before loading a pipe. At the touch of fire, the flavor of buttery caramel was quite prominent. Not all aromatics allow the smoker to enjoy the sweetness and flavor that is similar to the aroma; this feature may be a plus for the smoker who chooses a blend that suits those around him but doesn't deliver that same flavor through the pipe. Once stoked the underlying flavor of tobacco easily came through the topping and lasted throughout the bowl. Even with the extra moist beginning, Caramel Rush burned cool and dry, leaving a dry dottle with a soft gray ash at the end of the bowl. This is definitely a crowd-pleaser for lovers of aromatic flavored blends.

Chocolate Silk (New—GKCPC)

GAGE: While there is a luscious chocolate nose to the tin aroma, and while the tobacco packed and lit perfectly, I



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By Brad Pohlmann

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was hoping for more of the chocolate to translate to the blend, which features a tasty base of ribbon-cut black Cavendish and McClelland's famed Virginias. It certainly burned more evenly than most aromatics, didn't have any off-putting glycerin bitterness and smoked smoothly, if just a bit wet. The blend is touted to have both chocolate and nougat/nut flavoring, but I mostly picked up vanilla and a pretty strong dose of typical black Cavendish flavor.

The Virginias add a bit of welcome natural sweetness, and there is exceptional complexity in flavor for an aromatic. Still, I would have liked more chocolate flavor to have come through (I was hoping for a competitor to Bob's Chocolate Flake from Gawith, Hoggarth & Co.). Nevertheless, this mixture is a superior-quality aromatic and highly recommended for aromatic tobacco lovers, particularly those who enjoy Black Cavendish.

HARB: The blend features Black Cavendish and golden Virginias that have been seasoned with dark chocolate and nougat flavorings. The aroma when the tin is first opened was rich with nougat and underlying chocolate scents that quickly filled the room. The tobacco was not overly moist. Still, I let it air out a while before loading it into a pipe. The composition is mostly dark tobaccos with reddish brown and medium to dark brown ribbons comprising perhaps 5 to 10 percent of the blend. Once stoked and burning smoothly, the flavor of chocolate was more prominent than it had been in the aroma, but I felt the nougat character was the more dominant. I had to keep going back to the dark chocolate in the candy dish to confirm that the underlying flavor was dark chocolate. By mid-bowl, the flavorings began to fade, allowing the pure flavor of the tobacco to come through more. Overall, Chocolate Silk is an outstanding aromatic blend that burns evenly and stays cool, delivering two very complimentary flavors without totally obscuring the flavor of the Virginias that constitute the blend.

Cyprian Star (PCCA—1996—CORPS)

GAGE: This medium ribbon cut, with its dark ribbons mingling with aged red, orange and lemon Virginias and

a dose of Greek Basma leaf, whispers "Latakia" from the tin. The nose hints at a complex range of sweetness of two different types—a straightforward sugary Virginia sweet and the more honey-like scent of the Oriental Basma. I was intrigued by some of the larger pieces of the Oriental leaf, promising a real hit of flavor during my smoke.

It has been a long time since I smoked Cyprian Star, and it's better than I remember. Burning cool and even, it delivered a balanced mix of sweetness and light fruit from the Virginias and Basma, with nuances of espresso, dark chocolate, leather and campfire smoke. As with several of the reintroduced blends, the tobaccos have never been better. The well-aged mixture soars with top-notch leaf, but it's the healthy dose of Oriental leaf that unites the blend. Cyprian Star isn't a classic Balkan blend, and if you like Latakia but not Virginia, this isn't your cup of tea. But if you want an unusual blend that combines the best of Oriental and Virginia sweetness with cool-smoking and earthy Latakia, you'll enjoy this mixture. It should age very well as the Latakia mellows and the Virginia leaf continues to age and develop complexity.

HARB: Cyprian Star is a mix of orange Virginia, red Virginia and zesty lemon Virginia for the base, with Cyprian Latakia making up the balance of the composition. The aroma in the tin features the Latakia, with the Virginias providing tang and sweetness. The color of the blend is mostly dark chunks and cubes of tobacco, with a few light brown ribbons of Virginia interspersed in the mix. At first light, the Virginias are prominent, and once stoked, they provide a nice tangy smoothness and richness, with the Latakia adding an earthy, leathery spice to the smoke. By mid-bowl, the Latakia emerged more prominently and contributed more to the flavor profile without dominating the blend. The blend worked well in a variety of bowl sizes, with the Latakia more appreciated in larger bowl sizes. Cyprian Star is a medium-flavored, very rich and smooth blend that was very satisfying; it should be attractive to those pipe smokers who like both Virginia and light to medium English blends. ►



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English Woods (Levin—1989—GKCPC)

GAGE: Utilizing aged lemon, orange and red Virginias as a significant flavor component in a medium Balkan mixture that also features Greek Basma, this ribbon-cut blend goes easy on the Latakia. There's a hint of fruit and wood smoke in the tin aroma. That carries through the easy initial light, where the tobaccos deliver hints of all-spice, cocoa, mushroom and cigar leaf. There's no cigar leaf in the blend, but it has a smooth flavor profile similar to cigars utilizing a sweeter variety of Brazilian or African tobacco.

The Basma plays a significant role, while the Latakia remains surprisingly minimal and the Virginias play a supporting role. The unobtrusive room aroma can be considered a plus when compared with many Balkan blends or more pungent Turkish and Oriental blends.

English Woods works particularly well in a small bowl because the flavors get right down to business. Drawing another parallel to cigars, the mixture is like the Torito or other carefully blended short cigar to quickly deliver a lot of flavor in a short amount of time. Being thoroughly blended and extremely consistent, there isn't much change in the character from beginning to end, which isn't a bad thing, but as a long smoke in a large bowl, it can become monotonous. The moisture content from the tin is right on, but this is a mixture you can enjoy even when tinder dry, when it develops even more cigarlike character. The tobaccos are already well aged and ready to smoke. While it should age well, the Virginia sweetness and fruit may become more pronounced over time, which will diminish that interesting cigarlike character.

HARB: Described as a medium Balkan blend, English Woods is aged to naturally develop the flavors and smoothness of this complex mixture. The blend consists of zesty lemon and orange-red Virginias combined with Cyprian Latakia and Greek Basma. The Latakia characters are delicately apparent in the tin aroma accompanied by a faint dark note and the zesty tang of the Virginias. The composition features a variety of

light tan, medium to dark brown and black ribbons and nuggets of tobacco. At the flame, the smoky Latakia comes up lightly, followed by a very pleasant dark and slightly dusty flavor from the Basma that mixes well with the variety of notes delivered by the Virginias. Once through the charring light, each of the different tobaccos contributes its flavors to the blend in very good harmony. With English Woods, it is the Basma that McClelland has offered as the signature tobacco, and it is this exotic tobacco that provided the very satisfying taste sensation.

Epitome (PCCA—1995—CPCC)

GAGE: I wasn't familiar with the original blend, which was issued as Avatar. McClelland changed the name of the reissue to avoid any potential clashes with the owners of a certain somewhat popular movie featuring large blue creatures (even though the blend debuted 14 years before the 3-D extravaganza). The tin aroma is fruity and tangy with a bit of toasted pecan. Delivered as a medium-brown aged Virginia flake with a significant amount of yellow flue-cured Virginia streaked through the caked, aged and sliced broken flake, Epitome doesn't require much rubbing out to pack well and smoke smoothly.

The blend smokes fruity but not tangy, with subtle variations within a limited Virginia palette. There aren't a lot of highs and lows in the flavor, but I found the sweet grassy and vegetal character very enjoyable. The exceptional aging and quality of the leaf results in an approachable blend that showcases simple Virginia tobaccos at their best—sweet but not intense, interesting and yet not overly complex. Set aside to age in the tin, it may develop additional depth, fruitiness and complexity. If that happens, I would miss the particular straightforward flavors that remind me of visits to the tobacco fields and curing barns of North Carolina and Virginia.

HARB: Epitome is a classic Virginia flake that features quality tobacco of moderate maturity and aging. There is a slight tartness in the aroma, with medium sweet and woody undertones and a slight fruitiness. The composition is mostly reddish brown, with

light tan and medium dark brown ribbons making up the balance of the blend. For the first trial, I rubbed out the flakes to a fine consistency with only a short period of airing and loaded a medium-sized pipe. The first wisps of smoke were sweet, with a delicate fruity undertone that pretty much burned off by mid-bowl. I didn't notice the fruity undertone in a smaller bowl. Noting this difference, I tried a third bowl in a medium-sized pipe with the flakes rubbed out to a coarse consistency, and I was rewarded with more depth to the flavor and more smoothness. On the final trial, I rubbed out the flakes to a medium coarseness, which yielded a smooth, mellow and complex smoke with a flavor depth approaching that of a matured red Virginia. Epitome is a good candidate if you like to modulate the flavor and complexity of the smoke through different bowl sizes and extent of rubbing out.

Full Balkan Reserve (PCCA—1995—CORPS)

GAGE: Immediately upon lighting up this medium ribbon mixture, I picked up a pronounced sugary sweetness not expected in a Latakia-rich heavy English blend. However, that sweetness was driven primarily by the Oriental leaf and supported by the Virginias in the blend. While the prominent amount of Latakia doesn't bowl you over like some heavy Balkan mixtures, it's definitely the lead component. I picked up a complex array of flavors, including hickory smoke, saddle leather and cocoa.

The moisture content was fine from the tin, but it's a little easier to smoke with a day or two to breathe and dry down, as it was a bit difficult to keep lit and suffered when puffed too hard to keep it lit. As this intriguing blend developed in the bowl, it yielded a meaty, smoky and slightly sweet taste of tea-smoked duck. It conjured up images of dining on smoky meat around a blazing campfire. Because of the Virginia tobaccos, it's unusually sweet for a Balkan blend, but you don't have to be a Virginia lover to enjoy it, because a lot of the sugar is derived from the Oriental leaf and the Latakia itself.

HARB: This blend is described as a Balkan-style blend rich in Latakia and spiced with Macedonian leaf. The aroma in the tin has the earthy, smoky Latakia character, with a tangy spice of sweet Turkish tobacco underneath. The composition of the blend is mostly dark nuggets of tobacco with 10 to 15 percent medium brown and reddish-brown ribbons interspersed in the mix. The flavors that emerge after lighting are rich, and both the Latakia and Turkish characteristics are well represented. I felt the Turkish character was more prominent. This is a rich, spicy, complex and smoky blend with an underlying sweetness. Once well stoked, the flavors are in harmony and the smoke is very smooth and rich. Full Balkan Reserve is a testament that not all Turkish tobaccos are faint in aroma and delicate in flavor. As I progressed down the bowl, the flavors became more intense, and toward the end a cigar character developed. This blend burned cool and dry and provided a pleasant experience. It is an excellent candidate for the “to try” list of pipe smokers who want a blend with good depth, rich flavors and complexity throughout the bowl.

New Century (PCCA—1996—CPCC)

GAGE: This ribbon-cut mixture will appeal to the purists who believe a medium Balkan blend should feature only Orientals and Latakia, as it's easy to ignore the fact the mixture contains stoved Virginia leaf. If I didn't know it contained Virginia tobacco, I'm not sure I would have detected it. This is good news for lovers of more traditional Balkan mixtures. The tin aroma is all about Latakia and smooth Basma and a light Turkish pungency that would lead me to believe there's more Oriental leaf than just Basma in the blend.

It features hints of earthy spices like cumin and nutmeg, with bittersweet chocolate overtones. The Latakia is prominent, its smoothness owing to a superb grade of leaf. It's a classic medium Balkan profile, but what really elevates this blend is the quality of leaf and long aging seldom available these days. It's difficult to say whether the Virginia might become more pronounced with tin aging, but I don't see this undergoing any radical changes over time. New Century is excellent now and should maintain the same flavor profile for years to come.

HARB: New Century is described as a classic medium Balkan mixture that is smooth, rich and mellow. The blend features stoved Virginias, Latakia and mellow Greek Basma. The leathery, earthy aroma of Latakia is prominent in the tin, and there is an underlying sweetness and spice that only hints at what is in store for the pipe smoker in this blend. The composition is mostly dark brown and black leaf with a good proportion of medium brown and reddish-brown ribbons. Once in the pipe and fired up, the Latakia emerges first and is quickly supplemented by the Virginias, which add sweetness, and the Turkish tobacco, which adds complexity and richness. The Virginias serve as a very suitable base that allows the other two components to express their characters, but by mid-bowl, it was the Basma that carried the load and defined the remainder of the smoke. I tried this blend in pipes with different bowl sizes and felt the larger pipes matched this blend best and allowed the mellow smoothness to be well featured. This is one blend that deserves a place on your “to try” list and in your rotation. P&T

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Merde de Cheval

Despite its name, Merde de Cheval (horse shit: the best tobacco under the sun) is a fine and light English blend that will satisfy smokers who enjoy light touches of Latakia.

Distributed by F&K Cigar Co., Merde de Cheval is available at tobacco shops nationwide. Contact F&K at 9420 Page Ave., St. Louis, MO 63132; phone: 800.848.1480; fax: 314.423.2073; e-mail: gezvan@fkcgigar.com; website: www.fkcigar.com.



Monstrosity pipes

From the darkest depths of human imagination come Monstrosity pipes. These ugly buggers are only available when you make a \$100 donation to the website oompaul.com.

Made by Olie Sylvester, Monstrosity pipes come with an “ashes to ashes” warranty, which includes an owner certificate guaranteeing the pipes against burnout, stem breakage and bite through. If the problem can’t be fixed, you get the next Monstrosity pipe free of charge.

While thoroughly homely, Monstrosity pipes are made from Grecian briar that’s been aged at least five years and offer a fine smoke. For more information, or to see the Monstrosity pipes that are ready for adoption, visit oompaul.com.



Posella pipes

Posella pipes have been made for approximately 30 years by Vitaliano Posella. The son of a Calabrian briar cutter, Posella got into making pipes by first partnering with his brother-in-law, Tonino Jacono. For much of his time as a pipemaker, Posella has been content selling his wares locally; however, his work is now becoming internationally known.

Using only the best Calabrian briar, Posella pipes are available from basic rusticated classic shapes starting at \$120 all the way to beautiful fiamatta straight-grain freehands that would amaze even the most discerning pipe collector, and they offer excellent value for the money.

Posella pipes are available at The Piperack. To order one, visit www.thepiperack.com.



Becker strawberry tree pipe

At the 2009 West Coast pipe show, held in Las Vegas in November, pipemaker Paolo Becker told David Field about his experiments making pipes using strawberry tree wood, a material that had been used in the past by Italian peasants for making pipes.

A member of the Erica family, the same family as briar, strawberry tree wood greatly resembles briar wood in both structure and taste, according to Becker. It is 20 to 25 percent lighter than briar, because of its more open grain pattern, and after

handing out a few strawberry tree pipes to knowledgeable pipe smokers to sample, Becker has decided to make a limited number of these pipes for sale at retail shops across the country. To locate your nearest Becker retailer, contact R.D. Field at 4257 Fireweed Drive, Las Cruces, NM 88007, phone: 575.526.6132; e-mail: rdfield@q.com; website: www.rdfield.com.



Cornell & Diehl salutes African-American soldiers

Cornell & Diehl's latest tobacco series pays tribute to America's African-American soldiers with the introduction of Buffalo Soldier and Tuskegee Airman.

Buffalo Soldier combines Latakia and Perique in a base of naturally sweet Virginia tobaccos to create a well-rounded blend that can be enjoyed all day.

Tuskegee Airman is a blend of Virginia tobaccos, Perique, Turkish tobaccos and Latakia that is pressed to marry the flavors and then sliced so it will be easy to pack into a pipe.

Cornell & Diehl tobaccos are available at fine tobacco shops everywhere. Locate your nearest Cornell & Diehl retailer by contacting the company at 800.433.0080.



Maigurs Knets pipes

A professional model maker for the hobby, toy and industrial design industries since 1992, Maigurs Knets has turned his considerable talents to the pipemaking field.

Knets combines the precision of a model maker with a free-spirited artistic sense to craft pipes that exhibit stunning sculptural elements while offering the excellent engineering qualities that one should expect from a fine smoking pipe.

Quality Briar is the exclusive U.S. dealer for Maigurs Knets pipes. To order, contact Quality Briar at 508.579.4772; website: www.qualitybriar.com.



Xikar Scribe pipe lighter

Xikar's new Scribe pipe lighter features a sleek and elegant pen shape that fits nicely into pockets and features a unique pull-apart action that starts the flow of butane. A flick of the flint ignition sparks the Scribe's angled candle flame, providing the means to start enjoying a relaxing smoke.

Available in four finishes—black, burl, gunmetal and silver—Xikar's Scribe pipe lighters are available at premium tobacco shops nationwide. Locate your nearest Xikar dealer by contacting the company at P.O. Box 025757, Kansas City, MO 64102; phone: 888.266.1193; fax: 816.421.3530; e-mail: info@xikar.com; website: www.xikar.com.

Park-Lane Red Paramour

Park-Lane's Red Paramour is a blend of red Virginia ribbon, gold flake and red and black matured Virginia cake tobaccos that are blended with a touch of Perique and a scented Virginia flake. Red Paramour provides Virginia blend aficionados a smooth and sweet mixture.

To order Red Paramour, contact Park-Lane at 518.371.6274; website: www.cigarsandpipes.com.



Three down—five to go

The letter arrived four days after the killings. Three killings in two days. Two men and one woman, all executives of the same insurance company. All three had been shot, and it was believed at very long distance because no sound of the shot was heard for two of the three. The second executive murdered, one Walter C. Lambert, executive vice president, had just exited the Farley Trust building when he lurched forward and collapsed on the steps. A pedestrian, out for a walk at lunch time, thought he heard a shot but he was more than two city blocks away and admitted it could have been a car backfire.

The letter was addressed to Allen Pike, human interest columnist for the city's only daily newspaper. It was short and to the point:

Mr. Pike, The bullets used were Hornady boat tail 180 grain, .30 caliber soft point, fired from a 30-06 rifle. This information is not public. Check with the police. If you want to know more, place the word CONFIRMED in the personals column within two days. Three down, five to go.

It was unsigned, of course, and printed by computer, as was the envelope, with no return address. He made a phone call.

"Homicide, Lieutenant Franklin speaking."

"Jim, this is Allen Pike. I have a question for you."

"Sure, if I can answer it."

"Were the bullets used in the insurance killings all the same and were they Hornady boat tail 180 grain, 30-06 caliber, soft point?"

There was a short silence before Franklin replied. "Not sure about Hornady yet but the rest is right. How

did you know? It isn't public."

"I just received a letter that says so. It's unsigned, computer printed and no return on the envelope."

"Christ! I'll send someone ... no, never mind. I'll come myself. Twenty minutes." The line went dead.

Pike and Jim Franklin had been friends for years, having first met in college. Both had been sucked into the Korean War, Pike because he was Army ROTC and Franklin because he enlisted in the Marine Corps. Afterward, they both returned home, older, perhaps wiser, and still close friends. Franklin had been the best man at Pike's wedding but Pike hadn't been able to return the favor. Franklin was married by the time Pike returned from Korea.

While waiting, Pike made a copy of the envelope and letter and put them in his desk drawer. He was sitting at his desk sucking on an unlit pipe when Franklin came through his office door. He pointed to the letter and envelope with the stem of his pipe.

Franklin slipped on some latex gloves. "I suppose you handled the letter."

Smiling, Pike replied, "No, some genie waved his wand and opened it for me. Of course, I handled the letter!"

The detective scanned the envelope and then read the note. "I don't know about putting the word *confirmed* in the personals column. Might want to talk to the D.A. first."

Pike set his pipe on the desk. "It'll be in the morning paper. I want to hear more from this guy and I suspect the D.A. will as well."

"How do you know it's a guy?"

"Sounds like it, feels like it ... Hell, just a guess, but I think it is. Whoever it is probably loads their own bullets, probably has a silencer of some sort on the rifle, and probably has experience as a sniper or is self-taught."

"That's a lot of probables."

"Yeah, but I'm probably right and you know it. I'll go down to your car with you and walk around the block. Smoke a pipe on it. Wonder why he picked me?"

"No idea ... OK Sherlock, but if you get another letter that looks like it's from the shooter, don't open it, just give me a call."

"I'll agree to that if I can get a copy or make a copy."

"We'll arrange something."

The walk around the block didn't accomplish anything except the enjoyment of smoking a pipe on a cool October afternoon. When Pike returned to his office, he made arrangements for "CONFIRMED" to be placed in the personals column of the next edition, slipped on his jacket and called it a day.

The fourth murder occurred that evening and Pike learned of it the following morning listening to the news as he drove to his office. The body of Milton Hoven, a claims manager for the same firm as the three slain insurance executives, was found about 7 p.m. by a member of the cleaning staff. Pike phoned Franklin.

"Jim—Pike here. Heard about the shooting in the parking garage on the news. Another long-range shot?"

"No. Different. Up close and personal. Two taps to the back of the head with a small caliber, probably .22, but we don't have autopsy results yet."

"Not our guy, then."

"I didn't say that. The victim worked for the same company and stayed late waiting on an appointment that never showed. It wasn't robbery, and before you ask, no one saw anyone or anything unusual in the garage before or after."

"Shell casings?"

"None."

Pike picked up his pipe from the ashtray. "Anyone hear the shots?"

"No ... Did you put the note in the personals?"

"Yeah, it's in today's paper."

"Maybe we'll hear something, then."

"I suspect we will. This guy feels a need to talk with someone. He apparently has a story to tell and for some unknown reason has picked me to tell it to. I'll let you know if another note comes in."

The letter arrived three days later and this time it was a letter, not just a short note. It wasn't marked *personal*, so the top had been sliced open by a machine in the mail room. Mail marked *personal* was selected out and simply delivered to the addressee unopened. Same as the first one, this envelope had no return address.

Pike took a men's manicure kit from his desk drawer that his sister-in-law had given him for Christmas several years before and removed a pair of tweezers and a nail file. Using the tweezers, he carefully slid the folded sheet out of the envelope and opened it using the nail file. It was a computer printed letter that ran more than half the page. It ended with the words, "Place CONFIRMED2 in the personals columns."

Pike made a copy, then carefully folded and replaced the letter in the envelope with his tweezers before calling Franklin.

"Jim? ... Allen Pike. I have another letter. When you pick it up, I want a copy. And before you ask, the envelope was opened by our mail department but the letter was not removed. I'll see you in a few minutes."

He pondered the lie. Well, he was a newspaper man. Lies came easily. He reread his copy of the letter while filling his pipe, then put the pipe in his shirt pocket unlit before slipping his copy in the desk drawer. He was cer-

tain Franklin would agree to publishing the letter; it was the only connection the police had to the killer. What he wasn't certain of was whether his editor would agree, though he could hardly think of any serious objection. Civic duty and all that rot.

Franklin came into his office bringing with him the late autumn aroma of fallen leaves and rain and immediately put on a pair of latex gloves. Pike indicated the envelope laying on his desk and Franklin placed it in a plastic baggie without removing the letter.

"I want a copy of that, Jim."

"I'll see you get one but I want the lab to have this first. I'll have them make you a copy and send it over by messenger."

"Will that be this afternoon?"

"Should be."

"OK. I've been thinking of doing an article on this guy but would have to clear it with my editor first. Might help to get the public involved too."

"I dunno, the D.A. might have something to say about that."

Pike took his pipe from his pocket and put it in his mouth. "If my editor decides to run it, it won't make any difference what the D.A. says."

After Franklin left, Pike got up from his desk, took his coat from the coat rack in the corner and headed for the front door of the newspaper building. Outside, he paused on the steps, lit his pipe and started off toward a small diner a block away, the aroma of Sir Walter Raleigh pipe tobacco trailing behind him. When he arrived in front of the diner, he paused to look back toward the newspaper building. The distance was about 200 yards, twice the length of a football field. The killer must be one helluva marksman, thought Pike. Walter Lambert, the second person murdered, was shot at a distance twice what he'd just walked, maybe even more.

He tamped his pipe out, put it in his pocket and went into the diner. Kathy, who was at least as old as the diner and had worked there as long as Pike could remember, waved to him from the end of the counter. He sat on a stool and she brought him a cup of coffee.

"How's it going today, Al?"

"So so. Just thinking through an

article I want to write."

"That's usually the case when I see you in here mid-morning. They're always swell though. I read 'em every day."

"Thanks, Kathy." She went around the counter to wait on another customer who had taken a seat in a booth. Kathy was tall and slender with red-auburn hair that had probably been natural early on, but Pike suspected most of the color came out of a bottle these days. He didn't know much about her, but she always had a smile and a nice word for everyone who came into the diner, and he liked her for that.

He was convinced his editor would approve an article that included the killer's letter but was just as sure that presenting it in draft form first would ensure its publication. Pike had shown the first short note to his editor and been told to follow up if he received another.

His editor was Lincoln Forbes, an old-school newspaper man less than a year from retirement, and to hear him talk, he was ready now. It was 1987 and the increased use of computers and other technical advances were leaving him behind. Pike could identify with Forbes. Though he was eligible for early retirement but some five years away from regular retirement, he often felt as though the newspaper world was fast leaving him behind as well. Innovation seemed to pile on top of innovation at a speed he was unused to or could easily cope with.

He had a bit of a logistics problem if he wanted to get the killer's letter into the following morning's edition. Franklin said it would be afternoon before he'd have a copy of the letter delivered and though Pike had made a copy, it wouldn't be appropriate to take it to his editor before the police copy was delivered. Then again

He'd made up his mind. He would return to the office, write his column, then take it to Forbes with the copy when it arrived from Franklin. He finished his coffee, put a dollar under the cup, waved to Kathy and headed back to the office with his pipe in his mouth, again trailing smoke like an old locomotive.

He had just finished the column

when a uniformed police officer walked in and handed him a large white envelope. "Lt. Franklin said you'd be expecting this."

"Yes, Officer, I am. Thank you ... and please tell Lt. Franklin I appreciate it."

Pike opened the envelope and removed a single sheet with a note from the lieutenant paper-clipped to it: "Allen, Aside from a mish-mash of prints on the envelope, there were no prints or other identifying material on the letter or inside the envelope. This guy is obviously going to try to kill again, and between you and me, there's no reason he won't be successful. We're going through case files with the insurance company for rejected claims of clients in the past 10 years that may fit the profile, but as you can imagine, there are hundreds, maybe thousands. The D.A. says to go ahead with your column. —Jim"

Pike set the copy and note aside and picked up the printed copy of his column to reread it before seeing his editor. He'd omitted "CONFIRMED2" from the newspaper copy but would put it in the personals.

PIKES PICKS

By Allen Pike

Dear Readers: As you are undoubtedly aware, there have been a series of killings that have taken place in our city over the past week. At first glance, they may have appeared random because they occurred at different times and locations. In fact, the first three were connected as they were committed by someone using a rifle at very long range. A fourth person was killed several days later with a small caliber handgun, and this crime has been linked to the original three by admission of the killer. Yes, I said that correctly, by admission of the killer. The killings are not random.

An unnamed and unidentified person has been in touch with this writer with details known only to himself and the police. The police believe he is most certainly the person responsible. He has asked to have his letters published as part of this column and we have been given permission to do so by the district attorney. In his most recent letter below, he provides what he feels is jus-

tification for his actions. I will refrain from any further comment at this time.

Mr. Pike, As you must know or have guessed by now, my list now stands at four down, four to go. I killed Hoven in the Farley Trust parking garage. I'm sure you're in touch with the police, but in case you haven't heard from their forensics department as yet, I used standard .22 hollow point bullets fired from a Browning automatic fitted with a silencer of my own design and make. Were silencers legal, I'm sure I could make a fortune marketing them. But enough of that.

I suppose the police are calling me a serial killer by now, but in reality and by definition, that's not entirely accurate. Over a period of time, I compiled a list of eight people who caused me the greatest anguish and emotional devastation of my entire life. They are specifically and directly responsible for the death of the love of my life, my wife of almost forty years. She died a slow and painful death as a direct result of their intransigence regarding payment, even partial payment, for medical procedures that could have saved her life.

You must be thinking that I'm simply an old man overcome with grief and driven over the edge, but that time and those emotions are long past. How long past? I won't say at the moment but suffice it to say that my current actions are several years in the making.

Is it revenge? No.

Is it retribution? No.

It is a reckoning, and surely as a writer, Mr. Pike, you know the difference. If you publish this letter as part of your regular column, I will continue to write to you. If you do not, I will not.

Pike's editor, Forbes, read it through and only made two comments: One, that it was shorter than usual but understandable under the circumstances, and secondly, that he add the question "Interview?" to "CONFIRMED2" that was to be placed in the personals. Pike agreed, but he thought nothing would come of it.

Though they had a closed, in-house computer system for dispatching

copy, Pike liked the feel of hardcopy in his hand, as did Forbes, but he composed his columns on a computer and then duly sent them off to the copy editor. Another sign of the times, he thought ... and his age.

Murders five and six, one man and one woman, occurred within three hours of each other just two days after



the column appeared in the morning edition. Both were in management with the same insurance company as previous victims. Franklin phoned Pike late in the morning.

Franklin's voice was tired and ragged. "In case you haven't heard, Al, there were two more this morning, both at long range and both victims were with the same insurance firm as the others. At about five-thirty this morning, Robert Lane was shot in the head when he walked out on his driveway and bent over to pick up the morning paper. The bullet entered the top of his head. We're pretty confident we know where the shooter fired from—the edge of a small wooded area across an open field from Lane's home. Distance is about 200 yards. We found where it appeared a person

had been laying in a prone position as you would to steady a rifle, but nothing else.

"His second victim was Martha Wyles. Her husband had just dropped her off in front of the Farley Trust building and she was shot as she stepped back from the car. One shot, center chest. No sound of a gunshot.

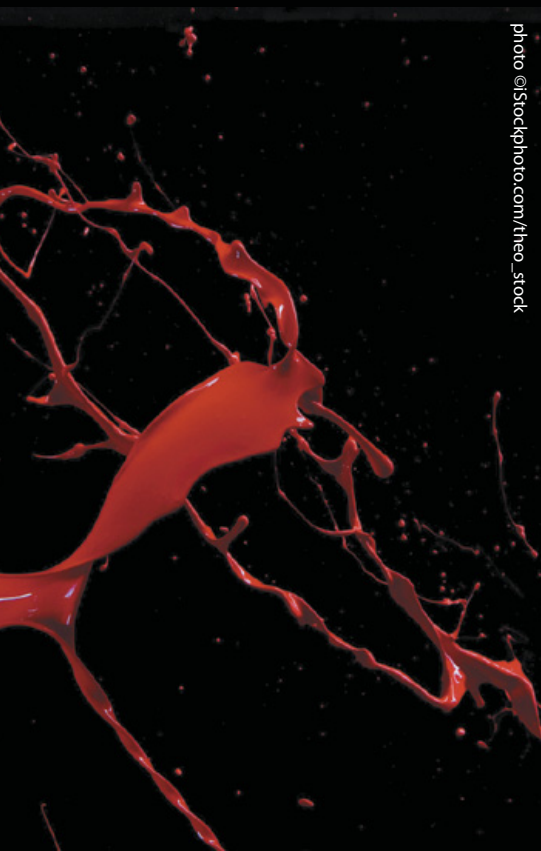


photo ©Stockphoto.com/theo_stock

We have more on this one, though. The shooter apparently rented a corner office on the seventh floor of a building a half block away from Farley Trust. Windows on both sides. He could have shot from either one but we figure the east window because of the angle. The office was empty except for two straight back chairs and a floor lamp. We're dusting for prints, but if his past performance is any indication, we won't find any. We do have a description from the building manager. He says the fellow is average build, about six feet tall with salt-and-pepper beard and hair. Very well spoken and gentlemanly. He rented the office about four weeks ago under the name of Statistical Enterprises, whatever the hell that is. Gave his name as Joseph Brown. May as well

be John Smith. Undoubtedly fake but we'll check it out.

"We may have caught a break on the victims as a group. We were told yesterday that they were part of a small middle management board who met regularly several years ago to review client claims that had been denied. They use a different procedure now, but the claims review board was in place for about seven years. We're weeding through denied claims now, but given the scant information we have, it's going to be a long process."

Pike had lit his pipe while listening. Some smoking restrictions were in place in the building but didn't yet apply to his own office. "Well, Jim, we now have a total of six out of the eight he indicated in his first note to me. At the rate he's going, he'll finish his list before you have any idea of who it might be. I'm wondering ... I get the impression the shooter applied more than once for compensation or coverage for his wife. He may have applied several times and been turned down every time. It seems odd that the same members of the insurance company's review board would have voted to deny his claim. And I wonder how he learned their names. I'm assuming he received some letter from them but it was most likely signed by one person, not the whole committee. What if some of the people he's targeted aren't with the insurance company?"

"Strange you should say that. Robert Lane, who was killed this morning, had only been with the insurance company a year. He came from United Power Equipment little more'n a year ago and had been in human relations there for about seven years. We discovered that by accident when we talked with his boss this morning. And hell, we had to call him at home. Seems like the local office is deserted at the executive and manager levels for all practical purposes. Most are afraid to come to work. Martha Wyles was obviously an exception and look what her dedication bought her. We're checking on the other victims' previous employment now and how long they'd been with the insurance company. Might lead somewhere and might not.

"These killings are making national

news and because we're being tight-lipped about what we know, they're making us out to be stumble bums. What they don't know is that we've contacted the FBI and asked for assistance. Not sure it will do any good but the D.A. is covering his ass. Can't say as I blame him. You and I have been friends for years, Al, and I appreciate the fact that you've kept some of our confidential information out of your column ..." He paused, "Not that I'm sure it would make any difference."

"You sound tired, Jim. When was the last time you slept?"

"Dunno ... a day, maybe two."

Pike set his pipe in an ashtray. "Go home, pour four ounces of bourbon over some ice and relax. Take a hot shower and crawl into bed for a few hours. This guy is smart and he knows the police are on high alert. He has two to go and he's not going to take any chances. He also knows you're learning about him in bits and pieces and he's not going to jeopardize what he's been planning for years. Call it gut feeling, but I suspect I'll hear from him before he kills again. You have time for some sleep."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. Call me if you get a letter from him."

"Will do."

The third letter arrived four days later at mid-morning and was post-marked from a neighboring state. The mail room had sliced the top of the envelope as they had with the previous one, and Pike followed the same routine as he had in the past, removing the letter with tweezers and making a copy. At the top of the letter was the comment, "Place CONFIRMED3 in the personals columns." Under that line was, "No interview now." Below that was the letter. He read it through, replaced it in the envelope and then phoned Franklin.

"Another letter, Jim. If you send someone over after it and I'm not in my office, tell them it's under my pipe rack on my desk. And I want a copy as soon as you can get me one."

"OK, Al. I'll send a uniform and see you get a copy as soon as the lab is finished. By the way, your advice about bourbon and bed the other day was right on—I slept for nine hours and felt great afterward. You must have

been a psychologist in another life.”

Pike laughed. “No, just personal experience from when I was a cub reporter living on coffee and cigarettes 20 hours a day. I still love my coffee but switched to a pipe over 25 years ago when common sense took hold of my beleaguered mind. See ya later.”

He picked up his copy of the letter and headed for Forbes’ office. Once there, he tapped on the glass panel in the open door and entered.

“Another letter, boss.”

Forbes took it from Pike, leaned back in his chair and read it through. When finished, he handed it back. “This guy wants to be caught, or knows he won’t be, at least till he’s finished what he’s planned. I suspect the latter. There’s enough information here to narrow the field considerably but I doubt in time to keep him from killing again. They may even be able to make an identification, but that’s a far step from catching him before he commits another murder ... or two.”

Pike took his pipe from his shirt pocket and put it in his mouth but made no attempt to light it. “That’s my feeling and it’s probably shared by the police and the FBI but I doubt they’ll say it publicly. There’s something that concerns me about this letter; maybe concerns me personally. The initials IQ are unusual and I know someone with the initials IQ. Irma Quinn, my wife’s sister.”

Pike was a widower, his wife, Joanne, having died some three years before in a car accident. No one had been at fault unless you blamed winter weather and black ice. It had been the first and only marriage for both of them and they had been married just over 30 years at the time of the accident. Eventually, he accepted she was gone but never accepted the void that was his constant companion. They had no children and Joanne’s only living relative was her sister, Irma. Pike had never cared much for Irma; he found her too abrasive at times, but she and Joanne got along well. He had to admit, though, that Irma had been very kind and caring when Joanne died. She called him regularly for a while and had even invited him for dinner a couple times. She was recently divorced and for whatever

reason, he felt she might be interested in a more intimate relationship, but he wasn’t ready. The contacts became less and less till there were none at all. As time passed, he realized she was probably just trying to comfort him but he hadn’t made any effort to resume contact. Now, with the possibility that her life may be in danger, he felt guilty about not staying in touch.

Forbes slid his chair back from his desk. “This sister-in-law of yours, any chance she works for the insurance company?”

“No, but she worked for United Power Equipment company for several years in their HR division. I’ve kind of lost track but I think she’s been a department manager with a bank for the past two years.”

“Well,” said Forbes, standing, “you’d better follow it up, and you might want to let Franklin know as well. I have a meeting upstairs.” He pointed upward and grimaced. He hated weekly management meetings with the publisher.

Pike returned to his office, noticed the letter was missing from under his pipe rack, lit his pipe and took a sip of cold coffee. He then composed a few lines as preface to the latest note from the killer. He debated deleting the reference to the initials but decided it was best to print the note as written. No sense pissing the killer off to the point where he’d discontinue writing. He finished, then read it through.

PIKES PICKS

By Allen Pike

Dear Readers: The death toll now stands at six and we have received another letter from the killer, this time with information that may be helpful to the local police, who are now being assisted by the FBI. As in the past, I will reserve comment for the time being.

Mr. Pike, Whether you believe it or not, or whether the police believe it, this task I have set for myself gives me no pleasure. Satisfaction, perhaps, but no pleasure. It is simply a chore that must be done. It’s entirely possible that as a result, some insurance companies and employers may choose to take a more enlightened approach when dealing with clients and employees but as you know, that is not my

intent. The individuals I’ve killed were unfeeling, had sold their humanity to their companies for the proverbial 30 pieces of silver, were criminally negligent and their negligence resulted in my wife’s untimely death. I am simply collecting a debt due.

If the authorities are as intelligent and dedicated as I think they are, then the elimination of Martha Wyles and Robert Lane will provide them with valuable information as to my identity, though it is unlikely to do them any good. I may tell you why at some future date.

In any case, I am confident that I will be able to complete my task soon. So confident, in fact, that I’ll give you the initials of the last two on my list. Those initials are IQ and SK.

He sent it off to the copy editor then checked his personal phone directory for Irma Quinn’s phone number. He had a home number for her but not a business number. He called but there was no answer, so he left a message on her answering machine to call him as soon as she could.

The police copy of the killer’s letter was delivered to Pike just after lunch, and Franklin phoned little more than an hour later.

“This case is beginning to come together, Al. We have it figured the guy worked for the United Power Equipment Company, and they’re group insured by our target insurance company. The FBI profiler puts him at about 60 to 65 years old, probably in good health, retired or quit from United Power in the past five years. That information, plus the fact that his wife died and he apparently had several hearings with the insurance company narrows the field considerably. We’ll probably be able to ID this wacko within a day or two.”

“I don’t want to rain on your parade, Jim, but identifying him and catching him before he kills again are two different things. The most recent letter was postmarked out of state three days ago. I’ll bet he’s back.”

There was a few seconds of silence on the line. “Yeah, my guess too. And even if we could identify the next two targets from the initials we’d have to know if they’re still employed

by United Power. We've asked them to consider a week's holiday for all employees and it's under consideration, but we probably won't have an answer till tomorrow. A week might give us a chance to get this bastard."

Pike picked up his pipe and lit it. "I may have something for you that will help. IQ may be Irma Quinn."

"How do you know that?"

"She's my sister-in-law and worked for United Power in their human relations department but has been with a bank for a couple years. I don't know which bank. I called her home phone and left a message to call back but no response yet."

"Do you have an address?"

"Yeah ... just a minute." Pike checked his address book and gave it to Franklin. "It's a high-rise apartment building with a parking underneath."

"All right, I'll send a black and white over just to be on the safe side. What kind of car does she drive?"

"She was driving a blue Ford Mustang a few months ago when I last saw her. I think it's last year's model so I suppose she still has it."

"Married?"

"Divorced."

"OK. Talk to you later."

Pike had emptied his pipe and was getting ready to go home when his phone rang. It was Franklin.

"Al ..." There was a long pause. "No other way to say it ... We found Irma Quinn's body in her car in the apartment parking garage. Looks like a .22 at close range. She was shot twice, the same as the fourth victim, Milton Hoven. The driver's side window was down as if she'd been talking to someone. The coroner said it was early this morning, probably 7 or so. I'm so sorry, Al."

Pike didn't know what to say for a moment, started to say something, and then sat down. "Did she ...?"

"Did she suffer? No. I wanted to come over to your office and tell you in person but I can't get away from here. We identified her from her car and picture on her driver's license but there will have to be a formal identification. Are you her only relative?"

"The only one here, at any rate. I think she has a cousin in New England somewhere. When will you

need me to identify her?"

"Tomorrow sometime will be OK. She's at the county morgue. Call me in the morning and I'll meet you there."

"I take it there were no witnesses?"

"No. No one saw or heard anything of any value and there were no shell casings left behind. Same thing our killer must have done when he nailed Milton Hoven. One of her neighbors saw her sitting in her car when she walked past on the way to her own car about 7:15 but said she often saw Ms. Quinn in the morning so thought nothing of it. If the coroner is right, she was already ... she'd already been shot."

"You don't have to go light with me, Jim. I covered the police beat years ago as a reporter. I'm tired all of a sudden, though. Just want to go home. If there's anything else, you can tell me in the morning."

"OK, Al. Call me."

"Yeah."

Pike didn't expect to get a good night's sleep and was right. He didn't remember waking but must have tossed and turned because he woke tired. Instead of going into the office, he phoned Forbes and was told to take whatever time he needed. He then phoned Franklin's office expecting to leave a message and was surprised when Franklin answered the phone.

"I can be at the morgue about 10, Jim."

"Fine. I'll be there. You sound as though you're as tired as I am."

"Probably am. See you in a bit."

He felt better after a shower, two cups of coffee and his first pipe of the day. Having some time to kill he turned on the TV to catch the morning news, then thought better of it. He didn't want to hear a report about Irma. As he reached to turn it off, the morning news anchor interrupted with a bulletin that a shooting had occurred in a residential neighborhood within the hour. Few details were available other than the victim was a male and that police had cordoned off the area. He left the TV on but there were few details reported in the next half hour. He finally shut it off, filled a travel mug with coffee and headed for his car to drive to the morgue. Franklin was there when he

entered the waiting room.

"I didn't expect to see you here, Jim. I saw the report of another shooting this morning on the news."

"I wanted to be here, Al. I have a team covering it and they'll fill me in. Right now, it looks like it's our eighth victim."

"Shot close up?"

"No, but not from the distance the others were, or at least we don't think so. A van was spotted by some neighbors about half a block away, but it wasn't there when the body was discovered. The victim's name was Stanley Kulp. SK, as the killer said in his last letter. Mr. Kulp worked for United Power Equipment."

"How was he shot?"

"Someone put a kid's toy wagon in his driveway and Mr. Kulp apparently noticed it as he backed out of his garage. When he got out of his car to move the wagon, he was hit center chest with a high caliber bullet. He fell halfway between the back of his car and the wagon. Died immediately."

Pike said nothing for a moment then nodded his head toward the hallway doors. "Can we do the identification now?"

"Sure. Any time you're ready."

It was Irma but she hadn't been cleaned up. There were two small round indentations in her forehead above her left eye and powder burns at her hairline and high on her left cheek. Pike stared at her for a moment, nodded his head to Franklin, then turned and walked back to the waiting room where he remained standing.

"I'll take care of all the arrangements as soon as the body's released, Jim. I'll need to get into her apartment to see if she had an address book. I know she and Joanne had some distant relatives on the East Coast somewhere but that's about it. I think her ex-husband moved out of state after they divorced, but if there's a phone number, I'll call him."

"If there's anything I can do to help, anything, just call me."

"Thanks, Jim. I will."

The funeral was the following week; a small affair with few mourners. Franklin and a few friends and coworkers were there, and one cousin flew in from Boston. Pike didn't have

any get-together afterward as with most funerals. He didn't feel like socializing but he did have lunch with Irma's cousin before driving her to the airport for her flight out. Her name was Karen Fisher, and she was quite attractive and several years younger than Pike. She had been close to Irma and Pike was surprised to learn they had traveled to Europe together the year before. Irma had apparently taken an interest in adopting a child from Eastern Europe, but the political situation had prevented it. There was obviously a softer, gentler side to Irma that Pike never knew but now wished he had.

He went back to daily routine and daily column, writing only one follow-up article on the killings. It didn't say much, just a recap of the murders, and at that, his heart wasn't in it. It was as if something was missing from his life, call it goal or direction, but it was almost like the void he felt after Joanne died.

Pike was convinced the authorities would never catch the killer and though Franklin never said so, Pike was certain he felt the same. The man had simply disappeared without a trace. Oh, the police had eventually been able to put everything together to identify him. His name was Leonard Cornell and his wife, Irene, had died five years before the killings started, almost to the day. He had been a skilled machinist by profession and had been retired from United Power Equipment for four years. His last known address was three years old but he hadn't lived there in that time. Neighbors who knew him said he simply disappeared.

The letter Pike had been expecting arrived three weeks later. The word *personal* was written in the lower left corner and it was postmarked New Delhi, India. He opened it but not with the care of the earlier ones. He somehow felt it was one he wasn't going to pass on to Franklin. He lit his pipe and began to read.

Mr. Pike, I want you to know that I was unaware Irma Quinn was related to you. Not that it would have made any difference. She was a mean-spirited bitch at best and her intransigence kept my company from speaking

to the insurance company on behalf of my wife. I am as convinced today as I was then, that if the company had taken our part, had supported our efforts for treatment, my wife would be with me today. And of course, none of the killings would have happened.

You may think me a callous bastard, or insane, but I hope some of those who were close to the people I killed will have the same sense of loss I live with every day. I have no way of knowing, of course, but perhaps you have felt the same way at some time in your life.

I doubt seriously that the authorities will ever catch me. I've created several very professional and complete identities for myself and will create more if needed. As you undoubtedly have noticed from the postmark, I was successful in leaving the country, and in fact was in South Asia several days after I killed Mr. Kulp. I may remain here a while. It is an interesting part of the world with delightful people.

*Without regret,
Leo Cornell*

PS: I know little about you, Mr. Pike. But you're a newspaper man, a journalist with a personal interest in what happened. I won't be surprised to discover one day that you've followed me. Come armed.

Pike read it through a second time, then put it back in the envelope and placed it in his sport coat pocket. He sat thinking for a while, sucking on an unlit pipe, and then as if he'd come to a decision, took his coat and hat off the coat rack and left his office for the diner a block away. He was entertaining a crazy idea and thought the fresh air might wipe it from his mind.

He wanted to catch up with Leonard Cornell. Maybe he wanted to kill him, he wasn't sure yet, and in any case, he wasn't sure he could bring himself to do it. Not that he hadn't killed before but that was the Korean War, long ago and far away. Or maybe he simply wanted to interview him, to comprehend in some way what had really driven Cornell to seek the murderous retribution that he'd inflicted on eight unsuspecting people. Oh, he understood Cornell, understood

his reasoning and could even sympathize to a degree. Empathize might be a better word. After all, he'd lost Joanne suddenly. He felt the void of her absence from the warmth of his bed to the depth of his soul. But what Cornell had done was tragic and wrong, hideously wrong. In a sense, a crime against humanity, though he suspected Cornell would argue that those he killed had committed a worse crime by their dispassionate, uncaring and "by the book" actions.

He turned in the paperwork the following morning for early retirement and would retire the following week on Friday. It surprised nearly everyone, including his boss Forbes, who came to his office late in the afternoon.

"I heard a rumor you were retiring, Al. True?"

"Yes, true."

"Why?"

"Tired, I guess. And I think I need a change; I'm getting stale."

"Well, hell, take a few weeks vacation. Travel the country. I hate to see you go. You're as popular a columnist as we have on the paper, and aside from that, I'll miss you. I thought I'd beat you out the door."

"Well, I've made up my mind. I have a few things I'd like to do and simply want to do them before I'm too old to appreciate it. Don't worry, I'll stop in from time to time just to make you wish you'd done the same. Maybe even submit a guest column from time to time."

The week went by slowly, but Friday afternoon finally rolled around. Pike had already taken a box of personal items home and just had a couple files, an airline ticket and his passport stacked on his desk when Franklin walked in.

"I just heard this morning you've retired. What brought this on?"

"I just want to do some things before I'm too old to enjoy them, Jim. Maybe travel a bit—see the world."

Franklin smiled. "Well, I'll be damned. I never would have thought it. I see your passport there," pointing at the top of Pike's desk. "Where you headed for first?"

Pike smiled back. "India ... New Delhi, India." P&T

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CORPS Pipe Show

The 26th Annual CORPS (Conclave Of Richmond Pipe Smokers) Pipe Smokers' Celebration and Exposition will be held Friday, Oct. 1, through Sunday, Oct. 3, 2010, at the Holiday Inn Select-Koger South Conference Center, 10800 Midlothian Turnpike, Richmond, Va. Mention the CORPS or "pipe smokers" for special room rates. For more information or to reserve a table, contact CORPS at P.O. Box 2463, Chesterfield, VA 23832; phone: 804.342.0761; e-mail: conclave@corpipesmokers.org; website: www.corpipesmokers.org.

NASPC Show

The annual North American Society of Pipe Collectors Show will be held on Saturday, Aug. 28, 2010 at the Ramada Hotel, 4900 Sinclair Road, Columbus, OH 43229. Phone the hotel at 877.609.6086 and mention the NASPC Show to receive a special room rate. For show information, contact Bill Unger at NASPC, P.O. Box 9642, Columbus, Ohio 43209; phone: 614.436.3751; e-mail: bill@naspc.org.

West Coast Pipe Show

The second annual West Coast Pipe Show will be held Nov. 6-7, 2010, at the Palace Station Hotel & Casino. Smoking will be allowed in the entire show area, including in the new smoking lounge incorporated into the ballroom. There will also be a Friday night poker tournament hosted by the show committee. For West Coast Pipe Show room rates, contact the Palace Station Hotel & Casino at 800.634.3101; Web site: www.palacestation.com. For table reservations and other information, contact Steve O'Neill at 956 East 800 South, Lewiston, UT 84320; phone: 435.258.5431; e-mail: steve@westcoastpipeshow.com; website: www.westcoastpipeshow.com.

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