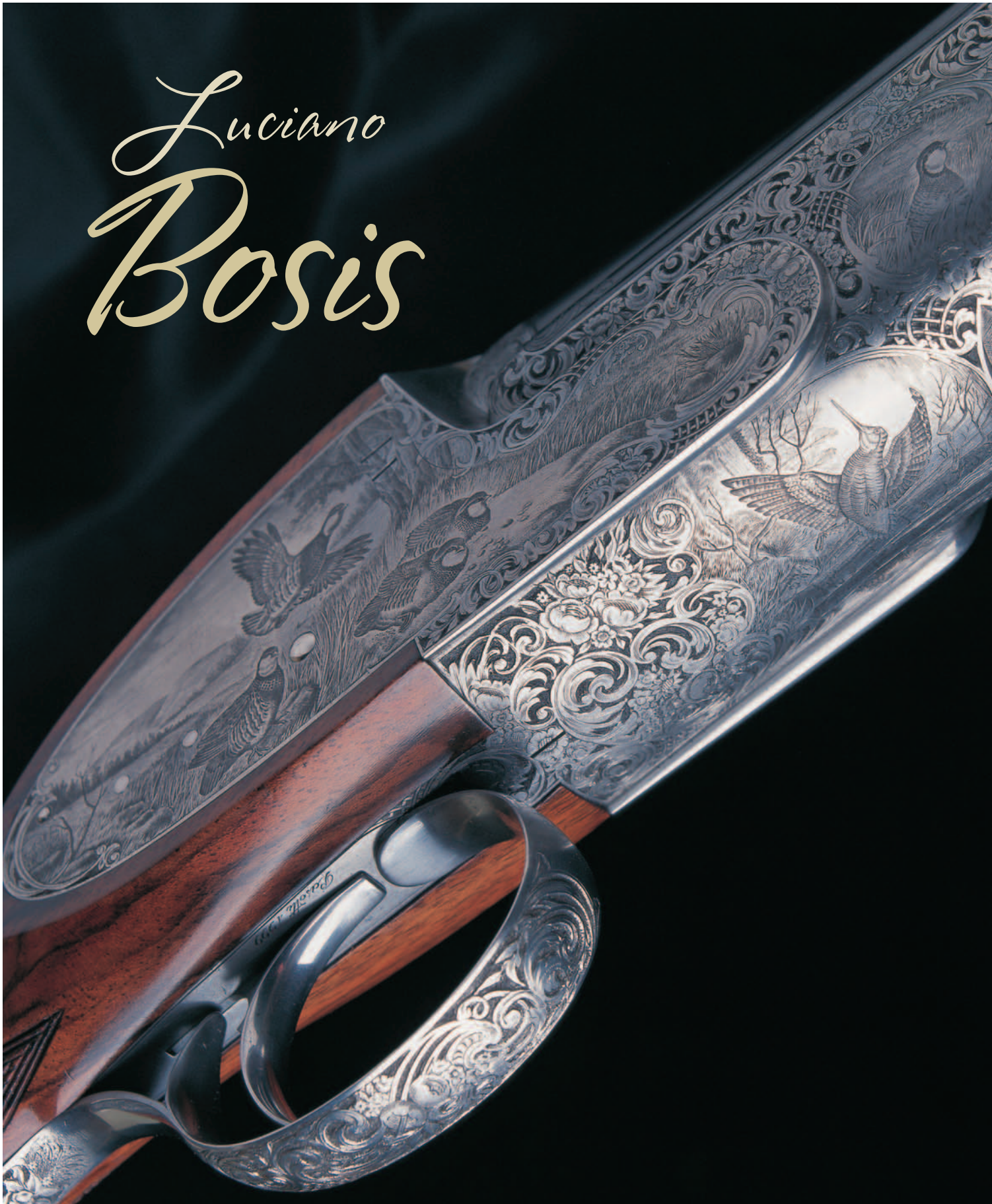
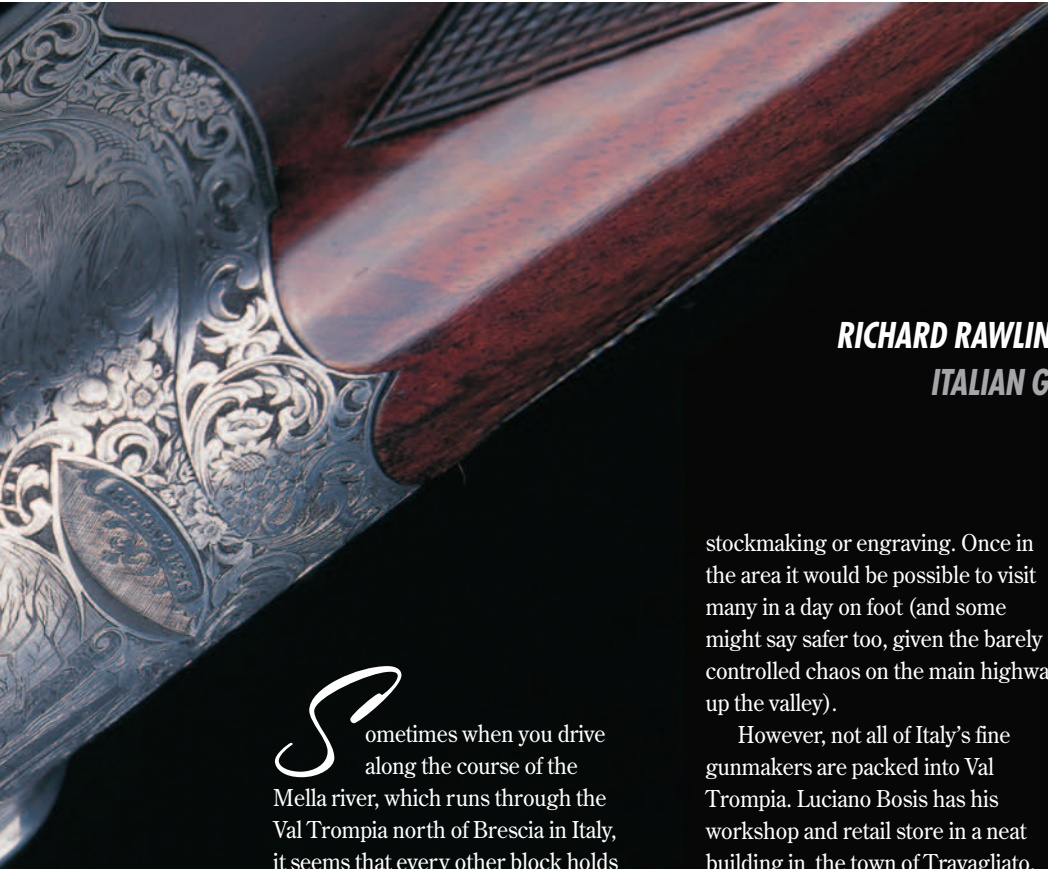


Luciano Bosis





RICHARD RAWLINGSON DISCOVERS THAT NOT ALL FINE ITALIAN GUNS ORIGINATE IN THE VAL TROMPIA

Sometimes when you drive along the course of the Mella river, which runs through the Val Trompia north of Brescia in Italy, it seems that every other block holds a famous gunmaker. Tightly packed in the narrow valley between the mountains, these communities are home to a remarkable concentration of gunmaking expertise. Alongside the giants such as Beretta and Franchi are businesses of all sizes, building guns, repairing guns and providing specialist services such as

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stockmaking or engraving. Once in the area it would be possible to visit many in a day on foot (and some might say safer too, given the barely controlled chaos on the main highway up the valley).

However, not all of Italy's fine gunmakers are packed into Val Trompia. Luciano Bosis has his workshop and retail store in a neat building in the town of Travagliato, about eight miles to the West of the provincial capital, Brescia. This is farming country, not metal bashing territory, but Luciano Bosis can bash metal with the best of them.

This really is gunmaking on an individual scale. Bosis and his small workforce are traditional gunmakers, much more comfortable with files and chisels than a computer keyboard. One Italian writer has coined the phrase 'techno-artisans' to describe the marriage of old and new techniques. It fits, say, Ivo Fabbri perfectly, but Luciano Bosis is just an artisan, plain and simple. No computer controlled machinery here, although mechanical assistance is used. This is 20th rather than 21st century gunmaking.

It means that output is limited (around 20 guns per year) and the price is high, not least when you consider that every Bosis gun will also be decorated by one of the superstar engravers. Such small numbers give every gun made a rarity value that guarantees it will be an instant collector's item.

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Rarity alone of course does not make a gun great. You could argue that bad products are almost destined to be produced in small numbers. Bosis, however, delivers guns that not only look right but feel right, with an attention to detail that survives the closest scrutiny. To hold one is to want one, especially the exquisite small-gauge guns, each built perfectly to scale.

Some 'collector' guns can seem to be nothing more than a canvas for another eye-wateringly expensive piece of engraving. You could call them art for sure, but art for art's sake, because as shooting tools they fail completely. No Bosis I have ever handled (and I am lucky enough that there have been many over the years) has ever felt anything less than a finely honed and superbly balanced masterpiece.

Perhaps it is because Luciano Bosis is a shooting enthusiast first and foremost; or perhaps it is that physical separation from the mainstream of the trade. Real life sportsmen visit the Bosis retail store and this connection with the everyday practicalities of the

sport is not always apparent in the gun business. I have met famous and gifted gunmakers who have no interest in or understanding of shooting. Their life is all about design and manufacturing technology, not the end use. Imagine a car maker who did not drive – how could you have a meaningful conversation about handling and dynamics?

Currently, Bosis offers three basic models, two of them side-by-sides. The Queen is a rather predictable, but beautifully executed sidelock using Holland & Holland style lockwork. Many of Italy's boutique makers offer guns of this type, so it has no distinctive features, but very few can match the Country, a real rarity in modern gunmaking in that it is a best quality Anson and Deeley boxlock.

Demand for these is small however, with the bulk of production now concentrated on the Michelangelo over-and-under. Once again there are few technical surprises. The gun is a Boss-style sidelock, of the type now almost universal among the elite Italian trade, available in no fewer than five gauges – 12, 16, 20, 28 and .410. The latter is a truly wonderful study in miniaturization, weighing just 6 lbs, while Bosis has made something of a speciality of the often overlooked 16-bore.

The Michelangelo's receiver is formed from a block of Cr2 steel, with spark erosion techniques used to create the main features. All internal and external parts are hand-finished to a mirror polish. The lockwork is deceptively simple, but finished to an equally high standard. A feature is that the bridle is not attached to the lock plate but formed as part of it from the solid block, providing an exceedingly stable platform on which to mount the moving parts.



As good as mass produced shotguns are, it is comforting that men like Luciano Bosis still exist making guns with no objective other than to produce the finest possible product, regardless of the cost.

Although his hunting guns are highly prized, especially in the currently ultra-fashionable small gauges, Bosis does make the Michelangelo in heavier versions for live pigeon and competition shooting. A gun designed for sporting clays would typically weigh around 7³/₄ lbs (3.5kg), around half a pound more than the game version. I am sure there are some owners out there who use their guns regularly in competition, but a Bosis sporter must be the rarest of rare sights on a competition layout.

As with any bespoke gun, details such as grip profile and

choking are entirely the buyer's choice. Nor is there a Bosis 'house style' in terms of decoration and you will find examples with every kind of engraving, from the amazing tight scrollwork of Nadia Martinelli to the exuberant fantasy scenes of Angelo Galeazzi. Just completed, and currently featured on his web site, is a stunning 12-gauge with gold inlay game birds on a color hardened background, the work of master engraver Stefano Pedretti.

Naturally, gunmaking and engraving of this standard is matched to the finest quality (normally Turkish) walnut. Bosis

has established a reputation for using only the finest quality wood – an affordable luxury when you have only to select around 20 blanks each year! Around 40 coats of hand-rubbed oil give the finished stocks their superb luster.

As good as mass produced shotguns are, it is comforting that men like Luciano Bosis still exist, making guns with no objective other than to produce the finest possible product, regardless of the cost. They make no economic sense to anyone other than the select few who can afford them, but from the heart rather than the head, they are just perfect. ■