

RICHARD RAWLINGSON FINDS OUT HOW YOU CAN HAVE A UNIQUE GUN

THE ONE AND ONLY



CLAUDIO TOMASONI WAS COMMISSIONED TO PRODUCE THESE CLASSIC GAME SCENES.

There is no doubt about it! we have a greater choice of good quality guns now than at any time in living memory. Computer aided design and manufacturing methods have brought top quality within the range of all. Many more firms are now capable of producing affordable and well designed guns. Even on a relatively tight budget you can easily find a selection of

guns that could take you to the top of the sport.

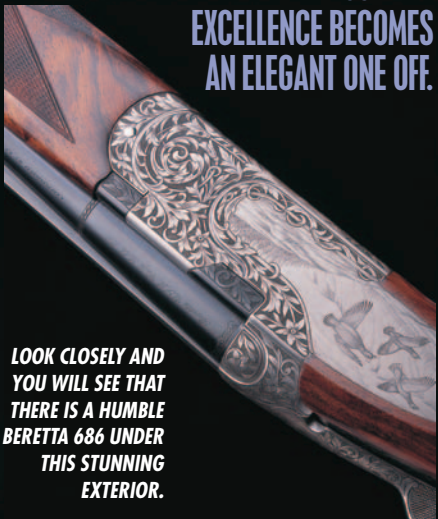
If there has been a price to pay it is perhaps in a loss of individuality. Computers are great at producing flawless copies of an original design, which is good news for quality control and a major factor in keeping prices affordable, but it does mean that there are lots of other guns just like yours. It is harder now if you want to stand out from the crowd. Mass production also means more of a 'one size fits all' strategy. Keeping control of the inventory

means limiting the number of variables – fine if you conform to the gunmaker's idea of 'average', less helpful if you need something different.

Or perhaps you like a standard model just fine but wish it could look different from the herd? A standard Browning or Beretta may be your dream gun from a performance point of view but you can afford something a bit classier. But if you opt for a more expensive maker, will you end up with a great looking gun that just doesn't shoot as well?



BERETTA'S CLASSIC DESIGN REALLY IS THE GUN FOR EVERYMAN. IN THE HANDS OF KENNEDY'S MASTER CRAFTSMEN HOWEVER, THIS PIECE OF INDUSTRIAL EXCELLENCE BECOMES AN ELEGANT ONE OFF.



LOOK CLOSELY AND YOU WILL SEE THAT THERE IS A HUMBLE BERETTA 686 UNDER THIS STUNNING EXTERIOR.

EACH VINGNETTE IS FRAMED WITH BOLD ACANTHUS SCROLL WORK.



NO SURFACE IS LEFT UNADORNED.



...BUT WHO SAYS A BESPOKE GUN HAS TO COME FROM AN ARTISAN MAKER WHO TURNS OUT FEWER THAN FIFTY GUNS A YEAR? THOSE SAME SKILLS CAN BE APPLIED TO ANY STANDARD GUN AND THE PHOTOGRAPHS HERE SHOW WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED

British dealer Tony Kennedy has an answer to that conundrum. He is no stranger to bespoke gunmaking, having represented such distinguished firms as Desenzani, Bosis and Bertuzzi to name just three. When it comes to the close-knit community of the Italian gun trade around Brescia, few have Kennedy's knowledge and contacts. For sure there are the industrial giants such as Beretta and Perazzi, but the region still has a thriving artisan community of stockers, engravers and boutique makers who produce guns the traditional way, with hand tools and a trained eye. This is the world Kennedy knows best, for he has built his business on delivering dream guns to those

with pockets deep enough to afford them.

But who says a bespoke gun has to come from an artisan maker who turns out fewer than fifty guns a year? Those same skills can be applied to any standard gun and the photographs accompanying this piece show what can be achieved with even the most humble entry level gun.

The starting point was a Beretta 686, as near to the shotgun equivalent of the Model T Ford as it is possible to be. Beretta's classic design really is the gun for everyman. In the hands of Kennedy's master craftsmen however, this piece of industrial excellence becomes an elegant one off. Starting with the basic action,



HEAVILY FIGURED TURKISH WALNUT IS SHAPED TO THE CUSTOMERS EXACT DIMENSIONS.



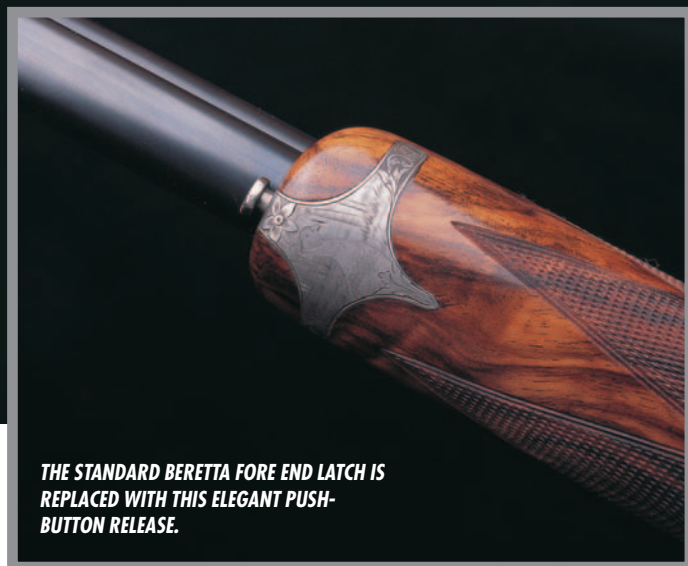
FOR MOST PEOPLE A CUSTOM GUN ALSO MEANS SPECIAL WOODWORK. THE STRONGLY FIGURED TURKISH WALNUT ON THIS EXAMPLE IS TYPICAL OF THE STANDARD THAT CAN BE ACHIEVED. IT WILL OF COURSE BE FASHIONED BY HAND TO YOUR EXACT MEASUREMENTS, FINISHED

WITH HAND-RUBBED OIL AND DECORATED WITH FINE HAND-CUT CHECKERING. YOU COULD IN THEORY TRAVEL TO BRESCIA TO SELECT YOUR WOOD PERSONALLY; MORE REALISTICALLY MOST WILL CHOOSE FROM A SELECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS SENT BY EMAIL.

the factory decoration and finish is polished off. The gun is then handed to a master engraver to be given a new identity. In this case Claudio Tomasoni was given the commission but any of Italy's finest can be used, although the very top names come with a long waiting time and a hefty price tag. For this gun, Tomasoni has produced a traditional combination of game scenes and bold acanthus scroll. Pheasants, partridge and woodcock adorn the action in scenes that come straight from an Archibald Thorburn painting.

For most people a custom gun also means special woodwork. The

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THE STANDARD BERETTA FORE END LATCH IS REPLACED WITH THIS ELEGANT PUSH-BUTTON RELEASE.

strongly figured Turkish walnut on this example is typical of the standard that can be achieved. It will of course be fashioned by hand to your exact measurements, finished with hand-rubbed oil and decorated with fine hand-cut checkering. You could in theory travel to Brescia to select your wood personally; more realistically most will choose from a selection of photographs sent by email. Modern technology does have some benefits!

The custom process need not end at new wood and engraving. You could have a new trigger blade or top lever shaped to your hand or, as on this example, an elegant Anson type push-button fore end release to replace the standard gun's lever latch.

A Beretta is the chosen medium for this example but the custom treatment can be applied to any new gun. If your ideal gun exists only in your dreams, why not see if dreams can come true? ■