

One of my favorite magazine articles was written years ago by Elgin Gates – titled “The Legend of Chapchinal”. In 1959 Gates and his partner, Herb Klein, were the first to hunt *Ovis ammon polii* since James L. Clark and Bill Morden’s 1927 expedition for the American Museum of Natural History. Better known as Marco Polo sheep, this is one of the most desired big game animals among hunters. The Gates’ story is spell-binding (“There, in the heart of Asia, on a lofty windblown slope on the rooftop of the world [at 21,000ft] I came at last to my own

mecca.”). It was reprinted in Clark’s book, “The Great Arc of the Wild Sheep”. If you can get a copy of this book, be sure to set aside a full evening – requesting no interruptions and your favorite adult beverage by your side!

That anecdotal comment leads me neatly into introducing our readers to Marco Polo Outfitters and its owner Carter Finnell. Yes, Finnell has successfully hunted a Marco Polo sheep (and not that long ago) and that’s why he named his very upscale gun store Marco Polo Outfitters.

Early Days

Finnell was born and grew up in Calgary, Alberta, an area where guns are a big part of life. His

father was a serious hunter, mostly for big game, while his grandfather was also very serious about his hunting – but for upland birds. Young Finnell was exposed to both.

Professionally, Finnell spent 30 years in the medical sales business. His last employer was bought out in 2008 and that’s when he started thinking about a new career. Living in the St. Louis suburbs, he noticed that there were no high-end gun shops, so he decided to open one of his own – Marco Polo Outfitters.

Now, there are lots of gun shops all over the country, and some are very upscale, “but I wanted to go the extra mile,” Finnell told me. “I wanted not only a gun shop that carried the very best shotguns and rifles, I wanted

MARCO POLO OUTFITTERS

BY NICK SISLEY



CARTER FINNELL WITH A BLASER F3 IMPERIAL OVER AND UNDER WITH GRADE 9 WOOD.

to treat my customers differently.”

Finnell knew all about treating gun buyers well, but his game plan (and one that he has obviously pulled off well) was that he wanted to spend the maximum time possible with existing and potential customers.

“A customer had looked at our website and obviously liked what he saw,” Finnell told me. “He phoned, and we talked. Later he made an appointment for the next week and drove all the way down from Wisconsin. I spent two and a half hours with him. He was interested in a big game rifle and knew very little about the new Blaser R8 – but I spent time explaining the rifle’s features, plus taking it apart and putting it back together for him. He ended up buying that Blaser with two barrels (interchangeable), an aluminum carrying case and a Schmidt & Bender scope for each barrel. Talking about the personal service he had been given, that customer told me, *‘I’ve never been in a gun shop like this.’* I was delighted.”

And that’s one of the aspects of Marco Polo Outfitters that makes this store so unique. Finnell told me that fully 60 percent of his business is through customers who make an appointment. Of course, for such appointments Finnell blocks out his time. During an appointment he tries to get to know as much as possible about that customer. He has no interest in a so-called quick sale. Sure, he wants to make a sale, but, more importantly, he wants to make absolutely certain that the customer gets not only what he wants, but what he needs.

Gun Fit

Finnell has been a Level II National Skeet Shooting Association (NSSA) Instructor for years, and

with that he has developed a specialty – gun fitting. “Nick, I’m 6 foot 7. Off-the-shelf guns don’t fit me! All my life I’ve had to make stock fitting adjustments to every gun I’ve ever owned. I guess because I’ve had to fine tune all my own guns, that’s given me the experience and desire to make certain every customer gets individually fitted – and a perfect fit with a rifle is just as important as a perfect fit with a shotgun.”

Once a customer is fitted with a

shotgun, Finnell suggests the customer takes the package home and shoots it – often – for about three months. On return, more patterning might be done to complete the perfect gun fit. Only then will the stock be finally finished. “There’s no reason to get fitted for a new custom stock if your gun mount is either incorrect, erratic or both.”

Finnell also gives shooting lessons professionally, but he also gives some lessons gratis, the

latter mostly to women and youngsters. It’s his way of putting something back into the sport – wanting to see new lady and young shooters come into clay target shooting. “Over the last 20 months I’ve had at least 10 women come to me. Their husbands want them to shoot so badly that each of these females had a shotgun purchased for them by their spouse. In every instance the purchase was a 12 gauge, and usually one that weighed at least 8 pounds. Every one of these women was getting pounded with recoil and for most of them the guns were simply too heavy. So I put each of these gals into a 28 gauge over and under and had them shoot 28 gauge $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce target loads. Nick, in every case they not only began breaking targets immediately, they discovered that shooting didn’t have to be painful (i.e. too much recoil) – they all loved it! One of those gals was 82 years young – and she can’t wait to come back for more instruction!”



GUN FITTING IS A MAJOR PRIORITY AT MARCO POLO OUTFITTERS. HERE CARTER FINNELL FITS UP A CUSTOMER.



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In Store

The pictures below illustrate the special cabinetry Finnell had built to show off the firearms he has for sale. The cabinets were done by Julian & Sons, one of the country's best known wood specialists. Further, all the guns shown, with the cabinets, are in a secure 'Vault Room'.

When you enter the store you initially come across clothing and accessories. Marco Polo Outfitters specializes in top-of-the-line clothing from Beretta, Krieghoff, Blaser and others. Some of his accessories are by Briley, Boyd, Pilla Optics, Gun Glove and Americase.

in that you will be most interested in – Perazzi, Beretta, Blaser, Krieghoff and Benelli. “Most traditionalists opt for a Perazzi when they come to this store – usually the MX2000 or the MX8. But a significant amount of our more recent sales have been for the high-rib sporting guns, the Krieghoff Pro Sporter and recently introduced Blaser Super Sport. Like us, I'm certain other gun stores are also seeing great interest in these high-rib shotguns.” Finnell shoots an SCO Perazzi a lot, but he also has Krieghoff K-80s and K-20s and a Blaser F3. He tends to like skeet and sporting clays best. The rifles



CARTER FINNELL ON THE LEFT WITH HIS KRIEGHOFF K-80 – STEVE POPOVICH, CARTER'S GUNSMITH, ON THE RIGHT WITH HIS S2 BLASER DOUBLE RIFLE.

with, including Steve Popovich. In addition to his love of clay target shooting, Finnell still keeps his hand in with big game. Since his company also specializes in rifles, it no doubt pays for him to keep abreast of what big game hunters want and are thinking with regard to rifles.

By now you should have drawn the conclusion that Finnell is a shotgun and rifle nut, but the big plus point to remember is that he's happy to give you as much of his time as you need to buy the right gun. While you are welcome to walk into his store unannounced, my suggestion is to call and make an appointment. That way you'll get the Marco Polo Outfitters treatment full on – probably an hour or more of special attention (www.marcopoloutfitters.com – Phone: 636-530-7960). ■



HERE'S A LOOK AT THE MARCO POLO OUTFITTERS VAULTED GUN ROOM – WITH THE BEAUTIFUL CABINERY BY JULIAN.

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Nick Sisley has been writing full time for over 41 years. He has written thousands of magazine articles, is a Level I NCSA and NSSA Instructor, an NRA Certified Shotgun Instructor, and has traveled worldwide in search of story material, usually with a shotgun. He can be reached at nicksisley@hotmail.com



Another aspect of this company's success is that Finnell has professional hunters come in from Africa and other destinations to put on presentations for his invited clients. Marco Polo Outfitters can also book big game and wingshooting hunts for you.

But it's probably the sporting shotguns this company specializes

Marco Polo handles are only the so-called cream-of-the-crop, rifles from makers like Krieghoff, Blaser, Sauer, Mauser, Sako, Volquartsen and other custom makers.

Finnell is a gunsmith himself, with certain areas of his own expertise. For other gunsmithing needs he has two others he works

