

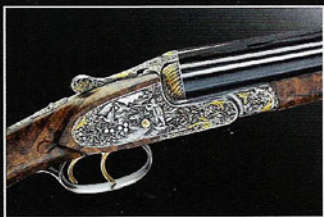
COLLECTION™

A BUYER'S GUIDE FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF ROBB REPORT

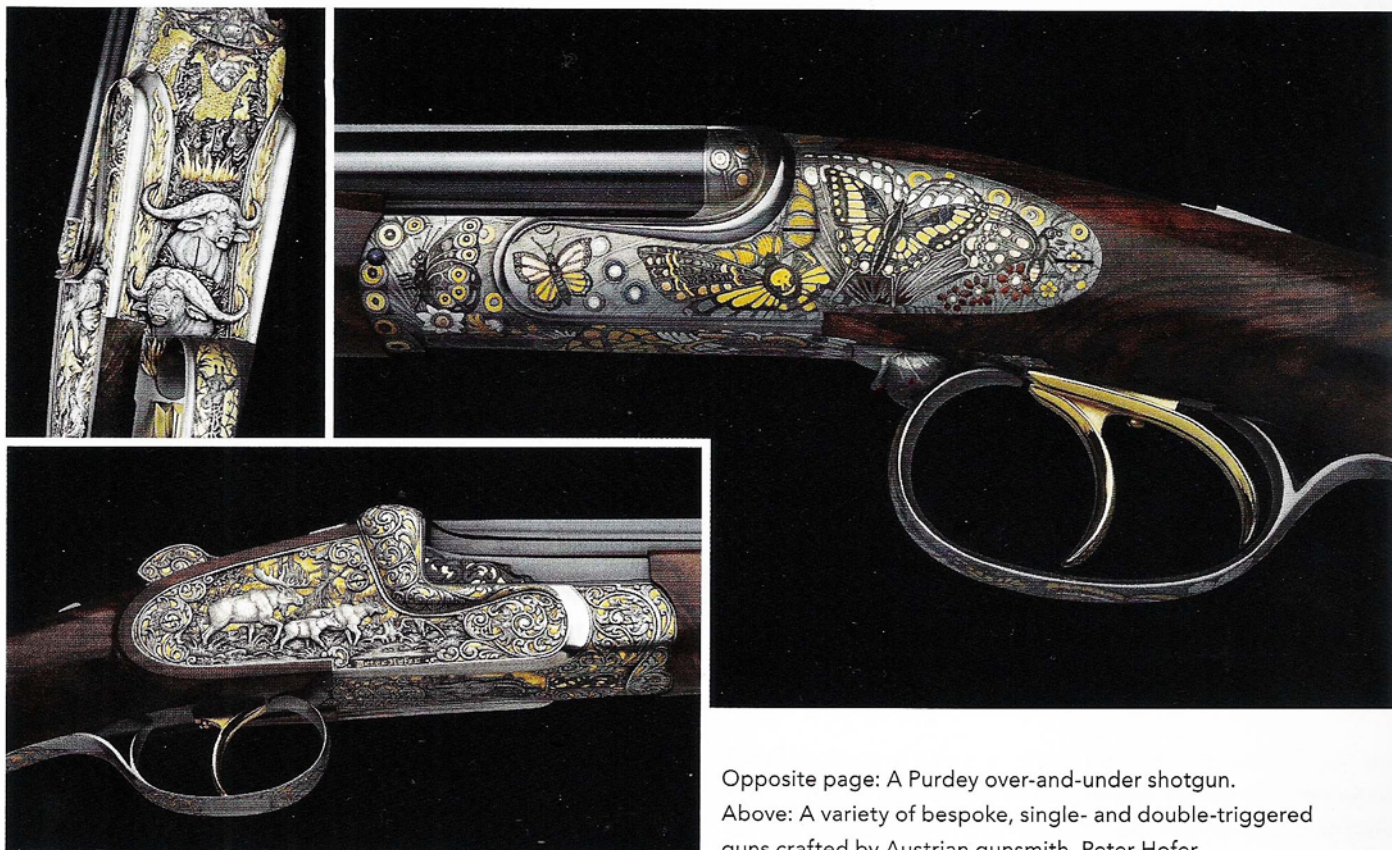
A New Generation of **SUPERCARS**



Luxury Train Adventures › Custom Gun Making › Sports Collectibles



PLUS MADE TO ORDER BOOTS & SHOES › DIGITAL MUSIC DEVICES › WINNING AUCTION BIDS



Opposite page: A Purdey over-and-under shotgun.

Above: A variety of bespoke, single- and double-triggered guns crafted by Austrian gunsmith, Peter Hofer.

THE EARLIEST EXAMPLES of the modern-day firearm were first used as hunting tools in the early 16th century, and within a few decades, the rifled arm was invented. But that invention—and guns in general—were reserved only for a select few. “The first guns were all custom-made,” says Greg Martin, president of Greg Martin Auctions (www.gregmartinauctions.com), an Irvine, Calif.-based appraisal and auction house for antique firearms and other weaponry. “Going back to the 16th century, the greatest engravings and guns were all handmade for royalty.”

While guns certainly are more prevalent today, bespoke models offer the same type of exclusivity once reserved only for the aristocracy. Martin says that even though the finest guns still are made for royalty and other distinguished individuals, royal blood is no longer a prerequisite to acquiring one. The finest gunsmiths in Europe and America constantly are creating bespoke shotguns and rifles for their most discerning clientele, and while such a gun might require a significant investment of both time and money, the finished product brings the romanticism of 16th-century craftsmanship to the 21st century.

“The lure of a custom gun is the magic of having something that you’ve designed and is built for you,” Martin says. “When it comes together, it’s an expression of who you are.”

AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It seems only fitting that Antony Galazan established his firm, **Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing Co.** (www.connecticutshotgun.com), in New Britain, Conn. After all, Galazan has built a reputation for creating bespoke guns that rival the handiwork coming out of Great Britain’s major gun-making firms. “He can do fantastic machine work and handcrafted work that replicates the best bespoke gun makers overseas,” says Martin, who has commissioned numerous pieces from Galazan in recent years. The way Martin sees it, Galazan’s work is no less desirable than that of other gunsmiths, even if he incorporates more machine work into the process than other craftsmen. “The image of the handcrafted gun is a status symbol, but it doesn’t necessarily mean a better product, not in this age of high-tech lasers and all sorts of machinery.”

A significant amount of value in a custom-made gun rests in the artistry and intricacy of its engraving, and, during its



Above: A side-by-side shotgun built by Antony Galazan at Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing Co.

Below: Examples of intricate engraving that Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing Co. can produce.

36 years in business, Connecticut Shotgun has established a solid partnership with many of the world's most notable independent engravers. It's done so through a commitment to provide the smoothest canvas on which an engraver can work. To accomplish that, the company's craftsmen spend hundreds of hours stone polishing all of the metal surfaces of a completed gun. "We spend more time stoning than most other companies spend making the entire gun," says Lou Frutuoso, Connecticut Shotgun's sales manager. "When the engraver sees that, he sees that it's a high-level gun. That's how we've become the best gun maker here in the United States."

The company's reputation and relationships with the industry's top engravers, like Fracassi and Pedretti in Italy, did not materialize overnight. Instead, it was a gradual process that hinged on bespoke gun connoisseurs and serious collectors adding Connecticut Shotgun pieces to their collections. As those collectors sought out the best engravers to finish their guns, those engravers were introduced to Galazan's work. From there, as Frutuoso explains, engravers began to realize that working on a piece made by Connecticut Shotgun

offered the chance to work on a pristine surface. And as Martin acknowledges, it is the company's finer details—like detachable locks with undetectable screw heads—that have attracted collectors to Galazan's work.

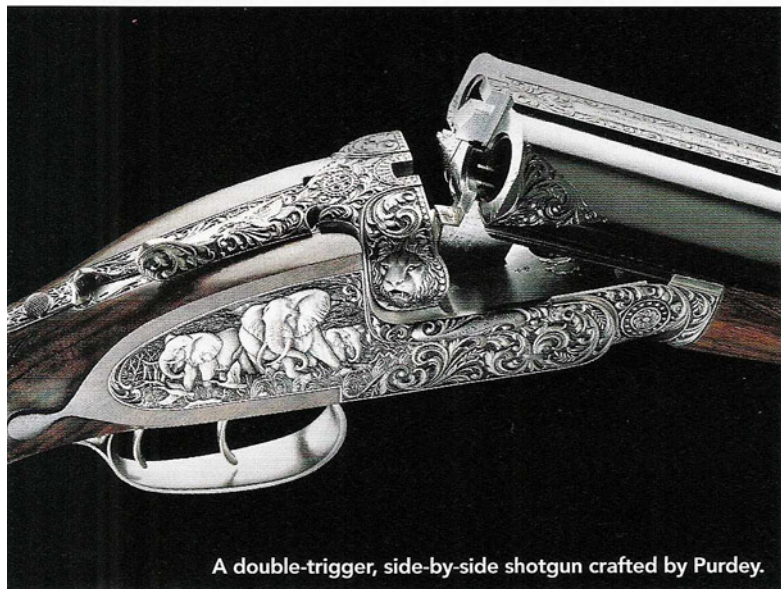
Connecticut Shotgun's best guns start at about \$75,000 and require between one and a half and three years to complete, but some engraving work can add years to the length of time it takes to finish a gun and can easily push the gun's final price into six figures. "The engravers work at their own pace," Frutuoso says. "And if the customer wants

Fracassi or Pedretti [to do the work], he doesn't mind waiting that much time."



OLD WORLD EXCELLENCE

Austrian gunsmith Peter Hofer will be the first to tell you that the evolution of his career and his own business, **Peter Hofer Jagdwaffen** (www.hoferwaffen.com), was as much a reflection of his skills as a craftsman as it was predicated on two principles of good fortune: being in the right place at the right time, and meeting the people who trusted him to make a high-quality gun and helped to guide him along the way. Hofer's decision to become



A double-trigger, side-by-side shotgun crafted by Purdey.

a gunsmith seemed a foregone conclusion. His father was a gun dealer and also offered repair services, so it was natural that Hofer should go to a college for gunsmiths in Ferlach, the southernmost town in Austria, which had a gun-making tradition dating to 1558. Upon graduation, Hofer set out to create a name for himself—a decision that initially disappointed his father, since he had envisioned his son coming back to work in the family business. But it did not take long for his father to see the potential that Hofer possessed; and when Hofer made his first exhibition trip to the United States, his father joined him.

During that trip to the United States, Hofer met Montana gunsmith Jerry Fisher, who imparted a few words of wisdom to the young Austrian—advice that Hofer continues to reflect upon today. “As a gunsmith, you never know everything,” Hofer recalls Fisher telling him. “You’ve never done everything. You always have to continue.”

Hofer’s scope of work certainly reflects that. His catalog depicts more than 40 models, with numerous designs that incorporate hidden barrels or unusual configurations. As a hunter himself, Hofer understands that many customers have unique requests for their own hunting needs, and he prides himself on the ability to craft weapons that offer solutions to those problems. One such gun, a side-by-side shotgun with a rifle barrel hidden between the other two barrels, was a design that he crafted for himself because, while bird hunting, he found that often he needed a rifle to take down a larger animal that unexpectedly appeared.

While Hofer can provide specialized weapons for hunters, not all of his customers hunt. Some simply choose to collect and are attracted to the labor-intensive designs that Hofer creates. With a team of eight craftsmen, Peter Hofer Jagdwaffen builds only five to 15 guns per year, with almost all of the work done by hand. Because of that, the guns range

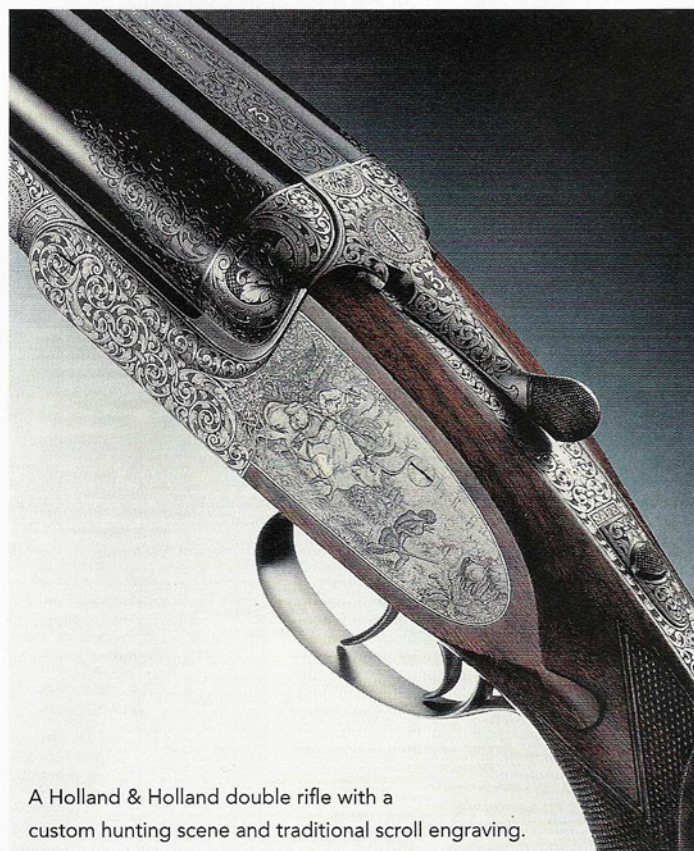
from \$40,000 to several hundred thousand dollars, depending on the special requests and the level of engraving that is requested. Build times start at one and a half years, but the most elaborate gun that Hofer ever built took more than 12 years to complete.

“Very early on, I worked for collectors and connoisseurs of hunting weapons and realized very quickly that they weren’t interested in buying the standard shotguns that they already had in their collections,” Hofer says. “It had to be something unique or special.”

BRITAIN’S BIG THREE

When it comes to bespoke gun collections, you would be hard-pressed to find one that did not include a healthy dose of British craftsmanship. When it comes to British gun making, three firms stand above the rest: Purdey (www.purdey.com), Boss & Co. (www.bossguns.co.uk), and Holland & Holland (www.hollandandholland.com). “The reality of the top-of-the-line gun makers in London, in my estimation, is this,” says Charles Grichar, a serious collector from Houston. “If you want a side-by-side shotgun, you go to Purdey. If you want an over-and-under shotgun, you go to Boss. And Holland & Holland has always been known for their double rifles.”

Grichar owns both Purdeys and Holland & Hollands, but when it comes to choosing a favorite British maker, Hol-



A Holland & Holland double rifle with a custom hunting scene and traditional scroll engraving.