

THE WORLD'S GREATEST GUN BOOK!

# GunDigest<sup>®</sup> 2012



**66<sup>th</sup>**  
**EDITION**

Edited by  
**DAN SHIDELER**

- FEATURE ARTICLES
- NEW PRODUCT REPORTS
- ILLUSTRATED CATALOG

# GunDigest 2012



Edited by  
**DAN SHIDELER**

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# John T. Amber

## LITERARY AWARD

**W**e at *Gun Digest* are delighted to announce that John Malloy has been selected as the recipient of the thirtieth annual John T. Amber Literary Award in recognition of his outstanding essay "The Colt 1911: The First Century," which appeared in the 65th (2011) edition of *Gun Digest*.

Few writers indeed have John's depth of experience with all types of firearms but with semi-automatic pistols in particular. And with 2011 being the centennial of this outstanding design, it was only natural that we should ask John to grace our pages with his perspective on J. M. Browning's most famous creation. In our opinion, John's piece on the 1911 is perhaps the best short introduction to the 1911 pistol ever written.

As its name implies, the John T. Amber Literary Award recognizes not only a writer's knowledge but his ability to express it with style and clarity. In this age of the self-appointed expert, it is the ability to write well that distinguishes the true gunwriter from the mere opinion peddler. Gunwriting has been referred to as a dying art, but it will live as long as there are those such as John Malloy to show how it should be done.

John has always been modest about his writing, although he has attracted quite a following through his writing for *Gun Digest*. I know from personal experience that he has many fans – because I am one of them.

John's shooting career and his involvement with *Gun Digest* coincide almost exactly. As he tells it,

*The post-war years were a wonderful time to be a boy interested in guns and shooting.*

*We shot as Boy Scouts, and shot any WWII war souvenir firearms available. We studied guns of all types. We joined the NRA and read American Rifleman. Soon, we needed more reference material.*

*Gun Digest had appeared once during the war, reappearing afterward as an annual publication. A friend and I pooled the necessary two dollars from our lawn-mowing money to buy the 5th (1951) edition.*

*I was hooked! I began to acquire Gun Digest whenever I could.*

*By the early 1960s, I had become a rifle, pistol and shotgun competitor and an ardent hunter. By the late 1960s, I was an NRA Instructor working with youth programs and had become a gun-rights activist.*

*In hindsight, I waited a long time to begin writing. However by 1980, I had had firearms articles published. Gun Digest accepted an early effort that appeared in the 1984 edition. More followed as the years went on.*

*All writers published in Gun Digest have to be good. Those writers who win the John T. Amber Award are acknowledged to be the very best.*

*I am proud to be included in that group.*

John, on behalf of *Gun Digest* and its readers, we offer a sincere thank-you for all the enjoyment you've brought us through your writing over the years. You're one of a kind.

Dan Shideler  
Editor  
Gun Digest

# John Malloy



# WELCOME

to the 2012 Edition of *Gun Digest!*



Dan Shideler  
1960 - 2011

**A**s excited as we are to bring you the 66th edition of *Gun Digest*, at the same time we are saddened to announce that the force behind the industry's No.1 firearms annual, Dan Shideler, passed away Sunday, April 3, 2011.

Though in poor health, Dan made it his mission to round up and deliver the material for the 2012 edition, guaranteeing that the gun world would once again get to enjoy a fascinating collection of firearms literature.

Dan joined the Company in 2004, splitting his time between our offices here in Iola, Wisconsin,

and his home in Indiana. He quickly gained respect throughout the company and the industry as an expert in firearms history, trends and pricing. Within a few years Dan took over as editor of *Standard Catalog of Firearms*. In 2010 he realized his childhood dream of becoming the editor of *Gun Digest*. It was the pinnacle of Dan's career. In the introduction to the 64th edition, he wrote:

*"I was raised on Gun Digest. Once a year, in the long-gone Indiana of the 1960s and 1970s, my father brought home the new edition, which my brother Dave and I eagerly devoured. I mean we read it literally from cover to cover, absorbing whatever wisdom and insight that could be found in its pages. I still have some of those 40-year-old volumes, nearly all of them showing pencil marks in their catalog sections where we, with boyish enthusiasm, checked guns that we would surely buy someday ..."*

*"And now, forty-some years later, I am the editor of that same book. Karma? The inscrutable workings of Fate? Call it what you will, I will say simply that it is an honor — for me, it's the stuff that dreams are made of."*

Dan never called himself an expert, preferring to be known as "just an old-fashioned gun guy." By the time he came to work at F+W, Dan had compiled a collection of every *Gun Digest* annual, starting with the inaugural 1944 edition. In 2008 Dan hauled his entire collection from his home to our office so it could be digitized and made available to everyone who shared his appreciation for firearms history.

I met Dan in 1997 while interviewing him for the position of "technical copywriter" at a previous company. Five minutes into our discussion, his gift for communication was obvious. He was wildly overqualified, but we hired him on the spot. To no one's surprise, within months Dan was running an entire division of our marketing department.

We soon became fast friends, and Dan made it his mission to further my education on firearms of all types. I confess that Dan and I spent too much time discussing guns and hunting, both on

the job and off, so it seemed only natural that years later we ended up right where we both wanted to be – working for *Gun Digest*. Partnering with Dan to produce some of the greatest titles in the industry has been an honor, and I'm better for having known him.

While I could probably fill a *Gun Digest*-sized volume with fascinating, humorous and near-unbelievable stories about Dan (and perhaps someday I will), it's better for now that I let a few of his colleagues pay their respects ...

**Kevin Michalowski, Senior Editor, *Gun Digest the Magazine***

Dan was particularly fond of obscure pieces. I remember well the day he posed for a photo with an anti-garroting contraption. It was basically a cap-lock blackpowder barrel mounted to a metal plate, worn on your back and fired by pulling a string to drop the hammer. Apparently the idea was to blast anyone who would sneak up behind you intent on doing harm. You wouldn't have gotten me to wear it on a bet, but Dan loaded it up, strapped it on and, on the photographer's cue, yanked the cord. The flame and smoke emanating from his backside gave us a good laugh and unforgettable photo. We all miss Dan's vibrant mirth and sarcastic sense of humor. We also miss being able to pick up the phone and ask him about guns we've never heard of ... And get a history lesson from his seemingly limitless knowledge.

**Corrina Peterson, *Gun Digest Books Editor***

Watching Dan in action was awe-inspiring. He knew everything there was to know about firearms and their history. People call our office all the time with questions about guns they found in their father's attic or behind the bathtub in the cabin they just bought. No matter how sketchy the description, Dan could always ask a few pointed questions and identify the gun. The real kicker is that the information was all in his head – he never had to look up anything.

Dan was one of a kind – a genius, a gentleman and a true friend. It has been a blessing and an honor to know him, and I miss him terribly.

**Patrick Sweeney, *Gun Digest Books Author***

I only knew Dan for a few years, but we quickly became co-conspirators. Together we schemed to find the best possible titles and content, for the benefit of ourselves, the publisher and the readers. He never complained about my complaining, and the only time he was upset was when I mis-remembered the details of a manuscript, and sent in twice as much text as needed. "I was crying as I was cutting stuff" he said.

He always had an idea, a plan, a funny line, and encouragement for the next project. Wise to the world, and the ways of publishing, he didn't let that knowledge discourage him. He always had fun. I'm going to miss him.

**Massad Ayoob, *Gun Digest Books Author***

Dan Shideler was taken from us far too soon. He was a joy to work with, an advocate for the authors he brought into the fold, and likewise to those he inherited from his predecessors. His

deep understanding of the book business would have earned him big bucks as an executive on Publisher's Row in New York City, but he chose instead to apply his talents to his avocation.

Dan understood the "art of the gun" — the form-follows-function sculpture of the things, and the way in which the sight of certain iconic firearms trip the pleasure centers in the enthusiast reader's brain, the way a '57 Chevy does for someone who grew up during the Eisenhower years, the way a distinctive Ansel Adams image does for a connoisseur of fine photography.

With his encyclopedic knowledge of firearms, Dan blended scholarship into art. Working with the author on one end and the art director on the other, he shaped books that will be on the shelves of gun collectors and shooters for many decades to come. The world of the gun is diminished by his loss.

**Phillip Peterson, Editor, *Standard Catalog of Military Firearms***

Dan was the one who suggested I submit columns about collectible guns to *Gun Digest the Magazine*, back when it was called *Gun List* — when that publication expanded to include magazine content. And as his career with Krause expanded he was the one who suggested my name to the pub board to do the 4th edition of *Standard Catalog of Military Firearms*.

As I look at images of Dan that appear throughout the Gun Digest web site, I realize that I sold or traded from Dan every single firearm he is shown with. I happen to still have one firearm that came from Dan: A Winchester M1911 self-loading shotgun known as the infamous "Widowmaker." He gave it to me in February as part of a multi-gun swap. I had intended to sell it but I think I will now keep it.

## Dan Shideler Memorial Fund

Another, lesser-known aspect of Dan's persona was his gift for music, both performing and composing. Dan was active in numerous community bands and composed several marches over the years. With that in mind, his family has established a memorial fund in his name:

**Daniel Shideler Memorial Fund**  
John Philip Sousa Foundation Project  
c/o Indiana Members Credit Union  
7110 West 10th Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46214

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Dan's family, particularly Dave and Karen, for securing and organizing the contents of *Gun Digest 2012*, ensuring that our staff could produce this edition in a timely manner. I'm further indebted to Tom Nelsen and Paul Birling, who worked tirelessly to lay out and design the book you hold here. Without their dedication you might still be waiting to read this edition. And thanks also to Andy Belmas, Jake Edson and Dan Schmidt for pitching in with editing duties. For everyone who had a hand in this edition, you can rest assured that Dan is proud of you!

Cordially,  
Jim Schlender  
Publisher, *GUN DIGEST*



## About the covers



### FRONT COVER:

The **Taurus Circuit Judge** revolver carbine, manufactured for and sold through **Rossi**, builds on the huge success of Taurus's Judge .410/.45 Colt revolver series. Load it up with 2-1/2- or 3-inch .410 shells and/or .45 Colt ammunition in any combination. This lightweight (only 4-1/2 pounds) with 18-1/2-inch barrel is a dandy firearm for home defense, small-game hunting or simply a fun afternoon at the range. Learn more at [www.rossisusa.com](http://www.rossisusa.com).

**Springfield Armory** continues to serve the concealed carry market well with the recent introduction of its **XD(M) 3.8 Compact** in 9mm and .40-caliber. It's built on the same-size frame as the wildly popular Sub-Compact XD and uses the same slide as the original XD(M) 3.8. Shown here is the 9mm with its 13+1 round magazine. Springfield's X-Tension magazine provides 19+1 round capacity. Get the whole story at [www.the-m-factor.com](http://www.the-m-factor.com).

### BACK COVER:

It's important and appropriate, as Model 1911 enthusiasts continue to revel in the joy and wonder of passing the 100th anniversary of this iconic pistol, that we make note of **Kimber's 1911 Custom II Desert Warrior**. Built for use by our U.S. Marines, from the integral tactical rail to the Tactical Wedge tritium night sights to the G-10 grips, it's professional-grade at its finest. See the whole Kimber line at [www.kimberamerica.com](http://www.kimberamerica.com).

**Beretta** shotguns, about which you'll read much inside these pages, has long been a master of combining fit, function and beauty. The aluminum-framed **687 Ultralight Deluxe** 12 gauge is no exception, featuring a highly figured walnut stock and full floral engraving with gold-filled gamebirds, and weighing in at a wispy 6.4 pounds. See more at [www.berettausa.com](http://www.berettausa.com).

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Tom Turpin: Custom and Engraved Guns  
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Gila Hayes: Women's Perspective  
Kevin Muramatsu: Gunsmithing  
Tom Caceci: Airguns  
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# ITALY'S DOUBLE-BARREL BARGAINS

*English shotguns set high standards.  
Italy's best doubles match them – for a lot less!*

BY WAYNE VAN ZWOLL

**S**top reading here if you grew up in tweeds, shooting pairs of guns at driven grouse without once loading the barrels yourself. If there's a Jaguar in your garage and Eton graduates in your family tree, you might in fact find this treatise troubling.

But as a purveyor of truth (well, mostly), I just can't tender Bond Street any more plaudits. Land sakes, it's had plenty. This hallowed center of British gunmaking deserves most of them. It gave us names we've come to associate with the best hinged-breech guns:

Purdey, Greener, Westley-Richards, Holland & Holland and many others. It gave us the Anson & Deeley mechanism, patented in 1875. From this tight quarter of London came the form and function that defined double-barrel rifles and shotguns, fitted to the shooter. Elegance



A lightweight, fast-handling gun is a prerequisite for hunting chukar in Idaho's hill country.



This hunter found his Fausti quick on target and smooth on the follow-through. There was also plenty of evidence of fine balance.



While Fausti Stephano specializes in small-gauge guns, it sells many 12-bores to hunters.



The author readies a Fausti-built Weatherby for another target. These guns endure extended shooting.



From left: Sisters Elena, Giovanna and Barbara Fausti run this Italian shotgun firm.



Most Faustis are small-bores, elegant in profile, and have frame sizes to match the barrels.

of profile and seamless marriage of parts set high bars for the competition. At the same time, legendary demands of each apprentice – hand-filing a two-inch steel cube to a one-inch cube perfect on all 12 edges – must have discouraged many aspiring gunmakers. Those who stuck it out endured long days in cramped, dimly-lit shops. One I visited years ago was little bigger than a storage unit, and hardly any brighter. The name above the door would have made anyone's Top 10 list of British gun firms.

That landmark work would come from such caverns is as remarkable as the sums charged for it. But while the venerable London names remain untarnished by time, they're not unchallenged. Italian

shotguns have even upstaged them. Among competitive clay-bird shooters, Italy dominates. Perazzi guns account for more than half those used in target games there, and almost all the rest are Berettas. The same preferences show up in other Old World countries – and stateside. Hunters who follow suit aren't

chasing a new trend; Brits may have developed the most celebrated game guns, but Italian makers served hunters first. In fact, Beretta is the world's oldest gunmaker. It was turning out barrels as early as 1526, predating by nearly three centuries the first barrel from Remington, America's oldest gunmaker.

### Beretta

Beretta established itself in the Gardone region of northern Italy. "Beretta 1" (the main factory) now straddles the Mella River, which in the early days served as a source of power, people and iron. Most of Beretta's shotguns



A CNC machine operator at the Fausti plant needs digital as well as gunmaking savvy.



Fausti doubles incorporate forged monoblocks that are carefully machined and held to tight tolerances.



A Fausti worker files a grip tang. These Italian guns exhibit fine fit and finish.



Fausti shotguns include side-by-side and over/under models in several frame sizes.

(and rifles and handguns) are built here. Shifts comprising about 900 workers keep this facility buzzing around the clock, except on Sundays. High-grade shotguns are assembled at "Beretta 2," a smaller facility, within walking distance. Most raw materials come from France and Italy, including "Steelium," an alloy formulated by and produced exclusively for Beretta. This steep-sided valley has long attracted skilled tradespeople and artisans, many of whom now provide Beretta with specialized parts, and services like engraving. "We're fortunate to have many able sub-contractors nearby," says the firm's Luisa Achino. "In the valley, there are 160 small shops, 40 within bicycling distance!"

While Beretta manufactures repeating shotguns, it is best known for its exquisite side-by-side and over/under models. The SO series offers several grades of embellishment on a true sidelock action. You can choose straight or pistol grip, fixed or interchangeable "Optimachokes." Heck, you can specify almost anything on the SO, from stock dimensions to engraving. By the way, the "EL" after a model designation stands for "extra lusso" or extra luxury. Double E double L shotguns are super-duper fancy. The sidelock Imperiale Montecarlo is the side-by-side counterpart to the SO series, which includes target, sporting and field sub-models in 12, 20 and 28 gauge. This top-end double shotgun has all the refinements you'd find on an English game gun. Choose Italian or rose-and-scroll engraving. Like the SO over/under shotguns, the Imperiale Montecarlo is part of Beretta's "1526 collection."

Sportsmen with mortgages might instead drift to the 680 series of stack-barrel Berettas: the 682 Gold competition guns (including a Trap bottom single version) with adjustable combs and the 687 and 686 over/unders. All feature a low-profile improved-boxlock mechanism. The 687 Silver Pigeon comes in several grades for upland hunters. The 687 Ultralight gives you 12-bore payloads in a 6.4-pound gun. The 686, in field and sporting form, is now Beretta's entry-level over-under. Want a side-by-side but can't dig the coin for a high-grade sidelock? The 471 Silver Hawk is still available. Beretta's boxlock double, in 12 and 20 gauge, features the single selective trigger, automatic safety and oil-finished checkered walnut that comes standard on all hinged-breech Beretta field guns. The EL version sports case-colored sideplates.



Each Fausti shotgun is hand-assembled and fitted. Manufactured parts show exceptional care.



Hand-rubbed stock finish on figured walnut make Fausti guns as fetching as they are functional.



Colored, lifelike images and delicate scroll engraving mark Fausti guns. This one remains unfinished.

## ITALY'S DOUBLE-BARREL BARGAINS



Select walnut goes on high-grade Fausti shotguns, some of which wear the Weatherby logo.



Headspacing a Fausti double is one of many traditional hand operations at the Gardone factory.



An engraver chases expertly cut scroll on a Fausti receiver. Such artistry is rare and costly.



A worker checks chamber length to ready a gun for mandatory federal (and C.I.P.) inspection.



The Gardone region has long attracted artisans. Here one inlays gold wire on a Fausti shotgun.

Competitive shooters are familiar with the DT10 stable of trap, skeet and sporting over/unders. In 12 gauge only, they have manual safeties and detachable (DT) triggers. But on a recent visit, I direct my time at Beretta to the company's new SV10 Perennia O/U. The SV10 is a boxlock with traditional low-profile breeching, trapezoidal monoblock shoulders and double locking lugs. An oversize hinge pin with a new reinforcing shoulder holds up under extended use. "Extractors run the length of the monoblock, so they operate very smoothly," Luisa points out. "You can choose ejection or extraction." Machined from a steel billet, the nickel-finished receiver features an arrowhead motif in relief.

Like all Beretta shotgun barrels, those



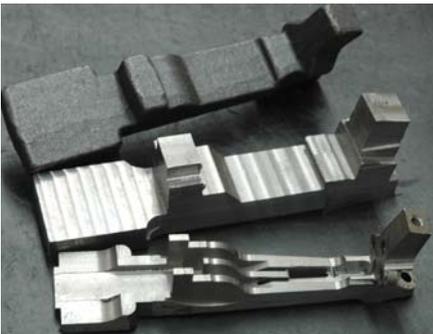
Melding modern machines with Old World craftsmanship, Fausti builds fine but affordable guns.



Deft hands moving too fast to follow, a worker at Fausti Stefano assembles a boxlock shotgun.



Massive lugs and triangular, full-length ejector rods give Fausti guns exceptional longevity.



From forging to finished part, Fausti steel undergoes many inspections. Final fitting is by hand.



Giovanna (left) and Barbara take a break at an Italian skeet field, reserved for company guests.



The Beretta family has run the renowned Italian gun firm, the world's oldest, since 1526.

of the SV10 are cold hammer-forged. A thick steel tube is kneaded into a long, slim barrel around a mandrel, by hammers that deliver terrific pressure, 1,800 strikes per minute. They're joined near the muzzle with silver solder, which also secures the quarter-inch matted rib. Special welds mate the rear of the barrels at the monoblock. Five Optimachoke tubes come with every SV10. They're steel shot-friendly, as is the chrome-lined bore.

The SV10's trigger has titanium components for fast lock speed. The guard, an elegant steel loop, properly matches the curve of the trigger. The break is clean, consistent and manageable. A transverse button in the safety pad selects the barrel of your choice. It is snappy and refuses to hang up in the middle. The automatic safety works well

too – although I prefer a manual switch.

My first shots with the SV10 Perennia come on an Italian skeet field modified to give shooters of modest ability the illusion that they're competent. I'm duly grateful.

Shooting the SV10 proves a pleasure – in no small part because I'm having a good day, and the clay targets are not. Then too, the shotgun babies my clavicle. Its walnut buttstock features an optional "Kick-Off" mechanism, a pair of hydraulic pistons inside that absorb much of the jolt of firing. There's noticeably less muzzle climb too. Because claims of "less recoil" abound, I test the Kick-Off device by following target loads in the 7-pound gun with the potent 2.75- and 3-inch magnums you might choose for a goose hunt or turkeys. No pain! And



Beretta's SV10 Perennia is the company's most recent over/under, a low-profile boxlock.



The internal Kick-Off recoil reduction system incorporates this butt pad on Beretta shotguns.

Kick-Off doesn't compromise the SV10's sleek profile. The black butt assembly blends with the stock (length of pull: 14.7 inches) and doesn't impair handling in the least. In my hand, the SV10 Perennia has perfect balance with Kick-Off installed. Combined with a slim, open grip and slender forend, that balance puts the barrel instantly on the leading edge of the targets.

Among Italian gunmakers, Beretta is a giant firm, building rifles and pistols



Known for high-end guns, Beretta also offers more affordable O/Us, like this SV10 Perennia.



The author cheeks a new SV10. Kick-Off recoil damping tames even stiff goose and turkey loads.

as well as shotguns, marketing both to sportsmen and military and police units worldwide. It has not, however, neglected its roots. The tall stone mansion marking Beretta headquarters has been a landmark for generations. It's also a museum. "We have 3,500 firearms on display," says Luisa, as we pass through a security check and a guard unlocks a heavy door. "The vault below holds another 4,000." We enter a long room with soaring ceilings. Dark wood on floor and walls give it a cavernous feel. The glow of bulbs glitters on the glass fronts of display cases wrapping the room. Glass cases cap a massive island of drawers commanding its middle. Everywhere there are guns – laddered on horizontal wall racks, stacked in vertical columns on the island, arrayed like silverware in the drawers. Pistols, rifles and shotguns.

Matchlocks, wheel-locks and flintlocks. Embellished percussion mechanisms and stamped-metal submachine guns. If there's any more complete firearms history in steel and walnut, I can't imagine where it might be.

Patiently Luisa endures. At last I blurt: "It'll take me another hour."

She must be tired of waiting. "Take your time," she says, and leaves.

I could, in fact, have stayed all afternoon. She retrieves me to visit another room, where we see punt guns Beretta built for 19th-century waterfowlers, and Beretta motorcycles and automobiles.

Few Italian gun firms have such a heritage. Still, you can find Old World quality from smaller and more recent operations. Unlike the American firearms industry, Italy's makers have hewed



Beretta's main factory employs 900 workers on the Mella River in Italy's Gardone district.



A spacious factory with robots and CNC machines produces Beretta guns on ancient grounds.



Beretta is a major employer in a string of villages with more than 160 small-gun shops.

hinged-breech guns have the feel of more expensive doubles. And the repeaters are extraordinarily agile. "High quality and traditional styling, but with modern innovation." Giovanna Fausti sums up what sounds like a winning combination. I've come to see it from the factory floor.

Giovanna is the most visible executive in the company. She guides the Fausti marketing effort in the U.S. Her younger sister, Barbara, takes care of accounts in eastern Europe. Third sister Elena keeps the factory on track at home. "That's right," laughs Barbara. "We control everything. We three sisters." There's a lot of truth in that claim. But it's not the whole story. Giovanna's husband also works in the business. And Barbara's husband came from the accomplished gunmaking house of Rizzini.

"We merged the Rizzini shop with our father's Fausti enterprise in 1991," says Giovanna as she ushers me into her office. "Five years later we dispensed with the Rizzini name because it remained an active brand within that family. We had to ensure that shooters wanting a Fausti came to us."

And they have. Shooters like Ed Weatherby, who has imported Fausti-made shotguns under the Weatherby label. In fact, I got my introduction to Fausti when shooting with Ed. I was mightily impressed with the fit of both over/under and autoloading shotguns. Never particularly skilled with a side-by-side (OK, I'm downright inept), I couldn't assess that shotgun with a sporting clays score. But the gun felt as if it should hit birds. The open Prince-of-Wales grip gives my big paws plenty of sliding room but is slim enough for smaller shooters. Lightweight at just under 7 pounds, it balances dreamily, with the weight between my hands and a slight tilt to the muzzle. It jumps to my cheek, swings smoothly. The Anson & Deely action

closely to tradition in both the design and manufacture of shotguns. While new mechanisms, better steels and more efficient production are in style now, Italian companies take care not to compromise fit and finish, form and balance. The emphasis remains on quality. Production quotas grow with demand; demand depends on the appeal of the product. European shotgunners, it seems to me, spend more for fewer shotguns than do shooters Stateside. Hunting and even clay-bird shooting haven't been as available in the Old World. Use and ownership of sporting guns was established as a prerogative of the landed class, and remains so. The success of Winchester's 1897 pump gun – or, later, the Remington 870 – would have been hard to match in Europe. There, shotguns evolved as art forms, not reapers of meat. To be sure,

faultless function was and is expected. But so is close mating of parts, and a lively feel in the hand. Europeans in the market for new shotguns typically lean to the double gun for those reasons, and as a nod to tradition. Most have the wherewithal to buy them.

### Fausti

Naturally, gunmakers who want to grow look offshore. Beretta has successfully expanded its line to include autoloaders that appeal to American shotgunners, while maintaining its classy side-by-side and over/under lines. Just up the valley from Beretta, another Italian firm has gone international with a similar strategy. Fausti Stefano has been around only since 1948 – it is a young company by local standards. But Fausti



Receivers machined from lightweight alloy give Beretta autoloaders a lively feel and fast swing.



Barrels joined to monoblocks await finishing in a rack at Beretta 1, the main production plant.

features Purdey-style double lockup to ensure that barrels maintain precise alignment over an extended firing life. Like its Fausti over/unders, Weatherby's SBS features chrome-lined barrels and lengthened forcing cones for more uniform patterns, and automatic ejectors for fast reloading (fired shells get kicked out; unfired rounds are lifted for easy extraction). Single triggers on all three of these Faustis are recoil operated. O/U safeties incorporate barrel selectors; on the SBS, the right-hand barrel fires first.

"Take it afield," urged Ed, handing me a 20-bore over/under.

I did, on the bluffs above the Flying B, a bird-hunting mecca on Lawyer Creek south of Kamiah, Idaho. Shooting pheasants in the crop fields lining the canyon would have been easier, but trying to tag chukars in the steeps would test both the Weatherby and my legs. This particular gun was fancier than it needed to be for rough duty. An Athena D'Italia, it wore first-cabin engraving and classy Turkish walnut. You get the same mechanism with less embellishment but still attractive walnut in the Orion D'Italia. It retails for just \$1,699 – not much more than a top-end synthetic-stocked autoloader!

"Point!" Phil Bourjaily was above me, the stylish English pointer between us. She was indeed locked up. "I'll back you," he grinned. Hoo boy.

Walking up on chukars is like stepping onto fresh ice. You hear it crack, see the fault lines, know that if you continue there's only a slim chance you'll reach the far bank with your dignity intact. When chuckars erupt, you have a short second to react. If there's no bird to retrieve, you must then explain to both the dog

(first) and your partner why no one could possibly have made that shot. I'm getting pretty good at this. So when the covey rocketed into the blue Idaho sky, banked sharply like a squadron of Red Arrows and plunged at Mach 1 toward the canyon floor, I expected to miss. Imagine my surprise when a puff of feathers blew from the rearmost bird and it cartwheeled through the October morning to bounce hard on the basalt far below.

"That shotgun must fit you!" Phil was more gracious than he needed to be. I would miss many more birds that day. To limit that tally, I prevailed upon him to join me later in the sorghum. Clobbering ringnecks with the lively 20-gauge felt like test-driving a Maserati in a parking lot.

"We build shotguns carefully, to look good, point quickly and endure a lot of shooting." There's no hedging; I can tell Giovanna believes in Fausti's shotguns. It's equally clear she's fiercely committed to the brand. "We're selling more guns in more places now. We expect good results in America, with our office there now, and aggressive marketing."

Italian shotguns aren't new to U.S. shooters, but they've not been marketed aggressively. "What can you offer that other makers don't?" I ask. Popular Berettas and Browning's Citori came to mind – and less successful hinged-breech imports. Not all Japanese-built guns have the lines or feel that appeal to hunters choosing doubles over repeaters. Maintaining quality in Turkish guns has become problematic. The Spanish AYA is pricey for weekend bird hunters. High-quality American-made doubles – the Fox, the Parker, Winchester's 21 – succumbed long ago to rising production costs. The A-10 American O/U introduced recently by

Connecticut Shotgun seems a bargain. But many hunters who recognize value in a shallow-frame sidelock with hand-detachable plates for less than \$4,000 still blanch. "Surely, Giovanna, you can't avoid that cost-price squeeze!"

She assures me Fausti has met that challenge. A growing customer base confirms it, with orders for both types of doubles. "In Italy, we sell about 60 percent side-by-sides, 40 percent over/unders. But we export many more over/unders: roughly 65 percent." She adds that 20-bore guns account for half of Fausti sales, and that 28-gauge and .410 bores are as popular as the 12. Then Giovanna introduces me to Claudio, who will lead me through the factory.

As we walk across the drive, above a small garden plot that fronts the Mella, Claudio describes the guns and their manufacture. He tells me in near-perfect English what I learned from Barbara earlier: that frames are sized to the chambering, "so you get a gun that's perfectly proportioned." There are five actions for side-by-side Faustis, four for over/unders (the 28 and .410 stack-barrels use the same frame).

The factory comprises two buildings – each bigger than the London shops I remember. They're a curious mixture of CNC machines, traditional floor tooling and craftsmen wielding files and gauges. It is not, I think, a company in transition. Rather, Fausti seems a place where Old World priorities meet the efficiencies of mass production. What's best done by hand here is still done by hand; "but you can make more shotguns by harnessing machines for the drilling and rough contouring." Claudio has worked with both hand tools and sophisticated equipment. He shows me how hinges are

fitted and triggers adjusted, by a fellow whose movements are so quick, the gun seems fluid in his hands. At another bench an artisan with a small file marries an inletted piece of flame-grain Turkish with a tang still in the white. We watch another Fausti worker slip headspace gauges into chambers, and another install choke tubes.

"Here's one reason Fausti guns last a long time." Claudio picks up an Anson & Deely side-by-side action. "The ejectors are in the forend iron. We use ejector stems that are triangular in cross-section. They're superior to round stems, especially in the smaller gauges." He inserts them, back to back, into a machined, box-shaped channel. They move as skates on ice, though this gun is far from finished. "There's no wobble as the gun wears in," says Claudio.

To make their guns distinctive, the Fausti sisters tap the talent of local engravers. In a room lined with high-grade Faustis, I watch one of these engravers. Light blows from a small hammer chase a chisel deftly over a game scene stunning in its realism. There's little room for error. And he makes none. Like many

Gardone engravers, he is well past his 50th birthday. He cannot speak English, and my Italian is no better than my Mandarin. But he sees I appreciate his work, and he smiles.

"We'll go shoot this evening." Fabio, Barbara's husband, is at my shoulder. It is late afternoon now. I'm driven to my hotel, a modest but comfortable old building shadowing a quiet side-street. Fabio and Claudio pick me up at six. We drive north toward the Dolomites, downshifting on a steep climb up a long, serpentine canyon that joins the Mella. The shooting facility perches on a bench. It is well equipped, with several clay-target ranges that march in steps toward ridgetop. We trudge up the steep grade. All shooting lines are covered; we choose one with a half-dozen stations. Fabio unzips the two cases we've carried up. The guns are both exquisite. They're also .410s. I grimace.

"Pull!" My companion goes first. One of the targets, we're convinced, cannot be reached by our smallbore gun. Even shooters with 12s have trouble. "That's OK," grins Fabio after his third miss. "If you get all the close ones, you'll soon

have an audience."

I don't, of course. But the Fausti over/under is a delight – unbelievably quick. I discover it wants my help on follow-through, and at last a couple of birds come apart. Duly humbled by the score, I watch other shooters arrive. Men and women, young and old, they slip well-made, well-used Italian guns from their sleeves. No novices, these. I can tell by their stance and swing. They laugh and joke until they step to a station. Then, leaning into the gun with practiced ease, they call for a bird and fire fast. They're smart to shoot quickly; these disks rocket away as if launched to destroy enemy clays.

"Just recreational shooters," smiles Claudio. No wonder the Italians fare so well in international shotgun competition! We three end the day over sandwiches, chips and wine at the gun club café.

If you've read this far, you're not a Bond Street blue-blood. Surely, if you want value and grace in a shotgun, the smoothbores of Fausti and Beretta warrant a look ... after the prices on Bond Street send you south.



The Beretta mansion has been a landmark in the Gardone region for generations. It includes a museum inside.