

THE STRAIGHT SHOT

The Beauty of Guns – Part 1 by Jess Hardin

Questioned about one's love for our guns, it's seldom we see beauty as a primary and elemental reason. When hard pressed we're more likely to resort to quoting the 2nd Amendment of the Constitution. We may point out which of our arms are heirlooms, seeking an exemption from the arbitrators of political correctness. Or that they are merely "props" for our reliving of the wondrous Wild West. The majority can be explained away as purely utilitarian devices, providing a portion of the family's sustenance in the great tradition of the hunt, or as the bottom line in personal defense for these troubling times. We might suggest that they're primarily an investment, so long as we haven't been seen pulling them one at a time from a fireproof safe, looking on each with an affection others might reserve for a sweetheart or a sunset.

While no one questions the motives or morality of someone spending hours of their life scrutinizing every painting in a gallery, the unarmed public considers it perverse when we give our firearms an equal amount of attention. We may be extra careful not to let them catch our eyes lingering over a long held

treasure or recent addition. We hope they don't see our fingers tracing the lines where figured wood meets deeply blued steel—like a skirt hem against a tanned calf, like the stark border where the fertile land presses against a brilliant dawn sky. We may be uncomfortable explaining how we can read the stories of a rifle's life in the way the finish has worn from its sides, find the spirit of a windswept tree in the figure and grain of its walnut stock, or are enticed into a world of adventure by the scene of hunters and stags in a meticulously engraved panel.

The art of firearms, like the art of life, is not only something we see—but something we feel... with our hands, and our hearts. In practice, and in the field. Most guns shoot, but not all have that special "feel" we know and love. Our favorites are inevitably vested with an ineffable quality, producing a certain provocation of the senses, invoking recollections of other years or even other ages. I hesitate to refer to this immeasurable component as "class," since it's not always determined by either price or pedigree, and is occasionally found in undervalued arms. Nor is it strictly a matter of embellishment. While well execut-

ed engraving is a wonder to behold, one can also ruin the simple lines of a gun with gee-gaws and gratuitous inlays, and there are some strikingly plain pieces of the highest aesthetic order.

While appearance is one major aspect, others include the degree of precision in the machining and the subtleties of their engineering. It's to be found in the sure movements of a classic bolt action, in the sound of a spinning cylinder and it's slow return to battery, the balance of a Colt single-action, and the heft and fit of a double by the likes of a Parker, Fox or Smith. While we men and women are thinkers, the quality I'm attempting to describe is more readily ascertained through feeling.

Few will ever agree as to which guns embody that special feel, history, materials, design, appearance or balance. In the end what's important isn't which arms we do or don't find beautiful... but rather, that beauty — like history — still matters.

(Excerpted from Jess' book *Old Guns & Whispering Ghosts*, signed copies soon to be available again from www.oldgunsbook.com)



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Admission is free and refreshments will be available.

For more information, call 756-4466

LET'S GET PICKLED!

The Coos County OSU Extension Service Family Food Educator (FFE) volunteers will be conducting a community workshop on Saturday, August 29th. Come get PICKLED at our preservation class on making pickles, sauerkraut and flavored vinegars. This workshop will be held in the Coos County Extension office in Myrtle Point from 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Bring a small, decorative jar for vinegar so you can take home a sample.

Pre-registration is encouraged and class size is limited. A \$7 fee is collected to pay for printed materials and class supplies. For more information on the dates and times of our October workshops on Tuna Canning and Gifts From the Kitchen, please contact the Coos County OSU Extension Office, 541-572-5263 or 1-800-730-4978.

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