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Beyond belief
The anti-tobacco movement’s propaganda knows no bounds, as seen with its latest fabrication—thirdhand smoke.

Equilibrium
While fewer people now smoke pipes, they demand better quality craftsmanship and design, inspiring pipemakers to seek balance between shape and grain.

Angelic beauty
Attaining perfection is a rare event, but pipemaker Giancarlo Guidi has achieved it three times, creating a special stamp to mark each occasion.

A fun-omenal fellowship
The Seattle Pipe Club offers a model on how informative, and fun, a pipe club can be.

Puffing systematically
Throughout history pipemakers have developed a number of system pipes in the quest to achieve the perfect smoke.

From diamonds to briar
Learning to craft with his hands by cutting diamonds, French pipemaker Pascal Piazzolla has now dedicated himself to making and repairing briar pipes.

Renaissance man
Whether it’s making homemade sausage, distilling his own grappa, creating a painting or carving a briar masterpiece, Luigi Viprati is an all-around master.

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A Brial system pipe from the collection of William Serad (photo by Chuck Stanion)
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- Pipes & Tobaccos Magazine,
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**Instantaneous delivery**

With this issue, *P&T* enters the 21st century. Never mind that it’s 2009 and most of the world entered the century nine years ago—we’re here now and proud of it. How did we achieve this, you ask? We went out and bought ourselves something called “technology.”

Technology is, according to *Webster’s*, “an indefinable system whereby seemingly impossible things happen without anyone really knowing how. Often indistinguishable from witchcraft, politics or Donald Trump’s hair.”

We found that to be a pretty irresistible package, so some of the boys here at *P&T* and I ventured out to the flea market and went directly to the largest used technology booth we could find, run by a guy named Walt who smoked a pipe that clearly had not been reamed or cleaned since the Spanish-American War. He puffed what smelled like a mixture of cellophane and goat excrement as he explained the different options his wares provided.

“This here,” he said with his hand on a complicated apparatus about the size of a water cooler, “is a fax machine. It can take a letter you’ve wrote and send it millions of miles to anybody you want in just a few seconds, where it reappears.”

“Whoa,” said one of our editors. “Just like Star Trek.”

“Yes,” said Walt. “Three hunnert bucks.”

So we bought it. We found out that it couldn’t send *P&T* magazine to our subscribers though, so we took it back.

“I can’t give you a refund on account of I spent the money on a new glass eye for my cat,” said Walt, “but you can have a credit. Sounds like what you want is this little baby.” He gestured toward a black box with switches and lights and a Van de Graff generator humming on the top of it next to two antennas with an electrical arc jumping between them.

“Whoa,” said one of our editors. “Just like Frankenstein.”

“Yes,” said Walt. “Three hunnert bucks.”

So we took it. Turned out it wouldn’t do anything except ionize the air and make your hair stand on end, though. While very cool, it is impractical for magazine distribution. Two more trips to Walt’s Emporium rendered a trunk full of bargain cell phones the size of toasters (watch for official *P&T* cell phones in our merchandise ads) but nothing else of value, so we hired a company to install the hardware we needed.

We keep our new technology on a shelf in our electrical closet, and it’s very nice. It is motionless and emits a low thrumming sound and an odor similar to burning ’possum hair, much like my uncle Carl. I sometimes go into this closet just to admire it and congratulate myself on being part of such a forward-moving publication. Then I go back to my typewriter and get back to work.

What, you may wonder, does this technology do? It sends *P&T* magazine electronically to a company that digitizes it so you can read the magazine online in exactly the same format as the printed version. You can turn pages, zoom in and out, click the contents to jump to specific articles, search for keywords, click live links to Web sites and e-mails and basically have a lot of fun.

This issue is online now at our Web site, [www.pt-magazine.com](http://www.pt-magazine.com). Check it out. We intend to maintain the latest two years of the magazine online for subscribers. And those hard-to-find sold-out back issues will also be available. International subscribers, who currently pay a gruesome cost for this magazine, will be able to subscribe to just the digital format at about half the current price.

The best part is the speed. Readers report waiting anywhere from three days to six weeks for their copy to arrive in the mail. Now you can read it online immediately while waiting for your print version. You won’t even have to open your magazine, keeping it in pristine condition for posterity or attic insulation.

For those without computers (I fully sympathize with your decision to omit computers from your life), *P&T* will continue to print and mail just as before. But if you change your mind, I know a guy named Walt who can help you out.
We are proud to present the artistic masterpieces of Elio & Guido Rinaldo. Since 1987, the Rinaldo brothers have been crafting fine handmade pipes with incredible smoking qualities, expert craftsmanship, exquisite designs and exceptional silver work. Experience the joy of a Rinaldo Pipe.

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Pipe smokers’ haven
I just returned from Christmas vacation in the north woods of Wisconsin, where I visited my sister and her family. Our schedule included heavy doses of eating, cross-country skiing and hiking. We spent many evenings dining at rustic, knotty-pine bars and restaurants that were decorated with deer heads, bear skins, stuffed lynx and the ubiquitous trophy walleye.

I brought along a half-dozen of my favorite pipes (Charatan, Castello, Chacom, Sasieni, Stanwell and Upshall) to smoke during my favorite time of day—after dinner. So, without realizing it, I began taking my own unscientific survey of bars that allowed pipe smoking. I soon discovered that if cigarettes were allowed, which was in about 95 percent of the bars, pipes could also be smoked. I always asked the bartender, who was usually the owner as well, if it would be OK to smoke my pipe and they always told me it wouldn’t be a problem. Patrons in several bars mentioned to me how much they enjoyed the smell of my tobacco, Dunhill 965, and that it reminded them of so and so. In only one establishment did the menu specifically state, “Cigarette smoking allowed only at the bar. No cigar or pipe smoking allowed in the entire establishment.” Unfortunately, this was the restaurant owned by our family!

While I ran into no other pipe smokers during my entire vacation, I’m happy to report that pipe smoking is very welcome in the north woods.  

Mark Barsness  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Briar beginnings
The continuing discussion about where the first briar pipes were made has pretty much ended with the general acceptance that this cottage industry began in the small town of Saint-Claude, France. As to exactly when, this issue is still being debated here and there, although I feel comfortable saying that the very first briars from any Saint-Claude wood turner’s bench were finished no earlier than 1855. This leads to a follow-on question: How soon thereafter...
were briars produced in England? Here, also, speculation abounds. According to J.W. Cole (The GBD St Claude Story [1976]), “… racine de bruyère (erica arborea), which was already being utilized with success in St. Claude in the Jura, and by 1855 Briar GBD pipes were sold alongside the GBD meerschaum.” Many of these very pipes may have been destined for the English market, but they were produced in GBD facilities in either Saint-Claude or Paris, France.

In 1858, in P.L. Simmonds’ A Dictionary of Trade Products, Commercial, Manufacturing, and Technical Terms (London), “Tobacco Pipe-Maker” is defined as “a maker of clay or meerschaum pipes for smokers.” Hence, one can conclude that at least as of that date, either England had too few or no briar pipe production facilities to be included in this definition or, per chance, the compiler of this dictionary did not keep up with the times. I tend to accept the former viewpoint. Trade communications and transportation between the two countries were relatively rudimentary in those days, but it seems logical—and not based just on Simmonds’ definition—that a fledgling briar pipe industry physically situated in England probably began sometime around 1860 or later.

Let the reader draw his own conclusion! Is there evidence to the contrary? If so, let the debate begin.

Ben Rapaport
Cyberspace

An offer from The Pipe Collector

The Pipe Collector (TPC), the professionally printed, bimonthly newsletter of the North American Society of Pipe Collectors, has just entered its 17th year of publication with a 40-page issue that I think may be one of the best in our history. It contains a funny and illuminating dialogue between Rich Esserman and Marty Pulvers and a wonderful short piece by Marc Dion, plus much, much more.

TPC and P&T are the only avenues open to those of the pipe community who want to read well-written and edited articles and stories about pipes, tobacco and related subjects the old-fashioned way—sitting at their desks or in their easy chairs with the actual copy in their hands and a pipe within easy reach. The two publications are quite different in style and appearance (TPC has many fewer ads and no color pictures, for one thing), but, as TPC’s editor, I really think both are indispensable to the pipe community.

NASPC ended 2008 with 900-plus members, P&T with far more subscribers. I believe that many of those subscribers, if not all, would enjoy TPC if they just knew about it or could see an example of what we produce. And the price is right: $15 a year for U.S. members, $18 for Canadian, and $30 for overseas. We operate on a tight budget, but I would like to mail a back copy of TPC to anyone who requests one by e-mailing me at bill@naspc.org or writing me at NASPC, P.O. Box 9642, Columbus OH 43209.

However, for those of you I’ve convinced that you need to join us right now, send your check to the P.O. box or make your PayPal payment using bill@naspc.org. (U.S. and Canadian PayPal payers must add $1 to their payment, while overseas payers must add $2—PayPal charges fees, and that tight budget is real.) Join anytime during the year, and you will receive all six issues.

Bill Unger
Editor, The Pipe Collector

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Beyond belief: A scare is born

For many years, the concept of “thirdhand smoke” was reserved for political satirists and stand-up comedians. In January 2009, however, the laughter stopped.

Thirdhand smoke is, according to The New York Times:

“... the invisible yet toxic brew of gases and particles clinging to smokers’ hair and clothing, not to mention cushions and carpeting, that lingers long after second-hand smoke has cleared from a room. The residue includes heavy metals, carcinogens and even radioactive materials that young children can get on their hands and ingest, especially if they’re crawling or playing on the floor.”

Winickoff has had a high profile since he co-authored a paper in the journal Pediatrics that brought thirdhand smoke to the attention of the mainstream media. But the real inspiration behind the new scare is his colleague, professor Georg Matt.

Matt, a psychology lecturer at San Diego University, has been on the trail of thirdhand smoke for five years. His first foray into this virgin territory came in 2004 when he published “Households contaminated by environmental tobacco smoke: sources of infant exposures” in the Tobacco Control journal. That study failed to generate any press interest and thirdhand smoke remained a joke until the summer of 2006, when Matt made another effort to promote it. Perhaps spotting a silly season story in the making, the thirdhand smoke theory was reported in Britain with sensational headlines such as “Hugging can expose infants to smoking health risk” (The Scotsman) and “Even smoking outside can harm your baby” (The Daily Mail).

In the 2004 study, Matt’s team found nicotine levels to be twice as high in the bedrooms of children whose parents claimed not to smoke outdoors than in the bedrooms of nonsmokers’ offspring. The implication was that even if a mother smoked at the bottom of her garden, she was bringing in dangerous toxins that would double her child’s risk of developing smoking-related diseases. And yet the doses in either case remained exceptionally small. The bedrooms of nonsmokers had nicotine concentrations of 0.09 mcg/m3, whilst the children of smokers had con-
centrations of 0.22 mcg/m³.

To provide some perspective, the legal limit of workplace exposure in the U.S. is 500 mcg/m³, some 2,500 times more than was found in the smokers’ households. The reality was that nicotine levels in the bedrooms of a completely nonsmoking family’s house are effectively zero and a doubling or trebling makes no real difference. It would take a paranoid hypochondriac to believe that such submicroscopic traces pose a threat to health.

In truth, Matt’s “discovery” owed more to the ability of expensive scientific apparatus to detect particles even when they can only be counted in parts per trillion. The fact that he was able to detect nicotine in an astonishing 97 percent of nonsmoking households bore testament to the wonders of modern technology, but was it conceivable that these trace levels represented risk?

According to the notorious surgeon general’s report of 2006, there was indeed reason to believe that such minute quantities could be life threatening. In the course of the press conference staged to publicize the report, Surgeon General Richard Carmona famously announced: “There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.”

Lest anyone misunderstand what he was getting at, he added: “Stay away from smokers.”

The idea that there was no safe level of secondhand smoke turned the laws of science on their head. The first rule of toxicology is that the dose makes the poison. All substances are toxic at high-enough levels just as they are harmless, or even beneficial, at lower levels.

Most of us understand that coffee contains benzene, water contains arsenic and that televisions pump out radiation, but we don’t let it worry us since the levels of these highly carcinogenic toxins are too low to pose a threat to our health. Apparently only one substance disobeys this law of toxicology: secondhand smoke.

In his eagerness to wage war on cigarettes—a product that Carmona said he would like to see made illegal—the surgeon general’s office had laid the foundations for a retreat into anti-science and the door was opened to thirdhand smoke.

It is apt, then, that the new thirdhand smoke “study” begins by citing the now-retired surgeon general: “The 2006 Surgeon General’s report on involuntary smoking concluded that more than 126 million people are exposed to secondhand smoke (SHS), 50,000 deaths per year are caused by SHS, and there is no ‘safe’ level of exposure.”

Setting the scene, the authors then provide a list of substances found in tobacco smoke accompanied by nasty-sounding products that also contain them.

“According to the National Toxicology Program, these 250 poisonous gases, chemicals, and metals include hydrogen cyanide (used in chemical weapons), carbon monoxide (found in car exhaust), butane (used in lighter fluid), ammonia (used in household cleaners), toluene (found in paint thinners), arsenic (used in pesticides), lead (formerly found in paint), chro-
mum (used to make steel), cadmium (used to make batteries), and polonium-210 (highly radioactive carcinogen)."

There was a time when serious scientific journals were able to list chemicals without having to explain them to their readers. That time, it seems, has now passed. Winickoff upped the baby-talk when talking to Scientific American. Asked the question: "What do you consider the most dangerous compound in cigarette smoke?" he replied: "I would say cyanide, which is used in chemical weapons. It actually interferes with the release of oxygen to tissues. It competitively binds to hemoglobin. Basically people with cyanide poison turn blue ... [And] arsenic, that is a poison used to kill mammals. We [used to] use it to kill rats. And there it is in cigarette smoke."

None of the six authors are chemists or toxicologists. Three of them are social psychologists, one has a master's degree in English and the other two are pediatricians with a background in tobacco control. Remarkably, for a study so overburdened with authors, there is no new research in Matt's paper. Everything within its six pages is based upon a 2005 telephone survey that is conducted every year by the Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Control, with one question taking center stage:

"One question was asked to assess health belief about third-hand smoke. Respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the following statement: ‘Breathing air in a room today where people smoked yesterday can harm the health of infants and children.’ Respondents who strongly agreed and agreed with this statement were categorized as holding the belief that thirdhand smoke harms the health of children."

The findings of the study/survey, as reported by the press, were that:

"His team surveyed more than 1,500 households, asking smokers and non-smokers about their attitudes. They found that while 95 percent of non-smokers and 85 percent of smokers agreed that direct inhalation of second-hand smoke was harmful to children, just 65 percent of non-smokers, and 43 percent of smokers believed the same for ‘third-hand’ smoke."

As this quote from the BBC indicates, the media reacted with shock that "just 65 percent" of the public knew that thirdhand smoke was harmful. But why should anyone believe in a concept that had only just been invented? The BBC itself had never before mentioned it, nor had most other news organizations.

There was no evidence at all that tobacco particles lodged into carpets and clothing posed a threat to health, and Matt’s study neither provided any nor cited any.

The nearest thing to evidence against thirdhand smoke had been a solitary study that claimed that cognitive skills were poorer amongst children whose parents smoked outdoors than amongst the children of nonsmokers. The study was highly questionable since it assumed that thirdhand smoke ‘exposure’ accounted for the difference between the children’s abilities, when social and genetic factors were more likely to have been at work. Indeed, there is a small but growing body of evidence that suggested that nicotine improves cognitive function.

Either way, no further study has appeared to support it and, more to the point, no study has ever shown thirdhand smoke to be deleterious to physical health. Oddly, the more obvious “smoking related” diseases of the heart and lungs have been wholly ignored by thirdhand smoke researchers.

Throughout the paper, the authors appear indifferent to the fact that no evidence exists to support their theory. As the title of the study indicates, they are more interested in whether the belief in thirdhand smoke will encourage home smoking bans.

“We hypothesized that belief about the harmful health effects of thirdhand smoke would be associated with higher rates of strict no-smoking policies within the home.”

Since the ends justify the means in the world of tobacco control, thirdhand smoke is useful if it helps to modify the public’s behavior and of little interest if it doesn’t. Whether the theory is actually valid or not is of secondary importance. Like a religion, thirdhand smoke is about faith, not science, for there is no science to mention. The study itself is called “Beliefs About the Health Effects of ‘Thirdhand’ Smoke and Home Smoking Bans” and it is around beliefs that the study revolves.

Despite a conspicuous lack of hard, or even soft, evidence, a host of news organizations including ABC, The Telegraph, The New York Times, NBC, the BBC, The Toronto Star and The Chicago Tribune rushed to report the shocking news that one-third of the population were unaware of the perils of thirdhand smoke. Although most journalists had never heard of the term until they were sent the press release, they feigned surprise at the appalling statistics that “only 65 percent” of the public were mindful of thirdhand smoke. No one wanted to admit that they, too, had never heard of the perils of thirdhand smoke.

It was a masterstroke by Matt and his team. Their greatest weakness was that thirdhand smoke was almost universally unrecognized even as a concept. Worse still, it had not one shred of evidence to support it. Ingeniously, they turned these weaknesses into their strengths. Like the tailors who made the emperor’s new clothes, the authors dared the media to admit that they were ignorant of thirdhand smoke and, winning the bluff, blasted the idea into the public consciousness.

This study breaks new ground by using the opinions and beliefs of random members of the public as a substitute for scientific evidence. In recent years, the anti-smoking movement has been accused of conducting science by press release,
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bypassing the scientific process to influence public opinion. The movement’s first study of 2009 displays a bold new tactic: using public opinion to bypass science.

Is thirdhand smoke a plausible health threat?

As has been made clear, there is no biological, toxicological or epidemiological evidence to suggest that thirdhand smoke poses any threat to health. The closest thing we have to a scientific study on the subject appeared in 2004 and was also co-authored by Matt.

In it, levels of nicotine found in the smokers’ living rooms were reported to be 0.32 mcg/m³ compared to 0.10 mcg/m³ in the non-smokers. Levels of cotinine (a biomarker for tobacco smoke—and an anagram of nicotine) were found to be between 0.33 ng/ml and 0.43 ng/ml in the children of nonsmokers.

Amongst the children of smokers who did not smoke in the home, cotinine levels fell between 2.47 ng/ml and 3.49 ng/ml. According to Matt, this seven-fold increase is proof of “persistently high levels of tobacco toxins” in the homes of smokers who do not smoke in the house. Although it is quite possible that this is the result of undeclared smoking in the home by some subjects, Matt believes that it is the result of “off-gassing” from tobacco smoke that has been absorbed into the hair and clothes of smokers. He explicitly refers to these trace quantities as environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) i.e., secondhand smoke.

“ETS contamination and ETS exposure were 5-7 times higher in households of smokers trying to protect their infants by smoking outdoors than in households of non-smokers.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to document that surfaces, dust, and air are contaminated in homes of smokers with infants. Infants of smokers are at risk of ETS exposure in their homes through dust, surfaces, and air.”

Sheer speculation of course, but the fact that nicotine was detected in no fewer than 97 percent of the nonsmoking households raises an interesting question. In the study, nicotine is used as a marker for secondhand smoke. The fact that the homes of smokers had two or three times the level of nicotine found in the nonsmoking households (even when the smoking took place outside) is considered significant by the authors. But the fact remains that even homes lived in entirely by nonsmokers have measurable levels of nicotine and, by Matt’s logic, of ETS. Are they also at risk? Is everyone at risk?

Presumably no anti-smoking advocate would claim that a home inhabited by nonsmokers poses a risk to health from firsthand, secondhand or thirdhand smoke. To argue otherwise would be to suggest that risk is universal and inescapable. And yet, 97 percent of nonsmoking homes have measurable quantities of nicotine, and the children of nonsmokers have measurable quantities of cotinine. If a nicotine concentration of 0.32 mcg/m³ (i.e., a third of a millionth of a gram per cubic meter) suggests the presence of “tobacco toxins,” then why should a concentration of 0.10 mcg/m³ be considered safe?

If, as the surgeon general famously insisted, there is “no safe level of exposure” and if fractions of a microgram represent risk, then even nonsmoking households contain a dangerous level of secondhand smoke. It is a ridiculous notion, but then we are in the realms of the ridiculous.

The common-sense answer is that the levels are tiny in the nonsmoking households but then they are tiny in the smoking households as well. The cotinine levels of 2 to 3 ng/ml found in the urine of the children of the smokers are extremely low compared to the levels of 300 to 1,500 ng/ml that are typical of smokers. Similarly, while the nicotine level reported in the smokers’ homes (0.32 mcg/m³) is slightly higher than that found in the nonsmoking homes (0.10 mcg/m³), both are dwarfed by the nicotine levels found in smoky bars (35.5 mcg/m³) and even smoke-free bars (5.95 mcg/m³). According to tobacco control advocates, there is no significant risk for lung cancer for air nicotine levels below 6.95 mcg/m³ i.e., 21 times higher than that reported in Matt’s 2004 paper.

With levels this low, deeming one safe and one unsafe becomes a matter of faith rather than science, and it is fitting that the 2009 paper is titled “Beliefs About the Health Effects of ‘Thirdhand’ Smoke and Home Smoking Bans.”

How could 65 percent of the respondents be aware of thirdhand smoke?

The media attention afforded Matt’s 2009 paper implies that groundbreaking research has been carried out. In fact, the study provides just one rather mundane finding: People who believe that thirdhand smoke is dangerous are more likely to forbid smoking in their homes.

This is hardly earth-shattering news. What is more of a shock is that two-thirds of those surveyed claimed to be concerned about thirdhand smoke. This is odd because, apart from a handful of articles that appeared in the summer of 2006, thirdhand smoke is a new concept to nearly everybody. How, then, were so many people able to be concerned about it?

The answer lies in the question asked in the survey. Thirdhand smoke is not mentioned by name and the concept was not explained to those surveyed. Instead, they were asked the following question: “Breathing air in a room today where people smoked yesterday can harm the health of infants and children.” Those who agreed with this statement were, as the authors explained, “categorized as holding the belief that thirdhand smoke harms the health of children.”

This is rather a leap. The question itself is very vague. It conjures up the image of a smoky room left overnight. The fact that it refers to “people” (plural) rather than one smoker gives the impression that many cigarettes had been smoked.
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AND MORE
the night before. Considering that the vast majority of respondents agreed that secondhand smoke was hazardous, it is only to be expected that a large number of them would err on the side of caution when dealing with a room in which a number of smokers had congregated the previous evening, particularly when “infants and children” are involved. But this room would be better described as having lingering secondhand smoke rather than “thirdhand smoke.”

No mention is made of the more fanciful notion of “tobacco toxins” being carried in from outdoors on smokers’ clothes, hair and fingernails, even though it was this element that captured the attention of the press when the study was reported. Nor were those surveyed informed that the concept they were invited to embrace included a room that had been smoked in “days, weeks and months earlier.”

The respondents were not told that the idea of “tobacco toxins” being harmful at ultra-low levels was no more than a “possibility” (in the words of the final study), nor that the researchers themselves referred to thirdhand smoke only as a “concept.” If they had been told that the researchers believed that smokers spread disease “through contaminated dust and surfaces, including the frame of an infant’s bed and a smoker’s finger,” it is fair to guess that far fewer of them would have endorsed the theory.

This article is an excerpt from a book in progress, Velvet Glove, Iron Fist: A History of Anti-Smoking, by Christopher J. Snowdon. Other chapters may be read on Snowdon’s website, www.velvetgloveironfist.com.

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9 www.bvsde.paho.org/bvsacd/cd51/following.pdf
10 Ibid.
Life was far simpler in the old days, when almost all pipes were made in a classical style by English or English-influenced pipemakers and pipes were designed solely to be smoking instruments. Even the early Danish artisans like Sixten Ivarsson (actually Swedish born) saw their primary task as the creation of effective instruments to smoke tobacco. Indeed the original freehand designs were in large part modifications to traditional shapes and were created to overcome defects in the grain, thereby salvaging pipes that, in strict classical terms, would have had to be discarded. The use of bamboo and horn was introduced to compensate for briar flaws or inadequate shanks. Above all pipes were designed to produce a good smoke, and shape was always subordinate to the “physics” of smoking design. If straight-grain pipes were produced in the process, this was a bonus.

Prices too followed a simple set of rules. Although Dunhill and others charged more for their larger pipes, the holy grail of all pipemakers was to produce a perfect straight-grain pipe with tight, uniform grain covering the entire bowl because these pipes sold for very high prices. This was almost never achieved, and pipes were priced according to how closely they approximated the ideal. Pipes with cross grain or bird’s-eye grain, however beautiful, were priced no higher than ordinary grained pipes.

Most pipes even at the highest quality level were made from ebauchon blocks cut from the briar burl, which maximized the number of individual blocks and thereby increased the return to the briar manufacturers. One result of this cutting process was that grain patterns were randomized, making a uniform straight-grain pattern very rare in a single pipe.

Prior to the emergence of today’s “super” pipe craftsmen, the prices of pipes were modest save for exceptional straight grains and pipes from a handful of manufacturers such as Dunhill and Charatan. Even for skilled artisans such as Sixten Ivarsson, the prices they received for their pipes were modest until the 1970s, so as many blocks as possible were turned into finished pipes and these reflected the full range of grain patterns from superlative to mediocre.

The contemporary pipe scene is very different, and in many ways this is the golden age for pipe smokers. Fewer people smoke pipes, but they are demanding the highest quality in both their pipes and their tobaccos. As a result, manufacturers of drugstore-quality pipes have largely disappeared, while even the quality manufacturers have downsized or ceased production, as the recent closure of the Larsen workshop confirms.

One upside of this trend has been the increase in artisan-made pipes from European, North American and Japanese craftsmen who are demanding better-quality briar. As a result the less plentiful plateaux blocks, cut from the outer portion of the burl, are in growing demand. These blocks are generally both larger and better grained than the more plentiful ebauchons and they are, of course, much more expensive.

Another very significant trend has been an increased appreciation by many collectors of cross grain and bird’s-eye grain, although most pipe collectors still rank straight grains as the most collectible of all. Bo Nordh reserved his highest prices for bird’s-eye and cross-grain pipes, while today Tom Eltang receives more requests for his bird’s-eye pipes than any other grain because of the dramatic effect of his golden contrast finish on this type of grain.

Contemporary pipemakers have thus been liberated from many of the restraints of the past: They are no longer bound by the historically determined classical shapes, and the tyranny of the straight grain has been broken. Indeed, complex and elaborate shapes may be highly desired in their own right, irrespective of their grain pattern.

We will be looking at some of the different approaches to crafting a pipe later, but it is important to recognize the continuities. All pipemakers must first examine their blocks to see what shapes are possible. They may be looking for a specific block to meet a special order from a customer or may simply be looking for inspiration. Rarely if ever will a block be perfect for the artisan’s dream. Modifications will be necessary either because of latent flaws that will become
apparent as the pipe is carved, or because a block is unlikely to provide a perfect fit for the shape the artisan has in mind.

Today the overall demand for eau-chons has declined significantly, while the demand for higher-quality plateaux blocks has increased. With the price of some handmade pipes now running into the thousands of dollars, the cost of the raw materials constitutes a small part of the final price. A sandblast pipe may entail even more work than a perfect straight grain or bird’s-eye grain but will sell for only a fraction of the price, so premium briar is in great demand.

In the past, plateaux briar blocks were cut in a traditional manner, which in some ways limited the choices available to the artisans. Many pipemakers complained that these blocks were frequently too small or were cut in such a way that their choice of possible shapes was limited. A new generation of briar manufacturers like Mimmo of Romeo Briars (see P&T Winter 2007) is sensitive to the needs of today’s artisans and has begun to cut their blocks in different ways.

Many pipemakers find that up to 80 percent of their handmade pipes have to be modified in some way from the original conception because of flaws, about 30 percent are sandblasted, while about 10 percent of partially finished blocks have to be discarded entirely. As Lars Ivarsson remarks, given the obstacles created by a hostile nature, it is a minor miracle that we have any “flawless” pipes at all.

The contemporary stylistic freedom and the new cuts of plateaux briar now available pose fresh challenges to pipemakers. Choices still have to be made and individual artisans will differ in their pipemaking philosophies: some will aim to create a particular shape while others will let the grain determine the final shape. And what should the relationship be between shape and overall “smokeability?” Some pipemakers seek primarily to create smoking instruments (the purists), while others strive to make pipe art (the artists). Of course most artisans combine these approaches, but these labels nonetheless do capture important differences.

The first key distinction is between those who favor shape and those who prioritize grain. Of course all pipemakers would like to create pipes with both perfect grain and perfect shape, but this is rarely possible. In most cases artisans have to make a choice. Historically even factory-made pipes reflected this fundamental choice between shape and grain.

Dunhill was famous for its brilliant range of elegant pipes in which grain pattern was a secondary consideration. Many of its elegant shapes had rather mediocre grain. Charatan, on the other hand, valued grain more highly and produced a range of superbly grained pipes that were occasionally somewhat clumsy and inelegant in style. Smokers
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who valued shape tended to be Dunhill smokers, while those who preferred grain gravitated to Charatan.

Amongst today's top artisans a similar distinction exists. For pipemaker Lars Ivarsson the challenge is to make pipes that capture the spirit of the briar—the actual grain is of lesser importance. He usually begins with a shape in mind and while he will make modifications if required to by quirks in the wood, in general he will sacrifice grain to capture on his own terms the shape he is after. Tom Eltang, on the other hand, says that he does not usually have a fixed shape in mind but is influenced by the natural grain pattern in the block.

In addition to the choice between shape or grain, another critical decision is philosophical: is the artisan seeking to create the best smoking instrument possible (the purists), or is a pipe an expression of the artistic vision of the artisan (the artists)?

The purists
The purists, who include Bill Taylor, Jim Cooke and Lars Ivarsson, never deviate from the principle that they are making smoking instruments. Whatever the shape, finish or grain, the pre-eminent goal is to produce a superlative smoking instrument. This entails, among other things, that the “physics” of the pipe (bowl dimensions, size and location of the air hole, etc.) must be optimal and must never deviate from the ideal. Of course the “physics” alone does not determine the quality of the smoke; the innate properties of the briar as well as the curing process will also play a major role. In addition to smoking properties the pipe must be hand friendly and comfortable in the mouth. If it is a “sitter,” it must stand firmly on its base. Purists would thus consider a shape like the Nordh ballerina to be a poor design because it balances very tenuously on its “toe” and can easily topple over if disturbed.

Individual purists will differ in the value they place upon grain versus shape. However, purists will always choose shape and the “physics” of design over all other factors when issues of smokability are involved. No compromise on the smoking properties of any pipe would ever be countenanced.

Lars Ivarsson is the archetype of a purist. He was trained by his father, Sixten, who saw himself as a pipemaker rather than an artist, a humble craftsman rather than a celebrity. Ivarsson shares this philosophy and has used his creativity to develop new designs, ranging from his “blowfish” to his cross-grain shapes (see P&T Fall 2005). Although all are striking, none make any sacrifice in terms of smoking properties.

He always strives to create pipes with perfect internal dimensions, and if “sitters” they balance securely on their bases and are comfortable in the hand and mouth. And it is noteworthy that many of even his most expensive pipes do not necessarily have exceptional graining. For Ivarsson, grain for grain’s sake is simply not a priority.

Other purists place grain ahead of design in crafting a pipe. While not making any sacrifice in terms of the “physics of the design,” they follow the dictates of the grain rather than superimposing their own design on the grain. Sometimes this produces incredibly grained but rather clumsy shapes, but some designers have the talent to combine both. As Eltang explains, “It is always the briar block and the grain that decides what shape the pipe is going to have.”

It is perhaps of interest that some pipe-
makers do not share the fascination of most collectors with straight grains. When asked why he made so few straight grains, Bo Nordh replied, “Simple—because it is so boring.” The noted German pipemaker Cornelius Manz claimed that “the most boring piece of briar is a perfect block of straight grain with no imperfections.” Even some purists enjoy the challenge of conquering a block of briar and imposing their will on Mother Nature!

The artists
A recent trend has seen the emergence of craftsmen who are more interested in creating briar art than conventional smoking instruments. While not indifferent to the smoking properties of their creations, they seek to transcend the inherent limitations of the briar. They see a briar block as a challenge to their creativity and view the wood as the mere instrument for the realization of their artistic dreams. Bo Nordh’s ballerina can be viewed as an example of this approach, while Tokutomi and Gotoh are modern exponents. We are increasingly seeing pipes described as “harpooned fish,” “cavalier” and “whale-volcano.” Presumably these images inspired the craftsman.

Many of these pipes violate the canons of the purists. In designing them the grain pattern is of decidedly secondary importance—indeed the design may override any limitations of the grain. These creations are not necessarily ideal smoking instruments, containing angles and edges that make them somewhat unbalanced and their hand feel uncomfortable. They are, and demand to be judged, as works of art rather than simply as smoking instruments. Some smokers may well find them unappealing as smoking instruments but may be attracted by their aesthetic properties. However, these pipes have found a ready market among many high-grade collectors. And perhaps in part because of the high prices of today’s ultra-high grades, many excellent smoking instruments remain unsmoked and are stored in safes protected by high-tech security systems. The increasingly effective campaign against smoking may also have affected the decision of many not to smoke their high-grade pipes.

Final thoughts
In today’s increasingly small world of pipe smokers, most would agree to let a “thousand voices bloom.” The old dogmas of classical shapes and straight grains have been discarded. A tight and full cross grain or bird’s-eye grain is highly valued by many collectors. And skilled artisans are making superb pipes with unusual shapes and variable smoking qualities.

Increasingly, ultra-high-grade pipes are being bought as works of art or investments rather than as smoking instruments. In part this is a reflection of the high prices some of these pipes attain. We can sympathize with a smoker who is hesitant to smoke his $12,000 Nordh Ramses and thereby significantly decrease its monetary value—even though it was designed to be smoked. And we can understand why some might be tempted to purchase a complex Tokutomi design with no intention or desire to actually put fire to briar.

But hopefully most pipe buyers will remember that the best of today’s pipes at all price levels have been lovingly crafted by skilled artisans to be efficient smoking instruments. And few pleasures can match the joy of smoking a quality tobacco in a well-grained and superbly executed briar pipe.
If a person is lucky, he might experience perfection once in a lifetime. For a golfer it may be getting that elusive hole-in-one. A bowler might attain a perfect 300 score. A pitcher could mow down 27 straight batters in a game. No matter what the profession, complete excellence is difficult to attain, but pipemaker Giancarlo Guidi has achieved it not once or twice, but three times.

Considered the father of the Pesaro school of pipemaking because he gave so many young carvers their first jobs at Mastro de Paja and later Ser Jacopo, Guidi travels directly to the cutting mills to purchase his briar, which allowed him to come across three blocks with grain so straight that they had the potential to achieve Ser Jacopo’s highest grade—Brillante, “Diamond” in Italian, in the della Gemma series—little did he dream that these blocks would yield something even better.

The best that Ser Jacopo has to offer, the della Gemma series is separated into five grades depending on the quality of the straight grain, with the Emerald grade being the lowest in the series, progressing through Garnet, Sapphire, Ruby and Diamond. Ser Jacopo inserts the corresponding gemstone into an 18-karat gold setting, which is then attached to the stem.

While Guidi carved his first Diamond pipe in 1983 and has produced several more throughout the years, when he started to strip away the outer layers of wood on these briar blocks it soon became clear that the pipes they would produce would be so special that he had to create a new category—they were simply too good to be mere Diamond grades.

The grain on these pipes was so perfectly straight and close together, it reminded Guidi of angel hair. For these pipes Guidi created a special stamp—Capello d’angelo—which translates into “angel hair,” and applied it to their shanks. He also stamped them with the month and year of their creation—0390 and 0499.

“When I was making the Capello d’angelo pipes all I could think of was not to screw them up,” Guidi says, breaking into the warm broad smile that first attracts so many people to his magnetic personality. “If you can find a piece of briar worthy of Capello d’angelo you are very lucky because it’s very difficult. The Capello d’angelo pipes were the most beautiful Ser Jacopo pipes ever made. I made the stamp many years ago and it’s still new because I haven’t used it much!”

Ser Jacopo has produced three Capello d’angelo pipes so far. Two were sold to Ser Jacopo’s American distributor, Marble Arch, and purchased by Pipes and tobaccos magazine. These are proudly displayed in the P&T Museum and pictured here. No available information has been found regarding the third pipe. While Guidi has only achieved three Capello d’angelo pipes, he still has the stamp and hopes that luck finds him a fourth time.

Ser Jacopo pipes are available at fine retail tobacconists nationwide. To locate your nearest Ser Jacopo dealer, contact the exclusive American distributor, Marble Arch, at P.O. Box 966, Rockville Center, NY 11571; phone: 800.843.2724; 516.536.9781; e-mail: marblearchltd@yahoo.com; Web site: www.serjacopo.com. P&T
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A fun-omenal fellowship: the Seattle Pipe Club

Ask Mr. Average Man or Ms. Average Woman on the street nowadays about smoking, and either might tell you, “Smoking ain’t cool.” By extension, then, either might also say that pipe smoking ain’t cool and, syllogistically, if asked, either might affirm that a club whose only members are pipe smokers ain’t cool either. In the 2000 movie *Almost Famous*, Philip Seymour Hoffman’s Lester Bangs claims: “The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what you share with someone else when you are uncool.” A very incisive (but depressingly factual) observation, indeed! So how is Lester’s observation on relationships relevant to any pipe club or, more directly, to the Seattle Pipe Club?

**Defining a pipe club**

A society is an extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization. A fraternity is a brotherhood in which the members freely associate as equals for a mutually beneficial purpose. And a club is an association of people united by a common interest or goal. Any place where pipe smokers gather together with regularity is, by definition, a society, a fraternity and a club. It’s also the local watering hole for the meeting of bodies and minds. Slightly stretching the words of Lester Bangs, the pipe club is a *shared* experience among friends who have a common interest: lay teachers and lay students *sharing* their respective knowledge of pipe smoking, pipemaking, newly discovered tobacco blends, great places to shop for smoking accessories and other interesting topics that they consider, collectively, their true currency. According to *Marchbanks’ Almanack* (1967), in 1950, at age 71, Dr. Albert Einstein, whom some considered quite uncool, accepted a lifetime membership in the Montreal Pipe Smokers Club, so, as I see it, all who have ever belonged to or now belong to a pipe club have been in very good company; if being affiliated with a pipe club was socially acceptable for Einstein, it should be socially acceptable for all the rest of us.

However odd a pipe club may seem to some, for sure, no Internet discussion group, blog or chat room—this new-age virtual or pseudo-interaction—can compare with the “up close and personal” lively, animated and spontaneous exchange and interchange among people who gather together for the occasional cultural and socially rewarding event as a pipe night out with the guys … and, quite often, with the gals. There is also the attendant value of meeting and mixing with others who smoke a pipe: eating and drinking, the two other pleasures that are part and parcel of this experience, as British writer, critic and author G.K. Chesterton asserted in *What's Wrong With The World* [1910]: “No one has even begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking ….”

**Introducing the Seattle Pipe Club**

Washington’s Seattle Pipe Club (SPC) is the realization of a vision that three pipe-smokers who met on the Web, Gary B. Schrier, Matt Guss and Ron Butler, had in the autumn of 2000; by January 2001, the club had its first meeting. Today,
it’s not the youngest, oldest or largest American pipe club, but it is one of the most unique localized pipe clubs in the country, considering its brief life of just eight years. I have visited enough pipe clubs and participated in enough pipe club-sponsored activities across the country throughout the years to make this claim. I can’t think of another club in the U.S. that has accomplished so much in so short a period of time, and this claim is not self-serving rhetoric. In my view, the SPC has “raised the bar” for what members might expect from a volunteer-led pipe club. (Personally, the club that comes closest in conviviality and joie de vivre is not in this country; it’s the Amsterdam Pipe Smokers Society. It, too, is about eight years old, and if its Web site is reporting all its activities factually, this Dutch club is as hip, hyperactive and hustling as the SPC.)

Why write this?
First, I need to clarify why and how I resolved to write this story. I was a guest speaker at the SPC banquet in 2003, and I got my first impression. I also happened to be in the Seattle area five years later, in September 2008, in the week that the SPC had its monthly meeting, so I attended. When I left late that evening, I decided that its story should be told, but as I faced a blank computer screen in the next several days, I confronted two questions: “What should I say?” and “How should I say it?” such that it portrays the true nature of this unique community of smokers who seem to be a world apart from any other group with which I have been associated; at the same time, I had to be sure that what I say will not offend other clubs. Let me be very clear at the outset that by singling out and singing the praises of the SPC, I am neither disavowing or demeaning the efforts and contributions of all the other local or regional American clubs, nor am I trying to set a precedent for others to write about the accomplishments of these other clubs for this magazine in the future. Moreover, I am not trying to compare and contrast the SPC with that club that has a global reach, the Chicagoland Pipe Collectors Club (CPCC). The CPCC is the flagship American club, it is international in scope, and it’s the host of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey-equivalent “Greatest (pipe) Show on Earth.” I hope (perhaps unjustifiably) that going public about this club in P&T will have a positive, upbeat impact: re-energize and resuscitate a moribund club, increase membership in smaller clubs, even start a handful of new clubs. If any of these things come about from this review of one local club, it would be a big payoff for the entire hobby.

My purpose is to paint a word-portrait, to describe the essence and ambience of what it’s like to be very active affiliates in a going concern, members of a vibrant, vital and spirited league of gentlemen-smokers. I can confidently and unequivocally state that this club has succeeded in harnessing its collective energies to offer, on a continuing basis, entertainment, education and exposure to pipe moguls and tobacco mavens, along with many other activities that keep the members coming back every month for more surprises. These are the telltale signs that distinguish any thriving club or society.

But how does one assess the quality of a pipe club? What are the measures of merit, the metrics, the criteria? There is no guide. Is it the number of active members? Number of continuous years in operation? Frequency of its meetings?
Financial health of its treasury? Über-ambitious board of directors? Some intangible attribute or characteristic? It’s some or all of these. But what does it take to be a successful club? Leadership, volunteerism and member empowerment are a few dimensions. I personally believe that a club is successful when it has viability, when people assume responsibilities and carry them out enthusiastically, when every meeting brings out new information or entertainment or an exposition designed to broaden member education and understanding of the hobby or popular topics of the day, things about which the members know absolutely nothing, or know something but want to learn more. But—and this is a really BIG but—no pipe club can succeed or survive for very long without money, and money has been the long and precarious pole in the tent of most clubs that struggle to sustain operations, but not so for the SPC. Applying all these criteria and all these interdependent dimensions, how does the SPC stack up?

The pipe club in history
I briefly digress to revisit pipe club history. In 1935:
• There were 807 branch clubs across America.
• The 50 largest clubs had a combined total of 12,640 registered members.
• Club No. 62 in Berlin, N.H., was the largest with 1,308 members.
• Total affiliate membership, including 6,405 active foreign participants, was 345,043.

Since that time the number of clubs has waxed and waned over the course of the past 75 years. On any given day, there are between 55 and 60 clubs in 27 states, according to the P&T Web site (http://www.pt-magazine.com/home.php?id=490)—21 of these are member clubs of UPCA—but how many of these clubs are alive and well, proactive and expansive in their activities? Assuming that club members get together on a frequent basis to smoke, eat and drink, what else do they customarily do, what else are they chartered to do, or have the capacity to do? Why travel somewhere just to smoke a pipe? This you can just as easily and comfortably do at home. There has to be some appeal, some attraction, something special for a pipe aficionado to join a club and remain a faithful member. In Seattle, there is!

An outsider’s look inside the SPC
In lieu of an elected board of directors, there is an informal executive committee, more accurately called “leaders of the pack”: Gary, Matt and the ever-jovial, always-volunteering Al Ford. How do they run the club? It’s part loose and layback: they jokingly govern with that Aussie attitude by applying the Outback Steakhouse restaurant chain slogan: “No rules, just right!” And it’s also part a structured organization to the degree that these few plan the program in conjunction with the members, decide what must be done, determine how to get it done and then make sure that it gets done. They abide by Robin Wood’s straight talk: “Successful organizations must balance bureaucratic processes at one extreme with the fluid chaos of relationships, interests and transactions, which enable it to be innovative and alive, at the other.” They are smart enough to recognize that a club that is more open to and involved in adjusting to change is more likely to be successful than one that is more stable and status quo oriented; in any organization, if the leadership fails to frequently change established and repetitive behavior, the organization stagnates and withers. All the members are the club’s publicists and they accept that critical public relations role: promote the club everywhere, to everyone and at every opportunity. But the key to the club’s prosperity is that the leaders are smart enough to know what it takes to achieve success: it’s a commitment to a simple, four-letter word—work—and they do not shy away from being fully engaged in every undertaking. Of course, a swelled petty cash box helps immensely.

As to its evolution, the SPC met with regularity for the first four years at local venues, but in 2005, Washington became the fifth state to implement a comprehensive statewide law prohibiting smoking in all indoor public places. Against a backdrop of this law, the SPC was hell-bent and determined to find a public, pro-smoke venue for its monthly meetings. They succeeded, and today they meet at Smokey Joe’s Cigar Lounge (BJ’s Bingo) in Fife, Wash., a place that is inviting, friendly and permits smoking, along with free-flowing, good-tasting, reasonably priced food and drink served by the Fife equivalent of Hooters girls; I was told that seeing them roam the area taking orders helps these pipe smokers digest their food more easily … and faster so that the servers have to return to take new orders. (Just kidding!)

Like lots of clubs, there is the custom—
Pipes and Tobaccos • spring 2009

Left to right: Craig Watness and Chris Berwald.

ary club lapel pin and a robustly informative Web site: www.seattlepipeclub.org. Many clubs do this much over time, so what are the discriminators; what sets the SPC apart? Obviously, it’s much more than a lapel pin and a Web site. The SPC has made every effort to ensure that card-carrying (dues-paying active) members get discounted merchandise at all local tobacco shops. How about a wide range of guest speakers talking on far-ranging topics, usually whatever the membership proposes … within reason, of course? (Financing the travel costs of guest speakers is a risky precedent, but it indicates that the SPC has a healthy treasury, a reflection of the financial commitment of its members.) Need more evidence? Name another club that has designed and arranged for production in Turkey of a cased, limited-edition meerschaum pipe with the club’s logo etched around the bowl, a briar “pipe of the year,” and even a unique leather tobacco pouch. Know another club that hosts a summer picnic, a formal dinner every anniversary replete with guest speaker, entertainment, prizes, an auction and a quaint ritual, the “Lighting of the Clays,” using a clay pipe that bears the club’s logo? (You may think that this annual affair isn’t a rare occurrence, that many clubs have a banquet, but that typical banquet is usually not a separate event but held in conjunction with a pipe show or a smoking contest.) The club organizes UPCA-sanctioned annual slow-smoking pipe contests … and it’s not just another tin of tobacco to that winner with the leathery tongue, but a worthwhile, tangible prize, a trophy. And, on occasion, awards are presented to recognize member contributions and hard work. What it does not organize is a regional pipe show; the members would prefer to travel as a group to Chicago every May and do their buying, selling, swapping and trading at Pheasant Run.

Is there another club that can match this next initiative? In August 2008, it debuted three tobaccos blended by one of its members, Joe Lankford, now available in two- and eight-ounce tins from www.pipesandcigars.com (1.800.494.9144). All three received rather positive reviews from Tad Gage in the fall 2008 issue of Pipes and Tobaccos: Mississippi River, Plum Pudding and Seattle Evening. At that September 2008 meeting, Marty Pulvers, a friend of the SPC, was the guest speaker for the second time; Joe Lankford announced that he had perfected a special blend named “Marty” for the occasion, and everyone sampled this blend that evening. As a bystander gazing at the membership that September night, listening to Marty wax humorous about his pet peeves as a pipe distributor, I could viscerally sense that this eclectic group of smokers, young and old, represented a large, closely knit family.

Of course, the club has had its ups and downs in membership, from an initial high of about 60 to a current low of about 50, and a few years of lesser participants in between, but that’s the norm in clubs; people come and people go, but it’s never deterred this club from moving forward. There’s something happening every month, someone present from the trade, a familiar face from the hobby, representatives from local wineries and breweries, local fisheries and the occasional spontaneous member who shares his lifework, such as someone who works for the U.S. Forest Service, another who served in the U.S. Navy SEALs for more than a decade—Fort Lewis, McChord Air Force Base, and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard are nearby—so the members are aware of the sacrifices that our military make. Those who volunteer are comfortable in their skin and are not shy about sharing their stories in front of a rowdy crowd of smartass and, on occasion, tipsy pipe men.

Don’t take my word about this club’s style and savoir-faire, take Fred Hanna’s: A few years ago, I was invited by the Seattle Pipe Club to address the Briar vs. Brand controversy that was raging throughout the briar pipe world at that time. They held the meeting in the luxurious Library Room at the top of the Columbia Tower, which is the tallest building in Seattle with a fantastic view of Mt. Rainier. They served excellent snacks and drinks and we had a great discussion. These are class guys and a grand testimony to the high quality of people in our hobby. I remain thankful to them for that remarkable experience.

Now that’s a classy venue! No back end of a barroom, corner of a fast-food restaurant, dingy box store basement or warehouse, or crowded tobacco shop for this outfit.

At the SPC’s 2004 annual pipe dinner in January 2005, a mystery guest was the keynote speaker. John Patrick Lowrie, an unknown quantity to the membership, was introduced as Clive Dunhill, who acted out as a long-lost nephew of Richard Dunhill. The audience was both captive and attentive as Clive, emoting in his very best “Queen’s English,” spoke of the company and its lengthy history.
in the trade ... and Sir Clive pulled it off convincingly until his cover was blown. The club leaders received accolades and attaboy aplenty for arranging this parody as part of the evening’s agenda. Brilliant idea, ingenious satire and extraordinarily original entertainment! When I contacted Clive (John Patrick) for a brief word on the club, this was his staged response:

I’m thumbing away this text using the great new SafariCom wireless signal in Burundi while on my BIG rhino hunt for more Dunhill White Spot ivory supply. Uncle “Dickie” Richard has long since retired, but I know the firm’s supplies are near exhausted so I must do my duty to family and firm. Besides, is there any question that the White Spot is any less near extinction than the rare black rhino and of equal importance? Spot is any less near extinction than the White Spot ivory supply. Uncle Dickie is his staged response:

“Dickie” Richard has long since retired, but I know the firm’s supplies are near exhausted so I must do my duty to family and firm. Besides, is there any question that the White Spot is any less near extinction than the rare black rhino and of equal importance? Anyway, the SPC is the bomb! I can’t brag enough how great my brief time with them was, and how well I was entertained and dined. Their small but dedicated group of puffers knows what’s what and how to throw a spectacular gala that every pipe-smoker should emulate. Their story could have been written 50–75 years ago when clubs were all the rage in London.

Rick Newcombe, the guest speaker at the 2008 annual dinner, had this to say: There is genuine enthusiasm and a real spirit of camaraderie among the members of the Seattle Pipe Club. There is also intelligence behind the club, since the state of Washington has some of the most draconian anti-smoking laws in the country, the Seattle Pipe Club is smart enough to hold its meetings in restaurants that are on Indian land—considered a sovereign nation untouched by American anti-smoking laws.

I would expect high praise and superlatives from a club officer, so I did not poll any, but I did ask for member comments. Bob Ramstad is one of the newest SPCers, and this is how he feels: I participate a lot on some of the Internet pipe forums, notably SmokersForums.org, but there’s just no substitute to real life interactions with fellow puffers. Given the collapse of pipe smoking in general, I very rarely see pipe smokers in public, and until I joined the club, I only knew one person who both lives near me and also smokes a pipe. The meetings are fun, the people interesting and generous, and the information extremely good. I’m very happy that there is such a high-class and well-run organization here in Seattle; it makes things much easier for me as a newbie.

Member Craig Watness listed all the activities that stood out in his recollection since he joined, and I string them together to show the variety and breadth of happenings: fly fishing from an expert; exhibition and sampling of coffee, port, local beers, scotch and American whiskey (each on different evenings, of course); cigar making; a comedy night with a ventriloquist; hands-on instruction on how to clean a pipe; and an exhibit of Native American pipes. Craig had given a presentation on how to become a slow smoker, and he should know how: he holds the North American record (1hr 12m 55s) and won the American title at the Slow Smoke competition in Chicago in 2006. Quite an impressive list of assorted activities.

Although I did promise not to seek or cite comments from the club’s leadership troika, I can’t resist including an incisive observation from Matt Guss by way of summary: We have a model that other clubs could copy, and we offer to help any club using all or parts of this model … [T]he pipe smoking community would be in a much better state, a smaller community: to be sure, but well structured and prepared for survival in a hostile world. Pipe clubs are almost the last bastions of refuge. The more they thrive, the more we do.

This gracious offer is a PowerPoint CD-ROM presentation, “Is This Anyway to Run a Pipe Club. How We Stumbled Our Way for the Past 8 Years to a Pretty Fun Little Club,” that he presented at the Chicagoland show in May 2008. It’s chock-full of the fundamentals that govern the club’s operation, and it includes some ideas on what makes the SPC a going concern.

The bottom line? Just as the overused cliché “you are what you eat,” a pipe club is what it does, and a successful pipe club is what it does on a continuous basis … something new, something different, something members want, something that’s delivered on cue every time, all the time. From all I have heard and personally observed at the SPC, attending any monthly meeting is not just a sight for sore eyes; it’s a sight for more eyes. Taking all the aforementioned into account, it is easy to conclude that this club leads in innovative and imaginative programs and lively entertainment. I believe the SPC is a colossal success, and using a one-off slogan from the Energizer Bunny, I predict that it will keep growing, and growing and growing.
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Castro Brothers Portrait

**GAGE:** This newly released, dense Latakia blend delivers a heady tin aroma. Offered by Maryland-based brothers Steve and David Castro, who sell mostly cigars through several shops and the Internet, it’s their first foray into pipe tobacco blending. It’s a very successful first attempt. It packs well right from the vacuum-sealed and dated tin, but it could be further dried if you like your tobacco that way. The mixture’s an evenly cut medium ribbon, with a lot of dark Latakia and Perique, and flecks showing two or three types of Oriental leaf.

Although it’s a heavy English blend, the Latakia, which is smooth, soft and of obviously high quality, doesn’t overpower the other components. The Perique, also of excellent quality, provides a pleasing nip. What really makes the blend is the sweet Oriental leaf—possibly Basma and Samsun, both very sweet and aromatic varietals. I detected no Virginia or Maryland leaf in the mixture, and none is advertised.

Portrait sweetens during the smoke, particularly if you puff a bit and give it an occasional rest. It works well in large or small bowls and burns to fine ash with little moisture exuded during the smoke. Its sweet-smoky character is reminiscent of some of the long-gone classics. With the vacuum-sealed tins, aging won’t do this blend any harm, but it’s ready to go right now. I believe it’s available only through the company’s Web site, www.cbcigars.com.

**HARB:** This is an aged Latakia mixture with a hint of Louisiana Perique. The aroma from the tin is slightly tart, with a leathery, smoky and faintly sweet character. The moisture in the tin may be suitable for many smokers, but I let it air out until it was slightly crinkly, which I prefer, before I loaded it in a medium-sized bowl.

The composition is mostly black tobaccos with golden and medium brown ribbons that are a medium-fine cut. Portrait was smooth from the first light, with a medium flavor level and an unexpected rich sweetness from well-aged Virginias and just the right amount of Perique to perfectly compliment the smoky Latakia.

Once well stoked, the Latakia moved to the forefront and notable spiciness emerged, suggesting a touch of Oriental leaf in the blend. As I progressed down the bowl, all the components participated to produce a well-balanced complexity of flavors that I enjoyed. In a meerschaum pipe, this balance was tilted toward a more spicy and sweet smoke, which made for an even more enjoyable smoke. Portrait deserves a place on your to-try list.

McCranie’s Red Ribbon 2000 Vintage Crop

**GAGE:** This new release features stoved, ribbon-cut red Virginia from 2000, released late in 2008. This is the third in a series of vintage aged crops, the first being 1983 and the second a 1996 crop. Like its predecessors, the 2000 leaf was stoved and pressed into cakes, aged and sliced into ribbons. The result is a lightly dappled deep red mixture resembling fine-grained mahogany. A few small chunks of cake remain, adding interest, but this certainly needs no rubbing out. The soft tin aroma resembles a spiced apple cobbler with raisins and is less intense than some stoved Virginia blends.

This McClelland Tobacco Company product may be the best of the three vintages, and that’s saying a lot, as its predecessors were top notch. The moisture content was perfect upon opening, and I dove in. Interestingly, the first few bowls, smoked over the course of two days, struck me as a little flat and without the complexity I had expected. Ah, but on the third
day, the tobacco blossomed. I’ve found that some mixtures need a day or two of airing to “relax” and open up their full flavor. This is similar to the French red wine Cotes du Rhone, which is invariably “tight” and bitter when first uncorked, often requiring decanting and an hour or so of airing to achieve its potential.

I’d recommend you open the tin, tease the tobacco a bit, replace the plastic lid and give it a couple of days. The mixture delivers a tantalizing raisiny and wood-smoke character throughout. The complex flavors are consistent from beginning to end in this even-burning tobacco. I’m continually saying most tobaccos taste better when puffed slowly, keeping the combustion temperature low. Yet this mixture also delivers when puffed more aggressively. More sweetness comes through at a higher temperature, almost like caramelized sugar. I alternated slow smoking with slightly more aggressive puffing, then allowing the blend to cool off before relighting. A truly unusual experience with a Virginia mixture, made possible by the leaf’s extensive aging. No question this mixture will cellar exceptionally well for years. However, don’t hesitate to dive right in. An exceptional crop and eight years of aging proved more than enough to bring this blend to perfection. Available direct from McCranie’s Pipe and Tobacco (mccranies.com; 888.523.8554).

**HARB:** This is the third limited-edition release of Red Ribbon by McCranie’s, and it comes from the 2000 crop of North Carolina leaf, so it has been processed and aged over a period of eight years. In the tin, the aroma is lightly sweet, slightly tart and nutty, and I detected a faint hint of cocoa. The moisture level is suitable for loading from the tin if you prefer.

It is presented as a medium to fine cut and consists of light tan, rich mahogany, dark brown and almost black ribbons. Described as soft, mellow and rich, it lit easily and the first wisps of smoke were as described. Through the charring light this blend had a sweet/tangy flavor with a bright undernote that lingered on the tongue. As with many Virginias, Red Ribbon developed more depth toward mid-bowl and the sugars in the leaf continued to emerge, yielding a smooth, mellow smoke with a rich, medium-range flavor. This character continued through the remainder of the bowl, with a tasty, smooth, rich finish that left a soft gray ash.

In a larger-bowled pipe, I felt Red Ribbon smoked even more smoothly and mellow, but the flavor wasn’t as deep as in the smaller-bowled pipes I used for the sampling. Those pipe smokers who have enjoyed the earlier releases of McCranie Red Ribbon will find this one just as worthy of enjoying now as the previous releases and will want to put some away to allow the blend to continue to mellow with age.

**Compton’s Commonweal Mixture**

**GAGE:** Although not tinned, Compton’s comes in handy vacuum-sealed pouches with zip reseals. The aroma paired fruity Virginias with prune and butter undertones. There’s a pleasing variety of cuts: some dark and slightly chunky pressed Virginia, ribbons of bright yellow flue-cured and golden medium Virginia. Blender Maxim Engle of Pipes2smoke.com describes the blend as containing red Cavendish, a term I’ve not before encountered.

It’s perfectly moist and ready to go out of the pouch. On lighting, the mixture greets you with huge, rich smoke volume and quickly settles into a mild and flavor-packed experience. In numerous pipes, different bowl sizes and both meerschaum and briar, the mixture wasn’t as sweet as I might have expected from the pouch aroma and aged Virginia contents. That isn’t a criticism! It was a complex and interesting blend, with subtle interplay between the tobaccos, and it was ridiculously cool smoking and easy to keep lit.

While there are some fine all-Virginia blends available these days, Commonweal stakes its claim at the lighter end of the Virginia scale, but without any of the heat or bite often associated with lighter-character Virginia mixtures. Although Engle never uses straight Burley in his
blends, the toasted Cavendish in the mixture may contribute to its lighter character. It isn’t as intense as stoved and pressed Virginia, providing a pleasing alternative for Virginia lovers wanting something with character and smoothness at the lighter end of the spectrum.

I’m confident this mixture will cellar nicely and can probably be left in the pouches, available in 50- and 100-gram amounts. An alternative would be to put the tobacco in a glass Mason jar to allow for aging to take place without an excessive amount of air transfer.

**HARB:** It has been nearly two years since we reviewed some of the recreated blends from the Comptons of Galashiels recipes Maxim Engle of Pipes2Smoke acquired in 2000. Here, we have two more of those blends that have been introduced since our first look at this series.

Commonweal is a light Virginia mixture consisting of red Cavendish and golden and bright Virginias. The aroma from the pouch has an earthy tang with an underlying sweetness and depth. Once stoked, I experienced a medium flavor with light sweet and fruity undertones, a delicate tang and spice, and a hint of nuts.

By mid-bowl, Commonweal had developed a good interplay between the deeper, mellow Virginias and the tangy, light Virginias, with the darker Virginias providing a smooth richness that was a nice complement to the lighter Virginias in the mixture. The depth of the flavors, I think, kept the sweetness at a low level for the last half of the bowl, and I enjoyed the flavors that developed as I progressed down the bowl more, I think, than I would have enjoyed a sweet finish.

**Compton’s Square Mile**

**GAGE:** Although a newly released blend, the mixture is hardly new, being based on one of the century-old Compton’s recipes Engle obtained. It seems like there’s a little bit of everything in the mixture, a fact quite evident upon a visual analysis of the mixture. This compilation of gold, tan, black and yellow leaf contains Virginias, Perique, cigar leaf, Oriental, black Cavendish and Latakia. With all these ingredients, it’s not surprising Engle says it took him three years to get it right.

Latakia takes the lead in the pouch aroma but is balanced by subtle smells from all these different tobaccos. Like Spilman Mixture, another resurrected old-time formula, this blend puts a lot of tobaccos to work. It’s a real challenge to get these “kitchen sink” mixtures right.

Lighting quickly and easily, the mixture presented two dominant flavors: Latakia and cigar leaf. After some experimentation, my favorite approach was to get the charring light and tamping out of the way and then let the pipe rest for five minutes and relight. Without this step, the Latakia and cigar leaf were overly prominent, at least for the first quarter bowl. However, if you relish the pronounced flavor of cigar leaf in your pipe tobacco, feel free to plow ahead without this interim pause.

Once the blend is “set” with an initial rest, it delivers a pleasingly complex smoke. The cigar leaf is noticeable but not overly prominent. It’s an excellent choice for cigar leaf pipe tobacco lovers but also satisfying for smokers who appreciate only a subtle hint of cigar. While the Cyprian Latakia carries the bulk of the flavor, subtle Oriental and Turkish elements come through. There is no sweetness from the Virginia or black Cavendish, as these leaves play a backup role to smooth the blend. It should cellar well, although I believe the cigar leaf will become less prominent and the Virginia perhaps a bit sweeter. I like what it delivers right now.

**HARB:** This is an interesting blend that includes red and Carolina Virginias, rubbed-out Virginia flake, bright flake and black Cavendish, which are combined with Latakia, Dubec, Turkish varietals and Perique. The blend is then finished off with coarse cube-cut cigar leaf for additional spice, depth and complexity. In the pouch, the aroma is leathery and smoky, with the Latakia highlighted.

At first light, the blend was very smooth, with the Turkish and other spice tobaccos in the forefront and the Latakia lending depth to the blend in the background. I found the interplay between the base and spice tobaccos to be very well balanced, creating a very unusual complexity of flavors.

By mid-bowl, the blend took on a different character, with the Turkish and other spice flavors fading and the Latakia and cigar leaf moving to the forefront but still maintaining the complexity of the blend through the lower half of the bowl. Toward the end, the cigar leaf blossomed and built up a level of flavor for a bold finish. Compton’s Square Mile blend is definitely worth a try if you want to experience one of the most complex blends available.

**Savinelli Mr. G. Black Cavendish**

**GAGE:** I popped the tin of this interesting aromatic blend and got a big, buttery nose with undertcurrents of pumpkin pie. It’s a spectacular, mouth-watering smell. While the aromatic casing was evident, an appealing aroma of fruit from aged Virginia leaf offered the prospect of more interest than you often find in an aromatic, where the casing frequenly drowns out any aroma of the tobacco itself.

It didn’t need to be dried down, although some smokers may prefer a slightly less moist mixture. A good sign of not being overly cased is that the tobacco dries quickly when left out, rather than staying goopy like many aromatics. I would have been ecstatic if the mixture had delivered exactly what that tin aroma promised. It fell a little short of that mark.

However, it’s a pleasant, cool, smooth-smoking aromatic that burns cleanly and leaves no dottle. I got a slightly sour aftertaste from the mixture, which was a downer. The base tobaccos are very good, and the Virginia definitely delivers a natural sweetness that casings and added sugars simply don’t. It’s in the upper echelon of black Cavendish mixtures, which are so often goooey and bitter. If you like black Cavendish, this is definitely one to try.
HARB: I had a hard time telling the difference in aroma and composition between this blend and Punto Oro because they were so similar to each other. In fact, the descriptive label on both of them was the same. However, I think I detected an additional aroma of allspice in Mr. G, though it was faint and didn’t come through in the smoke. Once Mr. G was lit and stoked, I felt the flavorings were not as prominent as they were in the Punto Oro Cavendish, which allowed the flavor of the tobacco and the pungency of the Oriental leaf to come through more. The burning characteristics were also very similar, and this blend also smoked to a dry gray ash.

Savinelli Punto Oro Cavendish

GAGE: Unlike the Mr. G. Black Cavendish, this predominantly toasted Burley mixture with a splash of Virginia and Oriental leaf delivered a flat, somewhat bitter smoke. Honey and caramel toppings are noticeable in the tin aroma but didn’t come through. Despite having good-quality base tobaccos absent of the goopiness of many Cavendish mixtures, it didn’t deliver much of interest.

HARB: There is plenty of aroma in Punto Oro Cavendish, although not as much as in the Savinelli Aroma Blend. The tobaccos featured are Virginia, Burley, Maryland and Oriental, and they are topped with honey and caramel. I felt the sweet aroma had a fruity note of berry or raisins.

The composition is similar to Aroma, with a mixed ribbon/Cavendish cut, and was also moderately dry in the tin. At first light, there was a medium sweetness with a caramel flavoring, and the blend delivered good body that was moderately aggressive on the palate. The flavorings left a pleasant aroma that lingered in the room for quite a while.

By mid-bowl, the topped flavoring subsided slightly, but not enough for the Oriental tobacco to add much to the flavor profile. This blend burned smooth and cool but could be coaxed to bite if sipped too hard. The dottle left in the bottom of the bowl was mostly a fluffy gray ash. If you’re looking for an aromatic blend that is well behaved with a smooth sipping rhythm, give this one a try.

Savinelli Special

GAGE: The tin aroma hints at a sweet and honey-scented aromatic, but the description makes no mention of casing or flavoring. I was intrigued by the medium-cut, uniformly golden tan mixture, which featured ribbon-cut burley and some loosely cut pressed Virginia flake left slightly chunky. The blend is spiced with Indonesian leaf, an unusual touch for pipe tobacco since Java leaf is primarily used in cigars and Dutch-style dry-cure cigarillos.

After a day of drying down, the mixture packed well and lit easily, owing to a nice combination of slightly larger pieces of leaf mixed with finer ribbon cuts. And, despite the tin aroma, no aromatic casing was detectable. There was plenty of natural sweetness from the moderately aged Virginia tobacco, and just the right amount of Burley smoothed the potential bite of several differ-
ent types of Virginia. The quality of Indonesian tobacco can be spotty, ranging from good to very bad. But at its best, Java offers a slightly sweet and spicy character. That’s exactly what the Java leaf in this blend offered.

There may be some kind of flavoring—perhaps honey—but not enough to put off someone who shies away from aromatics. If you’re not a fan of aromatics, you have to get past the tin aroma to give this a try. This blend bridges aromatic and straight English mixtures. I’m sure it will appeal to aromatic smokers, as well as Virginia and Burley aficionados looking for something on the aromatic side of the spectrum without the overpowering use of artificial flavorings. It burned clean and dry right to the end and didn’t leave a telltale after-scent in a briar pipe. It should age well, owing to the Virginia leaf.

HARB: This blend is a mix of bright Virginias and Burley with a light toasting that has been topped with java. The tin aroma is sweet, with a fruity java aroma mixed with a faint toasty aroma. The composition is mostly light tan to medium brown, with some dark brown tobaccos included.

The blend is presented as a combination of several different cuts, generally more coarse, to promote softness and a cool smoke. It was a bit too moist for my taste, so I let it air out until it was crinkly to the touch. At the light, it was mild and smooth, with a bright tang on the tongue, a light tingle on the palate and a faint citrus fruitiness. The java flavoring was hard to discern over the sweet Virginias and the depth of the toasted flavor of the Burley.

By mid-bowl, it was the flavor of the Burley that was the prominent character, yielding clean tobacco flavor to the end of the bowl. This special tobacco blend burned smooth and cool throughout and left a nice ash residue in the bottom of the bowl.

Savinelli Aroma

GAGE: The name doesn’t lie: the sharp buckwheat honey and marzipan (sugar-coated almond paste) tin aroma was overpowering. This colorful medium ribbon-cut mixture is dappled with a bit of black Cavendish, two or three aged Virginias, a bit of bright yellow flue-cured Virginia and a hint of a mixed-origin Oriental. It was a trifle too moist to smoke out of the tin but dried down perfectly within a couple days. The open tin served nicely as an almond-scented room deodorizer.

Despite the cloying tin aroma, the mixture proved to be mild and sweet. I couldn’t detect the Oriental leaf, although I don’t doubt it lent something to the blend. The natural sweetness of the Virginia was pleasing, although there was still a somewhat artificial quality due to the casing. The blend is described to contain a Bourbon vanilla flavor. I could taste the vanilla but not the Bourbon. What intrigued me was a pleasing hit of sugar upon relighting, so I smoked the mixture slowly and let it go out often so I could light up frequently. That worked well, anyway, as the tobacco tends to burn hot. Quality base tobaccos and an intriguing mixture of flavorings.

CPCC Golf Tournament

Friday May 1, 1 p.m. Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Ill.

The Chicagoland Pipe Collectors Club presents its annual golf outing this year on Friday, May 1, at 1 p.m.

Enjoy a great golf course, free goodie bag, awards, quality prizes and raffle. Rental clubs available. All skill levels will enjoy the fun scramble format. And if you’re particularly lucky (or skillful), this year’s tournament features a Harley Davidson motorcycle as prize for the hole-in-one contest. Ride home from the show in style!

Cost: $70, which includes greens fees and golf cart.

make this a good choice for a fan of genuinely sweet aromatics.

**HARB:** As promised in the description, this blend has a rich, sweet aroma of almonds and bourbon-vanilla. There is enough added flavoring to scent a medium-sized room in a short time with an aroma reminiscent of cookies baking in the oven.

Savinelli’s Aroma blend is composed of sweet Virginia, Burley, black Cavendish and a touch of Oriental leaf in a mixed ribbon/Cavendish cut, and it was dry in the tin and ready to load. Once lit and stoked, this blend burned cool and smooth, presenting good body with a tingle on the palate and a nice level of sweetness. The bourbon-vanilla and almond aromas lingered as a prominent room note.

By mid-bowl, I detected a faint floral/soapy flavor that subsided toward the end of the bowl and a slight pungency from the Oriental leaf, which added depth without contributing much to the flavor. The blend burned to a nice gray ash and left a dry bowl. This is an aromatic blend that produces lots of pleasing aroma that lingers in the air and an abundance of flavor throughout the bowl, and it should be attractive to those who want a good burning, sweet blend with an aroma that is suitable in a crowd.

**Savinelli English Mixture**

**GAGE:** Made slightly atypical by the inclusion of Burley—not a classic component in Balkan mixtures—this chunky, ribbony mixture contains Latakia, some aged Virginia and small bits of pressed and cut Virginia cake. Although Savinelli’s description claims 30 percent Latakia, the appearance and aroma indicated considerably less. And despite the claim of no aromatic topping, there was a caramel-honey scent I don’t associate with English blends. The dichotomy of the appearance and aroma and the concept of an English blend promised an interesting smoking experience.

I’m not fooled often, and I hope you chuckle along with me when I tell you that smoking this blend delivered what the description, not the aroma or visual inspection, promised. The Latakia jumped to the forefront but wasn’t overpowering. The Virginia leaf offered a hint of sweetness. The Burley was too prominent, however, giving the mixture a flat and uninteresting character. It was pleasant, but there are simply too many outstanding English mixtures available to suggest you run out and buy a bunch of tins.

**HARB:** This blend is described as a typical English mixture with classic Virginia, 30 percent Latakia, and bright Burley added to round up the flavor. The smoky tin aroma confirms the presence of the Latakia, and there is a sweet, spicy undernote that moderates the intensity of the Latakia.

The composition is almost equal between medium tan, medium brown and black tobaccos that are medium coarse cut into a mix of ribbons, cubes and chunks. The blend is finished off with partial granulation of the tobacco to promote a steady burn. I find that the smaller granular bits of tobacco can tend to fall to the bottom of the tin, so you may want to fluff the tobacco up a bit each time you load a bowl so the granules are suitably distributed to kindle the embers throughout the bowl.

The sweet flavor of the Virginias emerges first from the flame, with the Latakia close behind. The Burley adds body and helps the flavor develop into a smooth, mellow richness at a medium flavor level. The tobaccos are well balanced and complement each other.

By mid-bowl, I felt the Virginias and the Burley began to dominate the flavor, and for the remainder of the bowl, the Latakia shared the flavor without becoming prominent. I tend to prefer an English blend in which the Latakia doesn’t overwhelm the other tobaccos. Savinelli English Mixture certainly falls in this category and should please smokers who want to experience the exquisite smokiness of Latakia in a blend in which the other flavor components are not pushed too far into the background. P&T
The mind of man is a restless thing, constantly probing, questioning and striving to augment its scope of comprehension. In all things, dissatisfaction with the way things are drives mankind into new realms, great or trivial, into the unknown, into the endless pursuit of perfection. And so it is with the pipe. Not satisfied with a rolled-up tube of burning leaves (though this remains popular among those uncomfortable with the advent of civilization), intrepid smokers developed elegant and shapely clays. Not satisfied with clay’s evanescent delicacy, they carved meerschaum into utilitarian pieces of art. Not satisfied with the fragility of meerschaum, they found that briar was capable of holding the Promethean embers in the beauty and comfort of ancient wood. Continuous restless mental activity has been applied relentlessly to improvements, if I may use the term loosely, to the fundamental design of the pipe. Ah, that we were satisfied just to smoke. But smoking gives rise to thinking, and rather than solve the problems of the world, some would rather solve the problems of the pipe.

What may those be? Well, there is quite an extensive list outlined in the patent for the Falcon pipe (U.S. Patent 2,581,169). These are the same for any of the pipes one can imagine, especially the “system” pipes discussed herein. I paraphrase them as:

- moisture is trapped away from the bowl, avoiding “wet heel”
- condensation is also trapped, though how this is so different from moisture is unclear, but it may be removed, avoiding “wet smoking”
- a sour taste is avoided, as the condensate is trapped away from the mouth (sludge reflux, one might say, or gurgle, traditionally)
- the smoke is cooled to avoid dreaded tongue bite
- the pipe is easily cleaned

So, the issues are familiar and can be summarized as cool, dry, clean smoking, the desired enjoyment of every bowl. A slight digression seems appropriate to deal with the issue of “a wet smoke.” Water is the inevitable product of combustion. I find more variation in the state of the leaf, type and presence or absence of humectant, the weather and the pipe than any tobacco inherently and consistently being “a wet smoke.” I will say that there is an optimal humidification level for each tobacco, and there is an acceptable range suitable for each. So, let us focus on the pipe component of that.

In reviewing patents going back to the 19th century, one can see in each design the same objectives, and these systems can be classed into a few different categories. There are the reservoir systems, the filter systems and the absorption systems. Hybrid systems employ two or more of the more fundamental systems. In the reservoir
systems, there is a place in the design where a chamber exists to form a reservoir for the moisture so it never reaches the smoker. In the filter system, the smoke passes through a filter of varying design, and sludge is held in the filter to be later disposed of whole. In absorption systems, there is a place in the design where the smoke stream passes through an apparatus where excess moisture is absorbed without actually filtering the smoke, different from the reservoir in that it is absorbed. The hybrid designs came about because not all problems are resolved with a single design feature, and the creative pipemaker wants to solve them all (not just forget about them and enjoy a good smoke). Rather than try to classify every example I can think of into theses meager categories, I will run through a number of pipes, currently available or not, that are classics, successful, inventive, curiously entertaining or just nuts.

I should also mention that many of the features of existing pipes not strictly classed as “systems” fall into the categories I have outlined. The hookah (shisha or nargile) may be thought of as a reservoir with fluid or as a fluid filter. The breaking-in process for any briar is not just charring the bowl, but the systematic absorption of tar into the walls of the bowl. This is much more obvious with non-briar wooden bowls, like cherry (not Ropp branch cross-sectional bowls, which behave differently), rosewood or cocobolo, where tar is actually drawn through to the outside at times. This is why a pipe often takes on the characteristic aspects of the owner’s favorites. Latakia stays around as do, needless to say, Lake District additives. I am convinced that humectants invade the walls of the pipe more than anything, thus unrelenting gummy aromatics with no rest for the wood produce a sourly ruined pipe. In any of these cases, reaming and drilling out the shank may help. A lengthy break-in with burleys and matured Virginias would have helped to begin with but can be restorative later if one is patient. Even the coloring of meerschaums is tar being absorbed into the stone, a breaking-in of sorts, characteristically coloring them. It makes the pipe heavier and heavier over time as the process continues. In the old days of tobacconists, they used to offer a boiling service for meerschaums to remove some of this weight. Similarly, at the inns of Merry Olde England, the clays were cleaned by placing them in the hearth fire to burn off what had been absorbed in excess. Evidently, Sherlock Holmes did not do this as his clay was black and oily. The length favored by Bing and the spacer in the Charatan “After Hours” were clearly to cool the smoke by lengthening the draw distance, the ultimate along those lines being the Stryker pipe. Stingers, those strange little donjons, are used to trap sludge, and the designs look like minarets from a phantasmagorical city imagined in 1001 Nights. One can go on and on.

In order to test the performance of these various systems, I employed various blends from various manufacturers, including but not limited to:

- McClelland No. 24 Virginia, Dark Star, St. James Woods, Aurora, Frog Morton Across the Pond, Dominican Glory Maduro
- Cornell & Diehl Crooner, Manhattan Afternoon, Cross-eyed Cricket, Baalbek, Boker Or, Bailey’s Front Porch
- Mac Baren Roll Cake, Latakia, Club and Mixture Flake
- Samuel Gawith Best Brown Flake, Squadron Leader and Grousemoor
- Gawith, Hoggarth & Co. Bob’s Chocolate Flake, Coniston Cut Plug
- Sutliff Mixture No. 79
- Middleton Prince Albert and Carter Hall
Why this strange collection? They are subtle and nuanced, a one-dimensional sledge hammer, sweet or bitter, hotter than a solar flare or unflappably cool, burn sopping wet or bone dry, leave behind quite a permanent aromatic presence in the pipe or disappear unnoticeably into the air, are common or unique. They represent a cross-section of what the systems are supposed to correct, but perhaps more importantly what the systems are supposed to leave alone as the virtue of the blend. There should be a sort of Hippocratic Oath of pipe design: first, do no harm. Since this is not a tobacco review, I leave the reader to ponder which blends exhibit which characteristics for good or ill.

**Reservoir systems**

The Peterson system is probably the most successful system in the history of pipes. It is quite simple because it has three main aspects. Most importantly, the system pipes are generally bent, and there is a reservoir where sludge collects. If you don’t think it works, try a day of aromatics and see what is there. It is a military mount, and the mouthpiece is graduated in diameter, so it would never loosen over time. The graduated bore of the mouthpiece “makes the suction applied by the smoker 15 times weaker by the time it reaches the tobacco chamber. The result is that all the moisture flows into the reservoir and, thus cannot reach the smoker’s mouth.” As well, there is the famous Peterson Lip, which directs the smoke up and away from the tongue to avoid bite. The shape is contoured so that the tongue rests in the depression under the opening rather than in front of it. Given how long this has been around and in how many ways it has been copied, this all works quite well. I will say that if the funk is not removed, it soaks into the pipe fearfully, but it is an easy thing to clean.

The performance of the system makes the smoke quite cool. There is the straight variation on this system, where a metal tube extends from the bit into a small chamber beneath the bowl, making the bowl quite small, but this variation also works quite well. I have a few of the straight type that I have found to be well suited for taste-testing new blends just to get an idea of the flavor without indulging in a whole, average-sized bowl without an informed choice of pipe. It has negligible effect on the flavor.

The Kirsten system shows every sign of coming from the mind of an engineer, patented in 1940. Each aspect of the pipe shows forethought and design. The bowls are briar or meerschaum and all have a conical bore, which is the natural way combustion takes place without tamping. The rest of the pipe is made from space-age alloys, light as a feather with mil-spec tolerances and retro aesthetic sensibilities. The bowl is screwed to the main body, which is a large chamber, stopped at one end with a sort of valve made leak-proof with an o-ring. The pipe fills with an amazing amount of precipitated moisture after even a single bowl, and the valve may be rotated to prevent leakage from the air hole in the bowl, or the valve may be removed to empty the pipe. There is a ramrod fitted to the stem at the other end, and this can be used to clear the air hole in the bowl or to push tissue or cloth through the bore like cleaning a shotgun. It is an amazingly well-thought-out pipe.

This does worst, it seems to me, with ashy tobacco, like the heavier and least oily Burley and bright Virginias. The smoke with those is sooty, and as with Virginia flakes, the flavor is diminished with the removal of the moisture. However,
I have found that a Kirsten makes Mac Baren rollcakes sing, completely removing the tendency they have to incinerate the smoker with the leaf. They become cool, delicate and subtle, a dessertlike treat. The Kirsten tames the wild beast but reduces delicate and sophisticated leaf to narcolepsy. Kirsten suggests packing quite firmly, and I have found this good advice for best results.

The Falcon system is another American original, despite it coming from England today. It is a metal-shanked pipe (with a twist, in the case of the shillelagh version) and screw-in briar bowl and nylon mouthpiece invented by Kenly Bugg in Fort Wayne, Ind., in 1936. World War II slowed uptake because of the aluminum shortage, but after the war, they were produced in the millions. A spiffy-looking variation was patented in 1956, but I don’t know that it was ever produced. In the 1960s, production started in England, a few in Ireland in the 1970s, and the company was acquired by the English firm Mertin & Falcon in 1991. Very similar in design would be the Kaywoodie “Filtronic” and the Dr. Grabow Viking. This system worked adequately too, as it does not change the basic design of the pipe very much. Stuff is in the chamber under the bowl, which is of high quality, and there are “dry rings” made which can be inserted to more effectively absorb said stuff rather than having a messy surprise arrive from casual hand motions with the pipe. This is still a popular pipe and I can understand why. As far as cleaning, it does most to precipitate sludge.

Duncan Hill Aerosphere has a system that is based on a brass insert in the mouthpiece that brings in a small amount of cool air to cause precipitation into a chamber flowing into an offset channel in the stem. It is manufactured to admit the air in an exact, metered way so as to perform consistently. “The Duncan Hill Aerosphere smoking system (U.S. Pta. #4,275,747) utilizes the same principle of physics as the nanometer.” This system seems to have a mild influence toward precipitation, and no undue effect on the flavor of anything. It does not have the most powerful effect, but it does cool and drop sludge out. Not being a “closed” system like Peterson or Kirsten, it mechanizes the metering a pipe smoker does by varying the amount of air drawn in with lips parted during puffing. It is not the easiest thing to clean, but the effects are good with little distortion of the flavor.

The “Spit Valve” variants to these reservoir types might be familiar to our brass instrument-playing friends. As in the case of trumpets and trombones, there is a valve-like contraption on these pipes that can be removed, and what has precipitated may be flicked out. To my knowledge, nothing like this is being produced today, and they do not have the benefit of an o-ring to make sure they do not leak. This type of pipe would include the Johnan pipe and the Needham, which is labeled patented but with no number. This method does not cool, but these pipes do trap for removal some of the sludge.

Filter pipes
I treat these as a group, but there are a couple of leaders in this category. For the 6 mm paper filters, it is the Medico and Dr. Grabow pipes from Frank & Co. These use white or charcoal filter paper, and the smoke is drawn through the paper, removing moisture. It removes other things as well, including some subtlety of the tobacco, but surprisingly little. However, it does very well with sootier Burley leaf or bright Virginia in removing the sort of chimney flavor one gets at times. The downside is that these filters can get quite wet, depending on tobacco choice and weather, and as filters become too sodden to be as effective as when fresh, draw is also reduced. I will note that there are generic versions of the 6 mm and 9 mm both, and to me, they do not work as well as Grabows. A sidenote to the 6 mm is that they fit in most Savinellis, replacing the balsa system for which they were designed.

An interesting variation on the 6 mm filter, where the filter itself becomes the shank of the pipe directly exposed to the air, is the Medico Ventilator. There is a tube of aluminum connecting the bit to the bowl, and this has ventilating chevrons cut into it along the middle of its length. These allow air to circulate around the paper filter inside, cooling it even more. I have to say, this works remarkably well, but this design is no longer made. It is a clever modification to a fairly mundane design.

Another clever design is the Quiet Comrade (QuietComrade.com or Paparockpipes on eBay). This has a briar bowl, and there is a labyrinth in the stem, easily cleaned, effectively lengthening the pipe three times over, followed...
by the filter. Tobacco smoked in a Quiet Comrade tastes the same as it does in a filter pipe but is much cooler. It is, perhaps, the only design that comes close to a Kirsten in temperature-lowering ability. Recently, new bowls are being produced by Elie's Freehand Pipes of Belgium for the basic design. It is compact and rather retro too, but there are other models in the works that will function with the same basic principles. It is very serviceable and easy to maintain, a good comrade indeed to clean up hot and sooty blends.

There are also 9 mm filters, not at all as popular in the U.S. but the European filter norm it seems. Some are made from the same materials as the 6 mm but may also be found made from activated charcoal or even meerschaum chips. They increase the size of the shank considerably, and I think they are the principal reason that many European tobaccos are both so sweet and so hot: the flavor needs to get through one of these.

A leading and probably first 9 mm filter system is from Denicotea, the Blitz system. The company was founded in 1932 by Willy Heineberg as a cigarette filter fabricator, but pipes followed in 1935. Today, the filters are made in Switzerland from chlorine-free paper and activated charcoal and are purported to not diminish the airflow while at work. I will say that they are excellent at taking out sooty and unpleasant elements and even give a hand in making the strawlike Virginias from Africa seem somewhat better.

An astounding sidestep in pipe design, an evolutionary dead end, is the amazing Brial pipe. It has a passing resemblance to the Kirsten, but none of the beauty of form, execution or engineering. There is a briar bowl screwed onto an aluminum body, nearly fragile in construction. The body of the pipe is almost the size of a toilet paper roll and is to be stuffed with a tis-
sue as a filter for the smoke (one can imagine where the inspiration struck the inventor). I have no idea how well this works as I refuse to try it. Owning it is embarrassment enough.

Absorption systems

The Brigham pipe is a completely unique system developed in the 1930s and not duplicated in any way of which I am aware. It is referred to as a filter, but it really is an absorptive tube.

Brigham’s Kyle Wilcox notes:

At that time pipes were more in vogue and there were a lot of neo-phyles and relative amateurs smoking them. Tongue bite was one of those recurring problems that seemed to plague that particular group. Roy and Herb Brigham realized what a massive benefit it would be to develop a pipe that could eliminate it, even more so if it was also acceptable to the pros. They figured out that the cause was due largely to the tars and acids created during combustion of the tobacco. They literally tried hundreds of materials and methods of reducing these from the smoke, finding that bamboo and rock maple matched the criteria (especially the necessity of not imparting a taste of its own). Rock maple was the obvious choice, although it did create the necessity of hollowing each piece out to allow smoke to pass through it. They found that the longer the filter, the better the effect and also that there was a residual benefit of extending the wood environment beyond the shank of the pipe and into the stem.

The other feature incorporated into the design was the idea of a closed system: the filter tip joins neatly with the drilled hole in the bowl so that smoke has only one path to take. The smoke passes through the filter unimpeded, while moisture and a good deal of the tar and acid not crucial to the taste are pulled out of the smoke stream to the outer surface of the filter. The tenon that holds the filter is tapered so that the filter fits snugly at the tip but loosely in the middle and back end to allow for the buildup of the removed components between the outer surface of the filter and the tenon. This created the need for an entirely unique two-step drilling process in the pipe shank as the filter tip has to extend all the way down to the bore hole.

To achieve maximum effect and minimize the contact smoke has with the stem (which most other manufacturers accept as a must, despite the fact that stems can and do affect taste), the filter was also standardized to provide at least one inch of penetration into the pipe stem. For this reason, it is very difficult for us to create a deeply bent pipe while maintaining the pure design of the system.

Once we began making the pipes, it led to massive growth for the company. We truly changed the pipe smoking experience for many here in Canada as it was possible not only to appreciate the taming of tongue bite for neophytes, but it eliminated gurgle and backflow of saliva for the experienced as well. By extending the wood environment into the stem this also allowed experienced smokers to appreciate more of the subtleties of their favorite blends.

I must say, this design is a complete revelation. The seeming simplicity masks considerable engineering and manufacturing acumen, and it works wonderfully well. The clear benefit of removing excess moisture is to reduce the probability of bite dramatically without reducing the flavor, and possibly even enhancing it. Where has this been all my life? It is marvelous. Regardless of your experience level or tastes in tobacco, this is a must try. They offer a complete line from relatively inexpensive to higher-end pipes.

The Carey “Magic Inch” is a unique system that involves a special extension inside the mouthpiece, which itself has some vents for metering cool air into the draw from the bowl. The Magic Inch has been around for nearly 40 years and is wrapped in a papyrate sleeve. This causes the air to cool, and moisture is absorbed by the sleeve. This can be easily replaced (and should be frequently). This has an exceptional cooling effect and works quite well.
Replacing the papyrate is a bit less convenient than replacing a filter, but the upside is that it has no deleterious effect on the flavor. There are quite a few lines with basic shapes using this system, and they make good workaday pipes for general knocking around.

Most traditional in concept are the modernized sorts of clays, the ceramic pipes which now have double walls in current incarnations. This would include the Goede Waagen from Holland along with the Zenith and the Le Peltier pipes (www.lepeltier-pipes.com). These do color, in the cases of the lighter ones, but the inner bowl is separated from the outer surface by an air chamber. They do not seem to be as delicate as meerschaums, which I never smoke outside because of a pathological fear of chipping them, and one can carry them around at least with mental impunity. These modernized ceramic pipes, aside from being quite a bit cooler to the touch than the traditional clays, have the advantage of possessing normal-sized bowls. One had to develop a strange grip using the index finger above and second finger and thumb beneath to hold Victorian and Edwardian clays. However, my father (born in 1903 to place this in context) told me that his father used to wrap his clay’s bowl with rope ending in some sort of intricate knot to hold it in place (great rope knotters, the Serads, all lost in my case), allowing him to hold the clay in a way familiar to briar smokers. One can hold any of these ceramic double-walled pipes with impunity. The flavor is as expected, but I have not used one long enough to know about weight, accumulation or similar things.

The Savinelli Balsa Dry System is a simple triangular piece of balsa wood placed in the smoke stream in the stem. It is straightforward, can be left out and has little effect on flavor. It removes moisture
and is easily maintained, but it is seemingly not the most effective in removing a lot of undesirable funk. It is also the least inclined to remove a lot of flavor and has no discernible effect on draw. I replace these often, when I use them. As I mentioned, the balsa is about the size of a 6 mm filter, so that can also be tried instead. Alternatively, they can be fit in a cob for a unique trans-Atlantic experience.

The corncob is purported to have been first commercially produced in 1869 by a Dutch immigrant woodworker, Henry Tibbe. The basic corncob was patented in 1878 by Tibbe after a chemist developed a plaster-based substance applied to the outside of the bowls. His company became the Missouri Meerschaum Co. in 1907 and so remains. The cob absorbs a considerable amount of funk yet remains fairly lightweight. Most of these are manufactured with filters, but despite this hybridization, I would still classify them as absorption pipes. Aside from the current opprobrium of smoking in public, it is very déclassé to smoke these, and worse still to smoke them at your pipe club, nevermind at the Chicagoland Pipe Show. However, the truth is they smoke extraordinarily well, last quite a while, and if you run over it with the lawn mower, no great loss, just buy another five or six. A variation, though of considerable strangeness, is the Aristocob, patented in 1966. It was made by the Al Cobb Corp. of Grand Haven, Mich., back in the day. It is a spacey variation on the corncob, with a cob bowl inside a ventilated shell and stem. If George Jetson smoked a pipe, it would be an Aristocob. (Mr. Spacely would smoke a Kirsten.) Cob inserts were made by Missouri Meerschaum from the early 1970s through 1983, but they are no longer available.

There are untold numbers of variations on these themes. Once the search begins, the sheer number of these devices boggles the mind. Please note that much of this development happened before the advent of means of communication other than verbal or writing stole away treasured free time spent peering through self-made clouds of ambrosial tobacco smoke in contemplative reverie, the powers of inspiration now sapped. Time to sit and think, alone, is gone, stolen away on the electron. I commend to your attention the astounding (and astoundingly voluminous) collection of patent art at www.patentplaceusa.com, which you may purchase to decorate a considerable portion of the average-sized American home. To be honest, only a few of these system pipes appeal to me, like the classic cob, the Petersens of my youth, the Kirsten for making taste-sense of Mac Baren incendiaries, and the Brigham for just about anything, the last making me wish we had taken Canada during the Revolutionary War.

Regardless, one cannot but admire the sheer inventiveness of our fellow pipe smokers. I think I’ll go light up a bowl of something and use skill at puffing to suppress the design deficiencies while I contemplate the towering creative resourcefulness of humanity.
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On July 21, 1586, Francis Pretty tended the ship's log for the Hugh Gallant as it set sail from Plymouth, England. Aboard the vessel, Pretty wrote, there were “123 persons of all sorts” under “the charges of the Worshipful Master Thomas Cavendish.” The Hugh Gallant voyaged to the New World with two larger ships, the Content and the Desire.

For Cavendish and his fellow buccaneers, the journey would become historic: It was among the first voyages around the world, and it was fraught with troubles. After reaching the New World, the fleet became separated by a blustery March storm on the Atlantic.

According to Pretty, “This storm continued 3 or 4 days, and for that time we in the Hugh Gallant being separated from the other 2 ships, looked every hour to sink, our bark was so leak, and ourselves so dilvered and weakened with freeing it of water, that we slept not in three days and three nights.”

The sailors managed to save the ship despite their “dilvered” state—and there is likely no better word to express the crew’s condition. The Dictionary of Archaisms and Provincialisms describes “dilvered” as: “wearied; confused; heavy; drowsy; shivery; nervous.”

The ship’s log is rich with idiosyncratic idioms. Throughout his journal, Pretty calls ships “barks,” as in the phrase “our bark was so leak.” Whenever the ship reached a new destination, he wrote of men building a new “pinnace,” a small boat used for local travel and to repair the big ship while moored. Successfully navigating a 16th century ship’s log requires an obscure dictionary or two.

Such a colloquial richness is also a hallmark of the lexicon of the tobacco leaf. It turns out Thomas Cavendish is, of course, a seminal figure in the development of the modern leaf. Ultimately, his name has bequeathed a legacy that is both ubiquitous and ambiguous in tobacco phraseology. Exploring the agricultural and lingual origins of the major New World tobaccos that are the building blocks of most modern blends reveals both subtle nuances and stark variations in cultivation and curing methods that, in time, have resulted in the unique characteristics seen today.

At some point after his 1585 journey as a captain in the Roanoke voyages and before his second attempt to sail the world, Cavendish experimented with flavoring tobaccos. Historical accounts are ambiguous about exactly when and how it occurred. Nevertheless, it is known that his first expedition to “the Americas” landed Cavendish and his ship, then the Elizabeth, in what is now North Carolina—and also landed him a key role in transporting tobacco across the high seas. Some accounts that cover the period describe Cavendish applying sugar to tobacco, probably by dipping the leaves in sugar water. A few suggest he either stored tobacco in rum barrels or directly applied rum to the leaves. All are certainly possible. The precise truth probably died with Cavendish in 1592 amid his second attempt to sail around the world. However, his name persists as among the most commonly used in tobacco lexicon.

By 1851 and the first World’s Fair, Cavendish tobacco was among the most decorated U.S. agricultural products. Held in London, the fair was a “Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations” and included agricultural competition. Among American goods, tobacco with the name Cavendish won three Prize Medals, the most in an expansive class that included products such as flour, ham and wheat.

The many connotations of Cavendish

Today, in perhaps the most significant sense, the term Cavendish typically describes a “lightly flavored Virginia that is pressed, aged and thinly sliced,” says Mary McNiel, president of McClelland Tobacco Co. of Kansas City, Mo.—though this definition is surely not an exclusive one. “It is one of those words that have been used in so many different ways. There’s Cavendish in the sense of the Cavendish cut, which usually means pressed and neatly sliced.”

The light flavorings used in Cavendish cover a wide range, but among the more traditional ones are sugar, honey, maple and rum, the lat-
ter two among the featured flavors in McClelland’s Townsman. Virginia leaf tends to take the lead in most Cavendish blends, sometimes accompanied by Burley or Maryland. Cavendish comes both intact as slices or fully rubbed out. Tobaccos marketed as Cavendish are so varied that less experienced smokers are apt to think the term is synonymous with pipe tobacco itself.

For some purists, the name Cavendish should be reserved only for tobacco that has been re-humidified at some point, increasing fermentation. This more narrow definition requires reintroduction of humidity to the leaf either by steaming it or sweating it a second time—sweating is the process by which tobacco is packed tightly and fermented.

Sorting tobacco into meaningful categories can be an exercise in logic, and McNiel finds Cavendish a valuable term when it comes to understanding tobacco as it pertains to degree of flavoring. Author Richard Carleton Hacker writes in Pipesmoking: A 21st Century Guide, “… all blends can be divided into two categories: English and Aromatic.” But this duality belies important distinctions and is probably better described as “flavored and unflavored.” Hacker’s dichotomous system discounts the vast differences between unflavored Virginias and English tobaccos, which are generally understood to include some Orientals. Further, it places relatively subtle Cavendish blends in the same tobacco barn with aromatics—ones with copious casings from coconuts to strawberries.

Instead, McNiel prefers a categorization on a flavor-added continuum that begins with pure, unflavored tobacco. Such a typology would start with matured and unflavored Virginias. Next would be English blends, followed by Cavendish, and finally aromatics with flavorings added after curing.

Alongside the flavoring scale is a continuum of color. The hue of a leaf stems first from its variety: the soil and conditions under which it is grown. Curing comes next, during which the color of tobacco can be enhanced dramatically, especially bright Virginias. Curing is the initial drying of tobacco leaves through heat, air or both. Next, the time allotted for sweating, fermentation and aging will affect color, and finally, the hue can be deepened and darkened prior to tinning or packaging by stoving or similar techniques. Black Cavendish is, by and large, a stoved Cavendish. Stoving is a popular process of slowly “cooking” tobacco at low heat. The method mutes many of the delicate overtones, but it also decreases tongue bite and brings the sugars to the forefront, which makes it a welcome way to treat some Virginias.

McClelland stoves its own tobaccos using “heat, pressure and a little moisture,” says McNiel, in a process that cooks some of the tongue attack out of the leaf. “With unstoved Virginia, you have to be careful with that first light, but with stoved Virginia, we’ve cooked some of that initial (bite) out of it.”

Smokers who like a particular tobacco, yet find the bite unbearable, may wish to try stoving—keeping in mind moisture loss, an unavoidable side effect of the process. A popular home stoving method involves heating tobacco in a slow-cook pot and occasionally stirring to distribute moisture. Another is placing tobacco in an airtight jar inside an oven. With any stoving technique, it is likely that moisture will need to be restored to the tobacco (see “Water: an essential element for sustaining pipe tobacco” P&T, Summer 2008). Temperatures used for home stoving are generally low, ranging from about 200’ to 250 degrees. Similar tobacco “cooking” techniques include roasting and toasting.

Among McClelland’s most richly stoved tobaccos is Dark Star, which demonstrates that even the lightest-colored leaves can be transformed to jet black with substantial stoving. “It starts as a lemony, bright Virginia,” says McNiel. “Then, like the sun turns tobacco dark, stoving turns it black and concentrates the sugars. It’s like taking fresh fruit from the tree, then cooking it. It turns mellow and black—almost caramelized.”

Virginia is for (tobacco) lovers

The bright Virginia leaf of which McNiel speaks is the cornerstone of the Virginia pipe tobacco industry—and, as a true lover of Virginias, McNiel speaks both reverently and enthusiastically. When high-quality Virginia is flue-cured, it becomes strikingly vivid, which gave rise to the word “bright” in the leaf’s moniker and made flue-curing the preferred process for Virginias.

Flue-curing became popular in the late 1800s with the accidental discovery that the combination of Virginia tobacco and flue-curing produced a particularly brightly colored leaf, according to author Carl Ehwa Jr. in his book Pipes & Tobacco. A worker at a Caswell County, N.C., tobacco plantation, writes Ehwa, “fell asleep while tending the curing of tobacco and the fires burned down. Trying to revive them in haste, he added charcoal to the fire. The tobacco became brighter and brighter ... The importance of this accident is not so much that fireless, smokeless heat was used, but that this type of heat was used on the particular bright tobaccos
of Virginia and Carolina." Flue-curing had been tried with other tobaccos in Maryland, Ohio and Missouri, but it did not yield the dramatic brightness produced by flue-curing Virginia leaf. Ehwa describes a typical flue-curing process: Fresh leaf is immediately transported to the flues, and temperatures are increased in three distinct phases to a maximum of 175 degrees.

McNiel likens the process of flue-curing tobacco to steaming vegetables in terms of the vivid colors it produces. Although no steam is introduced during flue-curing, "The moisture in the leaf kind of steams the tobacco. In that moist environment, curing really brings out the color. I like to say that it's like when you steam veggies, it makes them very bright, as opposed to, say, boiling them. (Flue-curing) gives that depth of color."

The color-fixing process of flue-curing is far superior to fire-curing, writes Ehwa. "Flue-cured tobacco leaves bear little resemblance to those which have been fire-cured. When the smoking qualities of the two are compared, the difference between them is even more noticeable. Flue-cured tobaccos are light-bodied with a subtle taste and aroma. Fire-cured tobaccos tend to be rather strong, lacking sweetness and delicacy of aroma." While fire-curing may not produce the bright leaf found in flue-cured Virginia, the process can indeed produce some robust flavors, most notably those found in Latakia.

To unravel the myriad distinctions given to Virginias, a pipe smoker needs to explore the key geographic belts in which they are grown. Both the color and flavor of Virginia bright leaf are affected foremost by the soil in which they take root and the surrounding climate. "The soil and growing conditions are key," says McNiel, "for example: whether the air is dry or it's coming in from the sea and is salty—all those things contribute to the characteristics of the tobacco plant."

The Old Belt comprises much of the Piedmont regions of North Carolina and Virginia, stretching from roughly Roanoke, Va., to Winston-Salem and Greensboro, N.C. Tobacco plants here, in the most western Virginia belt, are the richest and deepest in color. While the belts are not exclusive to a single strain of tobacco, darker Virginias like mahogany are most likely to be found here along with deeper red varieties.

Moving east, the Middle Belt picks up near Danville, Va., on its northern edge and encompasses Durham and Raleigh, N.C., stretching southward slightly across the South Carolina border. Tobaccos found at home here are the orange variety of Virginias and lighter reds.

Farthest to the east is the New Belt, or Eastern Belt, which is prime territory for the lightest of the Virginias, the yellows and lemons. Much of the eastern portion of North Carolina makes up the New Belt, from north of Greenville stretching south toward Wilmington on the coast. In addition to changes in color throughout the belts, sugar content and smoking characteristics shift with geography.

"New Belt tobacco has the highest sugar content and it's a very lemony or bright yellow," says McNiel. Moving west, "The Middle Belt reds and oranges have a more mellow sweetness, a richer, deeper sweet. And you move right down the color chart—and sweetness chart—as you get into the Old Belt."

Each belt produces plants with their own desirable characteristics. While New Belt Virginias are known for their lemony sweetness, McNiel points out, "Middle Belt oranges tend to age well and have pleasing aroma." The darker Old Belt Virginia makes a superb base for many blends, writes Ehwa, "because it provides richness and substantially more body than lighter Virginia types."

McCranie's Pipe and Tobacco Shop of Charlotte, N.C., is responsible for shining the spotlight on the appealing qualities of red Virginia with its Red Flake and Red Ribbon. Because it is in the middle of the spectrum, Todd McCranie says red brings the best of Virginia leaf from both ends of the color continuum: the sweetness of brighter leaf but the subtleties of darker leaf. "It's got the combination of richness and sweetness, a full, satisfying smoke that's not overpowering," he says. "It has subtleties that last well throughout the bowl. It still has good depth. It's a little bit more rounded and fuller than a brighter Virginia."

By using a single crop of red Virginia, as opposed to a blend, McCranie likens the popular tinned tobacco to fine Scotch whiskey. "It's kind of like the difference between single malt Scotch and blended Scotch," he says. "We find the best possible crop from one good year, and we (tin) it until it's gone."

And just this year, the crop of 1996 red Virginia that McCranie's had been tinning for the last decade or so reached the last leaf. McCranie's premiere tins of Red Flake and Red Ribbon came from a 1983 crop and were released in 1984. The '96 crop replaced that one, and now McCranie's is releasing its 2000 crop of red, which required sitting through several samples.

"It came down to three samples pretty quick," he says. "We feel like we did it again with the 2000 crop—it may be our best crop yet. It took fewer samples to find the crop this time than in years past—we must be getting better at it."

Flue-cured tobaccos are also produced in the Border Belt, a region shared by North and South Carolina. Some are also produced in Georgia, Florida and, to a small extent, Alabama.

**The birth—and berth—of the Burley Belt**

Soils stretching to the west of the Virginia belts, especially in Kentucky and Tennessee, supply the quintessential growing environment for Burley, though it has also found a happy home in portions of Missouri, North and South Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. The wide berth of Burley has helped make it a particularly successful breed of tobacco. White Burley smoked in today's pipes is traceable to the cooperation of farmers in two states in counties separated by the Ohio River.

Tobacco from south of the Ohio River in Bracken County, Ky., made its way north of the river to Brown County, Ohio, either as seed or seedlings. A letter dated 1922, published by the American Historical Society in the *History of Kentucky*, includes an account submitted by the son of Kentucky tobacco farmer George Barkley. His story recalls two Ohio tenant farmers running "short of plants at setting time" in 1867. One of the men, Joseph Fore, crossed the river to purchase plants from Barkley.

When the Kentucky crop took root...
north of the river, it became the grandfather of the modern white Burley. For fellow farmer George Webb noticed the Kentucky transplants were rather remarkable: “From these plants sprang a half dozen stalks which were notable for their light color and fine texture, and the seed was saved from these plants.”

Another convincing account was written in 1875 and published in 1912 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Bulletins of the Bureau of Plant Industry. It describes Webb procuring seed from across the river and finding some of the plants it produced as “peculiar … diseased and dwarfed,” so he discarded them. But when similar plants from leftover seed reappeared the subsequent year, Webb became curious.

Ultimately, Webb and his contemporaries would become enthralled with the creamy color and considerably milder flavor of white Burley as compared to the darker Burley crops known at the time. For modern pipe smokers, however, Burley’s popularity stems chiefly from its hospitality toward flavorings. Compared to Virginia, it is low in sugar and has relatively little flavor. The subdued inherent flavor of Burley helps it carry casings effectively with very little fanfare of its own. Burley is typically air or sun cured.

Somewhere between Burley and Virginia is Maryland tobacco, a leaf light in original color, known for exceptional burning quality. As described by the Tobacco Dictionary, “In color and weight Maryland tobacco stands between flue-cured (Virginia) and Burley.”

The direct ancestry of the darker, heavier Burley that preceded Webb’s discovery of the white strain is not entirely clear. Most tobacco historians believe its predecessor was a Virginia seed planted farther west. However, there’s a strong argument to be made that Burley first germinated from Maryland seed (though the original Maryland is also likely a descendant of Virginia). The 1912 bulletins make the case for Maryland as the biological parent:

“Whether the development of Burley tobacco in (Kentucky and Ohio) was from the Maryland type of seed … or from the Virginia type of seed, history does not make clear. Burley tobacco more closely resembles the tobacco of Maryland in general appearance than it resembles the Virginia type. This is true in point of general character, including body and color …”

The derivation of the name Burley is widely believed to be a surname. As reported in the U.S. bulletins, “The origin of the name Burley is uncertain, but is said by some to be derived from the name of a grower, or perhaps, as others think, it was so named for Lord Burleigh of England.”

States of the Burley Belt also produce other varieties of leaves, including both air- and fire-cured Dark Kentucky and air-cured One Sucker.

**A French—Caribbean, English, Indian, Oriental, and perhaps Spanish—connection**

Far to the south of the Virginia and Burley belts, only a pipe smoke or two from the Gulf of Mexico, lie the lowlands that gave rise to the legendary Perique. Among the fascinating dimensions of this tobacco are its broad cultural connections—although it is grown only in a small portion of a single parish in Louisiana. Native Americans were first to develop a version of what would eventually be called Perique. Their techniques were later adopted by a New World inhabitant of French descent, according to William C. Rense, writing for the journal Economic Botany in 1968:

> “Popular legend states that Perique was originally grown in the St. James Parish area by the pre-Columbian Choctaw and Chickasah Indians … in the 1820s, a young Acadian, Pierre Chenet, attempted to cure the local Louisiana tobacco by allowing it to ferment within its own juices under great pressure …”

The wonderfully potent flavor of Perique and its gentleness to the palate has put the tobacco in great demand. Standing in conspicuous testimony to the importance of indigenous soils in the cultivation of a particular tobacco are the many failed attempts to grow Perique elsewhere.

Despite its Native American roots, Perique is decidedly Oriental in character and use. It is far too potent to serve as the predominant leaf in a pipe blend and is put into play only with great restraint. Its popularity extends to other forms of tobacco, including exotic cigarettes, but its premier place is in the pipe—as Ehwa realized more than three decades ago: Perique’s “major role will always be in high-grade mixtures for the pipe,” he projected in 1974. “It is indispensable in making fine English mixtures, adding spice and aroma without adding bite.”

In part, Perique may be unique because its origin likely diverges from most New World leaf, which is believed to descend from South America, specifically Brazil. Instead, the first Perique plants were probably progenies of the Caribbean. Rense reports that Perique was likely “carried into Louisiana by early French or Spanish settlers … resemblance to the Dominican Andullo and the coastal tobacco of Puerto Rico suggests a common origin …”

According to its legend, the name Perique comes from Pierre Chenet’s nickname. The tobacco may have more global connections than any other leaf, but it is likely that cultivation of the prized leaf will not wander far from home, nor will it stray much from its chief role as a component in premium pipe tobacco blends.

By wandering as far from home as one could go, mariners of the 16th century helped spread the word of New World tobaccos far and wide. More than two years after setting sail, Thomas Cavendish, Francis Pretty, the Hugh Gallant and what remained of its crew arrived back home in Europe with perilous seafaring style: They weathered another violent storm that threatened to short-circuit the successful circumnavigation in its closing moments. Shortly before reaching port Sept. 9, 1588, the vessel shed most of its shredded sails to vicious winds. Pretty wrote:

> “After a terrible tempest which carried away most part of our sails, by the merciful favour of the Almighty we recovered our long-wished port of Plymouth in England, from whence we set forth at the beginning of our voyage.”

And in regards to the importance of the Hugh Gallant’s voyage to tobacco history and its lexicon, we echo Pretty’s sentiments. P&T
“I am a fan,” exclaims Jean-Francois Butori when discussing French pipemaker Pascal Piazzolla. The owner of Lugdunum Cigare, in Lyon, France, Butori points to a six-foot display in his shop window that contains several examples of Piazzolla’s work. “Pascal makes a good briar pipe. Two or three times a year he comes to the shop to show me his latest models.” Butori scratches his short beard and breaks into a smile, saying, “I make my selections and a few minutes later he’s clipped each one onto the display in such a way that it looks good from the outside of the shop. He makes my job that much easier.”

Butori also points out a small machine on a side table in his shop. “This contraption is Pascal’s too. He gave it to me so that I could shine my customers’ dull pipes. He even repairs broken pipes, no matter who the manufacturer, for a reasonable sum. I don’t know of any other pipemaker in France who provides such intensive customer service.”

Butori’s comments regarding Piazzolla’s dedication to customer service evoke an image of Alfred Fuller, founder of the Fuller Brush Co., who based his novel early 20th century door-to-door sales technique on a similar client-friendly approach with the simple motto: “Design it to work, craft it to last and guarantee it—no matter what.”

A European pipe expert outside of the retail trade judges Piazzolla’s work as below par esthetically and the quality of briar as pedestrian when compared with the creations of more contemporary high-end German, Italian and Japanese artisans who are currently favored by American collectors. French pipemakers, with some rare exceptions, do not fare much better in his view, especially the traditional pipemakers of Saint-Claude.

That may be true; however, as one tobacconist says, it is Piazzolla’s feisty determination to craft and deliver a quality product at a reasonable price point that has kept many average French citizens away from cigarettes and in the circle of pipe smokers. It is also, we may note, somewhat difficult to make comparisons such as this when the prices for these French pipes are so much lower.

Most Piazzolla pipes retail for less than $135 and are carried by a loyal cadre of some 300 French tobacconists. However, that’s down from 900 separate accounts 20 years ago.

Such a downward trend at the retail level reflects a paradigm shift in the purchasing habits of dedicated pipe smokers in France, where popular intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre were often featured in the press smoking a pipe. Professionals point to the rise of online retailers who specialize in the high-end market with a new generation of designer pipemakers eager to both showcase their
creations and interact in real time with a global clientele of smokers and collectors.

Times have changed however, and the door-to-door approach to tobacco retailers that has sustained Piazzolla for nearly 40 years no longer makes commercial sense. Nor does it make personal sense for an older man who is still keen about finding his professional niche in a diminishing consumer market. So recently, Piazzolla has dedicated himself to repairing pipes and has invested in a professionally designed Web site, www.piazzolla-pascal.com. While Piazzolla claims that he has never touched a computer because his wife and associate, Thérèse, keeps the books and responds to e-mails, he hopes that collectors will find his services on the Internet.

As a Marseilles pipe collector muses, “No one questions when paintings or antique furniture get quality restoration, why not pipes?” Several collectors have already entrusted Piazzolla with their damaged pipes. “It could be cleaning only the bowl or the shank—I won’t touch the chamber—or finding a replacement for a broken stem. I have all the parts and tools in my shop to fit just about any vintage briar or clay pipe,” Piazzolla says. “I get pleasure from discovering how these vintage briars were carved, and when the client retrieves his repaired item, I tell him about my collection of old pipes, which usually leads to a nice order to boot.”

On his Web site, Piazzolla labels himself a “Master Pipemaker,” a promotion from the more modest artisan pipemaker that he calls himself in conversation. By doing so, he is virtually tweaking the nose of the Saint-Claude pipe establishment, which claims that it alone can bestow the “Master Pipemaker” title through its professional association, the Confrérie des Maîtres Pipiers de Saint-Claude. Piazzolla asserts that its executives have tried to edge him out of various industry contests and exhibits after he left Saint-Claude for Haute-Savoie, approximately 70 miles south.

The drive from the pristine lake town of Annecy in Haute-Savoie to visit the Piazzolla workshop takes a mere 20 minutes. At a turn of the road, the landscape suddenly transforms from urban to pastoral and drivers must be wary for unhurried livestock standing on the road.

Wedged in an Alpine valley approximately 2,400 feet above sea level, the village of Aviernoz consists of a few dozen houses and a modest hotel that’s popular with hikers. Across from the solitary café sits a three-story building and a barn converted into Piazzolla’s workshop, where Pascal lives with Thérèse and their two sons.

“We achieved what we set out to do,” Piazzolla proudly states. “We have our own home and a proper place to work.”

The workshop is bathed in light. The street-level storage area contains thousands of stems and filters line the walls, while the work area is on the second floor. The dozens of rolls of dark sandpaper, boxes of rough ebauchons and half-finished pipes look as if the surf left behind a load of amber-colored driftwood.

Both Piazzollas are in their late 60s, open-faced, silver-haired, with the unvarnished look of hard-working French country folks. Pascal, clean-shaven, recently underwent a jaw operation and had to give up pipe smoking for a while. “A briar smokes best when it’s been allowed
to rest for two months, that’s when I’ll be going back to it,” he says.

When the couple married in Saint-Claude 48 years ago, Piazzolla worked as a diamond cutter. His father, a former carabinieri, had immigrated with his wife and eight children to France from Puglia, one of Italy’s poorest regions, shortly after World War II. He found a job in a Saint-Claude pipe stem factory but died shortly afterward when Piazzolla was only 12. Two years later, the boy quit school to support his family.

“I found diamond cutting monotonous, and I was looking for a way out,” he says. “An uncle told me that pipes were the future, so I found a job as an apprentice at Chacom and quickly became a stylist.”

To add to his meager pay, he would moonlight for seven other pipemakers in Saint-Claude.

“By then, pipemaking was in my blood and I knew that’s what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

In the 1970s, Madame Lacroix, the wife of highly regarded pipemaker Jean Lacroix, offered Piazzolla a sales position, which Piazzolla quickly accepted.

“I had a family by then and saw the opportunity to make more money,” he says simply.

Piazzolla spent 17 years selling briar pipes to tobacco shops across France, Belgium and Switzerland, which taught him what smokers wanted. The modest financial success came at the expense of family time because the job required Piazzolla to be on the road for months at a time.

“My boys told their playmates that they didn’t have a father,” he says. “They live with us, but they don’t want anything to do with the pipe business and I don’t blame them.”

When Lacroix died in 1982 and his heirs closed the shop, Piazzolla found himself out of a job. Still a resident of Saint-Claude, Piazzolla opened his own pipe studio. He had the tools, a good knowledge of the craft and his former Lacroix customers who needed an alternative to the now-defunct Lacroix pipes. Short of capital to lease a workshop, he set up his equipment in unlikely places—an apartment balcony or a rat-infested abandoned shack. But once he discovered Aviernoz in the 1990s, Piazzolla bought his first house and started working on establishing his own atelier.

Rather than join her voluble husband, Therese sits down at the end of a long counter. She grabs some goggles and turns the switch on the 6-inch buffing wheel and its overhead light. Soon soft cotton wheels swish over a reddish briar soothed with a bit of carnauba wax. Her nails are painted pink but the fingertips show the faint scars of decades of pipe finishing—sanding the rough briar, staining or waxing, then fitting the stem tightly into the shank.

According to Piazzolla, Thérèse is one of the rare women in the industry able to complete the nearly 60 operations required to turn an ebauchon into a finished pipe. While she can drill a pipe, Thérèse prefers sanding and finishing to performing the engineering. “I like to do what I do best,” she says. “I
like to know that when a smoker gets a Piazzolla pipe he’s getting one without any flaws. Besides, those drills are awfully hard to calibrate.”

While those drills might be hard for Thérèse to calibrate, Piazzolla heaps praise upon them and his other equipment. “I designed some of those parts myself,” he comments proudly. “This one can drill into the hardest wood, ebony, which is a wonderful wood for pipes but too hard to work and too expensive to sell.”

Piazzolla exhibits an innovative touch to his machinery, but he also has pioneered simple solutions to age-old problems to his finished pipes. He has designed a series of flat-bottomed pipes that have magnets taped to the bottom so that they can sit easily on metal surfaces, which is very useful for shop displays as well as smokers, who can put the pipe down without spilling any of its contents. He has also fitted some of his pipes with meerschaum filters that he says cool the smoke.

The perfect pipe, in Piazzolla’s estimation, must start with a good-grained, well-seasoned ebauchon. After 15 steps, the pipe’s tobacco chamber and airhole are ready to be drilled. “Drill a perfectly centered shaft that’s exactly 3.5 mm wide and you’ll get a perfectly engineered pipe,” he says. “Get it wrong and the pipe is useless.”

The precision necessary to be a diamond cutter prepared him for the skills necessary to become a pipemaker.

“Cutting diamonds requires the same precision work needed to shape a block of briar into a pipe,” he comments. “Briar may be more forgiving but it is also more painstaking. An ebauchon requires 60 steps before I can ship out a finished pipe. I learned on my own without teachers or mentors, just by trial and error, and there were a lot of errors. Now, I’ve done it so long that my hand seems to know the way without asking my head.”

Off the workshop floor, Piazzolla has made a room for a gallery that showcases the menagerie of smoking instruments he has collected throughout his career. Among them are hundreds of briar pipes as well as approximately 600 clay pipes.

One of the more fascinating pieces in his collection is a clay pipe with a stem that’s three feet long. According to Piazzolla, the pipe dates to the 17th century and might have belonged to Marie de Medici, whose crowned features are engraved on the bowl. The French queen is said to have suffered migraine headaches that could only be soothed by smoking tobacco.

Piazzolla hopes that his presence on the Internet will smooth his path to semi-retirement that will combine pipe restoration and order fulfillment from his regular customers. In an off moment, he puts his hand on his wife’s wrist and says, “We could use a rest.”

Piazzolla also hopes to establish a pipe museum that he hopes will draw tourists from nearby Annecy. Who knows, maybe after seeing the Piazzollas’ work and hearing their tale, those tourists might become supporters of this original and resilient pipemaking duo. P&T
Renaissance man

Whether it’s making homemade sausage, distilling his own grappa, creating a painting or carving a briar masterpiece, Luigi Viprati is an all-around master

Approximately a dozen oil paintings adorn the walls and shelves in the close confines of Luigi Viprati’s studio, located on the ground floor of a condominium in Pontoglio, about halfway between Milan and Verona in northern Italy. The paintings reflect a cubist influence rendered in swatches of bright color. Some are no more than a few basic shapes painted on the canvas, while others are more complicated, featuring portraits and landscapes. All of them possess a level of sophistication expected from a talented artist whose work could be displayed in the world’s best museums; however, they’ve been created by a man whose fame has not been forged in the realm of oils, canvases and easels but rather in the field of briar, stains and sandpaper.

Somewhere near 50 years of age, Viprati is something of a modern-day Renaissance man. His face is covered with a perpetual three-day scruff and framed by a shaggy mane that falls to his shoulders. Yet Viprati’s unkempt appearance cannot conceal a passionate joie de vivre, in which the man keeps a humorous glint in his eyes, displays a tendency to chuckle when he talks and possesses a willingness to share his many talents with friends and strangers alike. When he’s not making pipes or painting, he’s at work distilling his own grappa or making homemade sausages, both of which he pleasantly doles out in large quantities. Viprati radiates an aura of mischievous fun, and one can’t help but feel he’ll miss out on the experience if he doesn’t have that second helping of sausage or that third snort of grappa.

Viprati’s workshop is small, at approximately 350 square feet, and slightly cramped, with machinery, drill bits and sandpaper wheels seemingly everywhere. Viprati stores his briar in burlap sacks that are stuffed inside empty milk crates in a corner of the room.

Having earned quite a reputation for his ability to produce pipes featuring stunning straight-grain patterns, Viprati says that the secret to regularly
bringing out the best grain a block can produce is no secret at all—it just takes a little extra effort.

“I go into the mountains several times a year to be with the briar cutters,” Viprati relates. “I spend two or three days there, and it’s fun—very rustic—but it’s also very important because I can look at each burl that comes out of the ground and suggest to the cutter how I would like it cut. I like to have my ebauchons cut larger than most so I have more options of what I can do with them. Also when you go to the mountains and look for your own briar you can often find very nice large pieces. The briar harvesters are paid by weight, and sometimes the managers don’t want to pay so much for big heavy pieces, so they are left on the mountain, but if you’re there you can insist on getting those larger pieces. Pipemakers who don’t go to the mountains themselves have no idea what kind of briar is really available. Most of them go to the mills where the briar’s already been cut, so they have no input into how they want their blocks, nor do they have access to the really big blocks.”

As an example, Viprati reaches into a bag and pulls out a large plateau block—at least eight inches long by six inches high. He studies the grain pattern for a moment and continues.

“This piece can be cut three different ways,” he says, holding it to the florescent light hanging a foot above his head. “I could try to cut as little away from it as possible to make a big pipe like a Canadian. I always try to make the larger pipe first because those are higher quality and demand more money. More often though, the wood just isn’t good enough to make a large pipe, so I’ll study the block some more to try to salvage the best I can from it. Sometimes that means carving two pipes out of the block. Other times that means using the briar as barbecue wood.”

Viprati mainly uses briar from Tuscany and Calabria, though he’s beginning to obtain pieces from Corsica as well.

“The mountains in Corsica are very wild and there should be some really nice briar there,” he says. “The best briar I can get is from Italy, southern France, Corsica and some in Greece.”
Although he makes the arduous trek into the mountains several times a year to personally inspect briar harvesting, Viprati estimates that he still consigns close to 30 percent of the briar he buys to the barbecue pit. Only 10 or 15 percent of his briar stock will yield high-quality pipes, such as his Collection or Fiammata series. Medium-quality pipes may be carved from 20 to 30 percent of his briar. The remaining blocks are sandblasted or rusticated.

“This one has potential to be an excellent pipe,” Viprati says, a broad smile creasing his face. He settles onto a low stool, loads tobacco into his pipe and lights it. Taking deep puffs on his pipe, Viprati sends massive blue-gray plumes into his workshop’s atmosphere as he draws a freehand shape onto the side of the block.

“If there are no flaws that develop, this pipe should easily become a Fiammata,” he exclaims before making the first cuts into the briar. He puts the wood to the saw and small triangular chunks, looking like pizza slices, are ejected from the block. After each cut, Viprati brings the block close to his face to inspect it. The clench of his jaw on his pipe’s stem relaxes more with each inspection as his face once again slowly breaks into a broad smile.

“This will be a very beautiful pipe,” he confirms. Although Viprati speaks in Italian, his friend Alberto Belometti translates, though translation is not necessary to discern Viprati’s excitement over this piece’s potential.

“He gets very happy when he thinks a piece of briar will make a high-quality pipe,” Belometti, who makes sausages and grappa with Viprati, says. “Yes, they can demand more money, but my friend is more interested in creating the high-quality pieces as an expression of his art.”

Satisfied with the basic shape of the pipe, Viprati drills the tobacco chamber and the mortise. The tobacco chamber is drilled using the size of Viprati’s right index finger to the second knuckle as the template. He uses a more complicated method when drilling the air hole.

“I leave a very small space between the mortise and the tenon to aid airflow,” he says. “Then I drill the air hole starting at 4 mm at the tenon and gradually reduce the diameter to 3.5 mm in the middle of the mouthpiece to 2.6 or 2.8 mm, depending on the size of the pipe, at the lip.”

For his higher-quality pipes, Viprati hand cuts mouthpieces from acrylic rods or crafts them from amber or horn. For the lower-quality pieces, Viprati uses ready-made mouthpieces that he shapes to fit each pipe. “Every pipe I make has its own demands for a mouthpiece,” he comments. “But I tend to make my mouthpieces very thin with a bend because the market prefers them.”

With the holes drilled, Viprati begins the sanding process using 80-grit sandpaper. Depending on how he would like to shape the pipe, Viprati uses sandpaper disks that have varying rounded edges—some give him the ability to make smoother contours, while others create sharper angles. He strips away a layer of wood and then applies an orange stain, which when dry allows him to look at the grain and see where the softer parts of the wood are.

Viprati reflects while the stain dries, mulling over whether to leave the original plateau surface atop the pipe or to remove it when he starts sanding. While he’s sure that removing the surface will reveal excellent bird’s-eye, he decides that less is more and opts to leave the surface as it is.

From 80-grit, he moves to 120, then 220, followed by 320 and 400. Viprati sands by hand with the 500-grit paper. Through the sanding process, Viprati comes across only one flaw. He stops the machine, grabs a sharp pick and digs at the flaw. It’s only an imperfection on the surface and once Viprati is satisfied it’s gone, he sands some more.

While Viprati sands, Belometti says that it’s unusual for Viprati to create such a unique pipe during the day. “He usually works on his best pieces during the night, when he can work without interruption and feels the most inspiration,” Belometti comments. “He does more of the regular work during the day with the help of his brothers, but when the night comes he stays, drinks a little grappa and carves away. Sometimes he’s here until 5 a.m.”

Working with his brothers, Viprati makes 300 to 350 Fiammata or Collection pipes a year and 1,000 to
1,200 of the lower grades. The brothers, Giuseppe, Antonio and Cesare, do the simple tasks, such as cutting the wood into basic blocks or etching the nomenclature onto the briar. Viprati carries out all the other procedures himself.

Viprati pipes are separated into eight grades. Rusticated pipes and sandblasts make up the lower grades and then the rest have smooth finishes. The smooth pipes are broken into four grades, starting with 1Q—Q standing for quadrifoglio, Italian for four-leaf clover—and then 2Q, 4Q and 5Q. Viprati reserves Fiammata and Collection grades for the best examples of his work.

“Half of my production is sandblasted or rusticated,” Viprati explains. “The rest are smooth, with most of those falling into the 1Q to 2Q range because I make pipes the traditional way and don’t use any putty to hide imperfections. To qualify for a 4Q or higher, the pipe must have excellent bird’s-eye or grain. Fiammatas have very strong straight grain. And Collection grade pipes are very large pipes that don’t have any imperfections. I like bigger pipes because you can show off more of the pipe’s details.”

Viprati also likes bigger pipes because they typically fetch more value in the market. “My pipes sell from $190 for rusticated or sandblasts to as much as nearly $650 for Fiammata. I never set a price for my Collection pipes so that I can let an individual collector judge the pipe’s value to him and name the price he wants to pay. The most expensive pipe I have sold was nearly $10,000.”

Combining his interests in art with pipemaking, Viprati produces an annual series named after Salvatore Dali, one of his favorite artists. Inspired by great artists’ renderings of pipes on canvas, Viprati shapes each year’s edition to honor a pipe that appears in a painting. The shapes change every year and each edition is limited to 300 pipes, though sometimes he is unable to find enough briar of the quality to make 300 Dali pipes a year.

The Dali pipes feature a special silver band that’s shaped to look like a crown. Silver is a favorite adornment that Viprati often uses. He occasionally features bamboo, but he finds that it’s very difficult to work with and it’s not easy to drill holes into it. Viprati has recently secured a supply of jade from China and plans to begin using it as an adornment too. And he also has a small supply of ivory, which he will use on pipes commemorating his 25 years as a pipemaker, which he celebrates in 2009.

As Viprati marks his 25th year as a professional pipemaker, he could be forgiven if he started to think about exploring different avenues of work, but Viprati says that making pipes is still a hobby.

“I make pipes for the pleasure of artistic expression,” Viprati explains. “Each piece is different. Market demands require me to make some of the lower-grade pipes, but I became a pipemaker because I wanted to save some money by making my own pipes and I wanted to use my imagination to make beautiful things.”

Viprati’s pipes are sold in Italy, China, India, Europe and the United States. While he used to travel across Italy selling pipes to tobacco shops himself, Viprati far prefers allowing other people to sell his pipes because it leaves him more time to make more pipes. However, Viprati does enjoy traveling to pipe shows in Europe and the U.S. where he can meet the people who enjoy his work.

“It’s very important to get in touch with my customers so that I can talk to them about my pipes and learn what they prefer,” Viprati states. “It’s nice to make friends and pipe shows are a very interesting and fun way to display pipes.”

While Viprati likes to attend pipe shows, he desires a sustained presence in the U.S. so that customers do not have to wait for his American visits to purchase a pipe. He plans to establish his own distribution company, and by 2010 he hopes to travel through the U.S. to personally select more shops to be Viprati retailers. And who knows, maybe Viprati retailers in the States will also have the opportunity to sell original Viprati paintings, sausages or grappa too.

Viprati pipes are available at fine tobacco shops across the country. To locate your nearest Viprati dealer, contact Luigi Viprati at Via Kennedy, 2, Pontoglio 25037, Italy; e-mail: arcadiasnc@tele2.it. P&T
This is the very pipe that was crafted at the 2006 Chicagoland International Pipe and Tobacciana show during the pipemaking seminar. Many aspiring and accomplished pipemakers have attended these seminars, three of which were supervised by Lee von Erck of Negaunee, Mich.

It was just luck that the briar worked on in that seminar would turn out to be flawless. “These flawless pieces don’t come around too often,” says von Erck. “This one is graded double A and it turned out beautifully.”

The pipe was roughly out and drilled at the seminar but finished later in von Erck’s shop. “It was made using a drill press rather than a lathe,” he says. “Most carvers starting out don’t have a lathe—I didn’t—so I brought my drill press to show everyone how to do the measurements and the geometry using that.”

Like some of von Erck’s other pipes, this piece comes equipped with two bits—one a churchwarden and the other smaller, to suit the mood of the smoker. The multicolored fitment is laminated wood.

Oil cured and always much lighter than they appear, von Erck pipes have built a reputation on great smoking properties. The Japanese market has become especially fond of these pipes, and von Erck now finds it difficult to ship less than his entire production to enthusiasts there.

Each von Erck pipe is unique and carved to accentuate the natural grain of each different block of briar. Limited numbers are available at pipe shows that von Erck attends and on his Web site, www.von-erck.com; telephone 906.228.2699.
Pipe of the Year 2009
by Jody Davis

You don’t see Jody Davis pipes available very often. He might bring five or six with him to a pipe show, but it’s an effort for him to hold them that long. He makes only about 100 pipes a year working full time, mostly special orders, and he occasionally sends photos of an available pipe out to his e-mail list. Rarely does one of his pipes await adoption for more than a few hours. Estate pieces are even more rare, because once you have a J. Davis pipe, you don’t let it go.

Crafted in his Arizona workshop, J. Davis pipes have earned a reputation for style, creativity, proportion, excellent finishing and dry, neutral smoking quality. When we first proposed the idea of a P&T/J. Davis pipe, we didn’t think we had a prayer of Davis accepting. He couldn’t keep up with orders as it was. But he’s been making these pipes one by one for us for the last 20 months, and we’re immeasurably pleased to be able to offer them now.

This pipe is a freehand, so there are very minor, almost imperceptible differences between them in size. They are approximately 5.5 inches long and 1.8 inches high, with a tobacco chamber depth of 1.35 inches and a chamber diameter of 1 inch, tapering to the bottom. The stems are hand-cut vulcanite, thin and preposterously comfortable, 0.62 inches wide at the lip button. Each pipe is fitted with a cocobolo wood shank end cap, except for Saint grade pipes, which are fitted with legally sourced elephant ivory. (Despite the legal status of the elephant ivory used on the Saint grade pipes, it is illegal for us to ship these internationally, so these pipes may be shipped to U.S. addresses only.)

We have only 50 of these pipes and don’t know how quickly they will sell out. They will go on sale Wednesday, April 1, at 11 a.m. EDT. Orders placed before that time cannot be honored—we want to give everyone the same opportunity to acquire one of these special pipes.

To place an order, telephone 800.346.7469, ext. 238, or 919.872.5040. ext. 238, and leave a message on the recorder with your name and telephone number. Please speak clearly and don’t forget to leave your number. The recorder will time stamp your message and we will return your call in the order in which it was received. Alternately, you may order by e-mail by writing to pipesales@pt-magazine.com under the same conditions—that is, no earlier than 11 a.m. on April 1. Because of possible delays in e-mail delivery, we ask that you include your telephone number as well as your full name. Whether using voice mail or e-mail, please indicate your preference of an amber sandblast, black sandblast, Cardinal or Saint grade pipe.

Remember, to order your 2009 Jody Davis/P&T magazine Pipe of the Year, call or e-mail no earlier than 11 a.m. EDT on April 1, 2009. Telephone 800.346.7469, ext. 238 or e-mail pipesales@pt-magazine.com.

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<th>Pipe Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friar Black sandblast with cocobolo wood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friar Amber sandblast with cocobolo wood</td>
<td>$635</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardinal grade smooth with cocobolo wood</td>
<td>$1135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint grade smooth with ivory</td>
<td>$1535</td>
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Pipe Events

Chicagoland International Pipe & Tobacciana Show
The Chicagoland International Pipe & Tobacciana Show will be held May 2-3, 2009, at the Pheasant Run Resort, 4051 East Main St., St. Charles, IL 60174. Reservation telephone numbers are 800.999.3319 or 630.584.6300. Mention the show and receive a special room rate. For more information, contact Frank Burla at 630.271.1317; e-mail: fpburla@aol.com; or visit the show’s Web site at www.chicagopipeshow.com.

CORPS Pipe Show
The 25th Annual CORPS (Conclave Of Richmond Pipe Smokers) Pipe Smokers’ Celebration and Exposition will be held Friday, Oct. 2, through Sunday, Oct. 5, at the Holiday Inn Select-Koger South Conference Center, 10800 Midlothian Turnpike, Richmond, Va. Mention the CORPS or “pipe smokers” for special room rates. For more information or to reserve a table, contact CORPS at P.O. Box 2463, Chesterfield, VA 23832; phone: 804.342.0761; e-mail: conclave@corpipesmokers.org; Web site: www.corpipesmokers.org.

North American Society of Pipe Collectors Pipe Show
The 2009 North American Society of Pipe Collectors Pipe Show will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2009, at the Midwest Hotel & Conference Center, 4900 Sinclair Road, Columbus, OH 43229. Call the hotel at 877.609.6086 and mention the show for a special room rate. For show information, contact Bill Unger at P.O. Box 9642, Columbus, OH 43209; 614.252.2904; bill@naspc.org.

Triangle Area Pipe Smokers (TAPS)
The 12th annual TAPS Pipe and Tobacco Expo will be held on Saturday, April 4, 2009, at the Holiday Inn-Crabtree, 4100 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, NC 27612; phone: 919.782.8600. Mention TAPS or pipe smokers for special room rates. For more information, contact TAPS at 919.848.3388; taps@mindspring.com; www.tapsclub.us.

West Coast Pipe Show
The first annual West Coast Pipe Show will be held at the Palace Station Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, from Oct. 31-Nov. 1. The hotel has 100 smoking rooms and early registration is encouraged to ensure getting one of these rooms. To make a reservation and receive a special room rate, contact the Palace Station Hotel and Casino at 800.634.3101; Web site: https://rooms.stationcasinos.com/cgi-bin/LANSAWEB?procfun=rrn+Resnet+PAL+funcparms+UP(A25 60+pcpipe+?/. For more information regarding renting a table or attending the show, contact Marty Pulvers at 650.965.7403; e-mail: mpulvers@aol.com; or Steve O’Neill at 435.258.5431; e-mail: son@2oneills.us.

To add your pipe show to our events page, please send information to Steve Ross at Pipes and tobaccos, 5808 Faringdon Place, Suite 200, Raleigh, NC 27609; or e-mail steve@pt-magazine.com.
### Pipes and tobaccos magazine PRIME Retailers

Please patronize these P&T PRIME retailers—shops that have dedicated themselves to the service of discerning pipe smokers everywhere.

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