



## Peter Hofer Advances Conservation Philosophy Through Gun Making Genius

BY MICHAEL G. SABBETH

Peter Hofer does not merely build the most prestigious sporting firearms on the planet. His firearms advance themes. This article gives three examples of Peter's transformation of philosophies into wood and steel. I have known Peter Hofer many years. I visited him at his elegant workshop in Ferlach, located in southern Austria, approximately ten miles from Klagenfurt, the Carinthian capital.



**S**EVERAL OF HIS MILLION-EURO FIREARMS have been raised to my shoulder. “Will you give me a five-percent writer’s discount?” I have frequently requested, clearly in jest. Peter and I hunted for mouflon in Croatia. Dozens of hours have been spent chatting with him at Dallas Safari Club and Safari Club International conventions. I have had published several articles on Peter’s transcendent art.

The above history is mentioned not pridefully but to establish a foundation for my presentation of these three recent Peter Hofer creations. Thesaurus pages have been tirelessly thumbed and the prose of fine gunwriters have been studied to assist my finding adjectives and imagery to capture in a cage of words Peter Hofer’s seemingly preternatural art. At times I am prepared to admit defeat, for my list of superlatives has been exhausted. Even the exquisite professional photographs Peter supplied for this article provide merely an evanescent justice for his three-dimensional art.

## THE JAGUAR RIFLE

**ONE OF MY GREAT** and all-too-rare joys is visiting Peter Hofer’s booths at DSC or SCI and touching and shouldering some of the extraordinary firearms I’ve written about but have never seen except, in some instances, only by photographs. At this year’s Dallas Safari Club, I saw Peter’s extraordinary Jaguar rifle. Holding the magnificent firearm, running my fingers over the engraving and multi-colored gold inlays as carefully as if caressing an infant’s face, I could feel, more than understand, how the Jaguar rifle embodied Peter’s wildlife conservation philosophy.

Details illuminate the big picture. The Jaguar double rifle is a bespoke side-by-side double rifle chambered in 500 Nitro Express 3-inch that required six years to build. It is built on a massive and extraordinarily strong action, described by Peter as a “Peter Hofer special action,” which features a double underlug and a third bite. The sidelocks are pinless. The double triggers feature a floating front trigger and a two-stage rear trigger. The safety is non-automatic. Chopper lump 24-inch barrels are constructed of Böhler steel with an integral rear fixed V sight and folding leaves regulated to 50 and 80 yards. The rifle is paired with a Swarovski Z61 1-6x24 scope, reticle 4AI, zeroed at 110 yards and secured by a Peter Hofer quick detachable swivel mount.

Orchestrated closely with his client, the Jaguar rifle engraving is

embellished with solid gold inlays of white, yellow, red gold and platinum and multiple hues of enamel. On the bottom of the action, the masterful execution of the bulino engraving style portrays a luminous jaguar attacking a mammal in subtle shades of black and gray. The rifle immortalizes the resplendent Jaguar in the glory of its colorful and breath-taking habitat. The engraving, the precious metals and the enamel show a cascade of wildlife, including a crocodile, an anaconda, a capybara, an ocelot, a blue-and-yellow macaw, a toucan and tree frogs.

Speaking German to Claudia, his assistant, Peter sought clarification for translating his ideas into English. The Jaguar rifle is intended to have an ethos transcending beauty and mechanical excellence. Claudia confidently explained that “Peter is trying to explain his philosophy about the value of hunting.” Two principles embodied in the Jaguar rifle are the sustainable conservation of a rare animal and the legitimacy of hunting as a management process for wildlife conservation. The rifle becomes a vehicle to raise awareness of the threats to the jaguar’s survival and an influence for corrective behavior.

Peter views the Jaguar rifle as a defining work of his art, in essence, his legacy. Addressing global wildlife issues, Peter hopes his art will inspire all hunters to honor and actively advocate for wildlife.

## THE FALCON SHOTGUN

In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) honored the falconry tradition as a “living human heritage.” Coincidentally, that same year, UNESCO honored the 500-year-old gunmaking craft of Ferlach, Austria, for its high cultural value. UNESCO characterized Ferlach as “preserving fragile knowledge and skills inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.” Ferlach’s gunmaking craft was added to the UNESCO list of “Intangible Cultural Heritages.”

The relationship between falconry and Ferlach’s gunmaking tradition energized Peter’s fertile brain to craft art that advances philosophy. Intrigued by falconry for decades, Peter had become a student of the 4,000-year-old discipline. His attendance at falconry hunts in Middle Eastern countries inspired the crafting of this bespoke Falcon shotgun.

The aerodynamic falcon can reach speeds of 170 miles per hour when diving for prey. Often referred to as the “silent hunter,” the falcon can grasp prey in the air or on the ground. Boasting a range of five to ten miles, Falcon hunting exceeded the range of any firearm. As with the Jaguar rifle, the Falcon shotgun advances a testament, this one to falconry’s cultural tradition and his advocacy for falconry’s conservation.

The 12-gauge Falcon is a side-by-side shotgun employing what Peter described as a “Special Peter Hofer

sidelock action.” The action features a catch bar and double underlug bolting. The Falcon has ejectors and double triggers with an articulated front trigger. As stated in the literature describing the shotgun, the 30-inch chopper lump barrels are made of the highest quality Böhler steel and are choked 1/2 and full. The bespoke 15 3/8-inch stock is constructed of specially selected Turkish burr walnut that, according to Peter’s brochure, is approximately 580 years old.

When I visited his shop, Peter opened for my inspection the cavernous, humidified vault for preserving his stock blanks. The vault would certainly be an appropriate cellar for a world-class collection of Burgundies and Bordeaux. The stock blanks used by Peter in his firearms, including those featured in this article, are unsurpassed. Some of the wood, Peter claims, was 900 years old. When finished with dozens of layers of oil, the wood glows as if illuminated by an inner lamp.

The Falcon exhibits the finest expression of bulino engraving, featuring the most delicate shading on the spectrum from light gray to rich black. Hundreds of hours were required to execute this spectacular aesthetic achievement. Original sketches of the engraving patterns were shown to me. I admit that studying them, I imagined hearing the beating of the falcon’s wings and seeing the predator’s acceleration to its target.





## WORLDWIDE UNIQUE SHOTGUN SET OF FIVE

**I SPEND A DISPROPORTIONATE AMOUNT** of time at Peter's exhibit booth at conventions because I am nearly hypnotized by his firearms and, bluntly, I like the man. When he's not busy, he asks me for new jokes, preferably florid, and rewards me with a hearty laugh. Then he tells me a few jokes for which I give him great credit because of his near mastery of English. While talking with me, sometimes Peter excuses himself at his exhibition booth and engages with one or two men, often dressed in banal sports shoes, wearing somewhat worn blue jeans and inconspicuous T-shirts, and who likely flew to the convention in their Gulfstream from the Middle East.

Amidst the jewels of firearms at his display this year at the DSC Convention, the firearm—more correctly described as the set of firearms—that evoked thoughts to prance around my aging brain of second and third mortgages and depleting my IRA was Peter's "Worldwide Unique Shotgun Set of Five." Fortunately, this devilish impulse passed

quickly, especially when I was informed the price of the set was above \$2 million.

Under Peter's watchful eye, I received consent to pick up each firearm. With a perfect length-of-pull, each shotgun fit exquisitely—a condition that has proved historically to be expensive. Each shotgun swung with the smooth confident control of a maestro's baton. In my mind's eye, I saw masterful complex shots perfectly executed, although I did not see traipsing with these guns through razor-sharp corn stubble in Nebraska or Kansas.

This extraordinary set of shotguns was under construction for 12 years. Peter takes his time to create these mechanical miracles. Four of the shotguns are side-by-side, in 12, 20 and 28 gauges and one side-by-side in .410 bore. One of the five is an over/under shotgun in .410 bore.

The action of each shotgun is scaled. The shotguns are built on the "System Peter Hofer sidelock," which features a catchbar and double underlugs. The brochure made available to me informs that the multi-level

patterns on the receivers accentuate the elegant lines of each shotgun. Special attention was given to the construction of the forend push piece.

Remarkably, for constructing the stocks, Peter found five stock blanks from the same piece of highest quality burl wood. As with the actions, the stocks were scaled in dimension according to the gauge/bore of the shotgun.

Peter delighted in pointing out that each shotgun featured a different bird. The feather style of the featured bird is engraved in relief on the top of the action, on the top lever and on the metal parts of the forend. Wildfowl scenes of each bird are engraved prominently on each shotgun. Delicate bulino engraving was selected over the traditional Austrian/German deep chiseled ornamental engraving. The photographs show the different birds on each shotgun, but the five shotguns are unified by a single concept: honoring the species of wildfowl.



## THE LASTING VALUE OF A PETER HOFER FIREARM

**PETER SHOWED ME** a document with quotations from the United Nations Education, Scientific, Cultural Organization: One quote is: "For intangible to be kept alive, it must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practised and learned within communities and between generations." A following quote states: "Every handcrafted hunting weapon from the manufactory Peter Hofer Austria is a product of a craft that has been elevated to the status of an intangible world cultural heritage by UNESCO."

Peter emphasized his firearms should rightly be viewed as a hedge against inflation. The document that has the UNESCO statements additionally provides examples of the resale of Peter's firearms that show dramatic increases in value. Peter emphasizes the investment



value of his firearms should be perceived as being equal as an alluring factor for purchasing his firearms as are the highest precision and unique workmanship invested in each of his firearms.

Peter attained his unique and, arguably, exclusive status in the sporting arms Pantheon by crafting firearms that tiptoed into the rarified realm of genius. Few Peter Hofer firearms are made. Depending on their construction, Peter produces only ten or so firearms each year. As stated above, some of these works of art are completed and then released to their customers after many years of work. I don't envy those who own Peter Hofer firearms. I am pleased and comforted that the existence of those fortunate few enable Peter to perform his near-magical craft. ■