

# BOSIS

## *Is the Mostest*

*Luciano Bosis: builder of modern Italian masterpieces*

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**T**raditionally, style has been problematic in Anglo-Saxon and particularly English-speaking cultures. Often seen as something best left to our affectedly artistic Continental cousins while we concentrate on the more serious business of mechanics and engineering, style nevertheless now plays a greater role in the marketing of everything from outdoor clothing to fine guns. The exterior of the Luciano Bosis workshop, in Travagliato, northern Italy, is a case in point.

While many of London's swankiest gunmakers labor away in gloomy workshops, the Luciano Bosis atelier occupies a large, sunny site that easily could pass for a trattoria or villa. Three stories featuring a palette of subdued colors on a



One of a pair of Michelangelo O/Us engraved by Angelo Galeazzi that sold at Sotheby's Gleaneagles sale in 2004 for a record £104,000.

neutral background with a combination of stenciling and polychromatic motifs are offset by pine-green shuttered doors and windows. Overhanging pantiles complete the Renaissance feel. On our visit to the shop last year we were greeted in the doorway by Signora Giulia Bosis. As with the shops of many bespoke gunmakers, no guns were visible, but cartridges and accoutrements lined the walls. I marveled at a collarless gilet of subtle check with quilted mole-skin shoulders and a matching cartridge bag before concluding it would take an individual with more élan than me to feel perfectly comfortable in anything so suave.

We were ushered into living quarters directly behind to meet the maestro, Luciano Bosis, and his woodworking daughter, Laura, and then beyond to an open court of what was clearly once a farmyard. The atelier is beneath a hay loft in an old stable; it is just large enough to accommodate the Bosis workforce of six. By walling off the stable with glass, Bosis has created a small, simple workplace. No heavy machinery is visible, but vises line a bench serried with hand tools.

Luciano Bosis is in his seventh decade, and he remains full of energy and vivacity. He is just as willing to talk of his beloved soccer club Inter Milan and its Brazilian goal scorer, Adriano, as he is of Italy's contribution to autoloading-pistol design or "luxury" shotguns from the Emilia-Romagna region.

In 1954, at age 12, Bosis started work for the gunmaker Galesi, where he learned to assemble and braze all of the components that make up a pair of barrels. While there, Bosis was able to devote himself to his greatest passion in life: shotguns. From 1971 to '76 he worked for competition-shotgun builder Perazzi, and by the time he was 20 Bosis was an accomplished craftsman who had read every book

COURTESY OF SOTHEBY'S



TERRY ALLEN; INSET: BONNY HAWLEY

Luciano Bosis (inset, holding one of his redesigned locks) knows the value of quality mechanical design, refined aesthetics and reliable performance. Proof is in this 20-bore Michelangelo over/under engraved by Giancarlo Pedretti.





1980 a representative of Pachmayr, in Los Angeles, saw the new Basis over/under exhibited at the IWA show and placed an order for 10 identical shotguns. Basis was on his way to fulfilling a dream.

From the beginning, Basis has been aided by a brace of highly skilled craftsmen: his jointer, Franco Zini, and his nephew, Massimo Scalvini, who test-fires the guns and prepares them for proof. Zini previously worked at Franchi, where he jointed the Imperiale Montecarlo, whereas Scalvini began apprenticing with his uncle in 1984. Basis himself is in charge of every other operation. Zini and Scalvini, with their creativity, dedication and hard work, helped

(in Italian) he could find about gunmaking. Perazzi promoted him and put him in charge of his own department, where guns were fitted and proofed. This department also was responsible for the final fine-tuned jointing after the stocking and checkering was complete.

But Basis was too ambitious to stay. In 1968 he had turned the aforementioned space behind his home into a workshop, where he at first repaired and eventually built guns. By 1977 he had opened the shop in front of his home, with all the profits going to his own shotgun projects.

Bosis initially built a handful of 12-bore side-by-sides, which he displayed at the European trade shows such as EXA, in Brescia, and IWA, in Nurnberg. He smiles broadly recalling the phone ringing in the wake of the EXA show and his first gun sale. More followed, boosting confidence. In



COURTESY OF LUCIANO BOSIS

Combining technology, craftsmanship and modern materials, Basis is raising the bar in Italian gunmaking. Company offerings include boxlock (top) and sidlock side-by-sides—known as the Country and the Queen—as well as sidlock (middle two) and boxlock over/unders—known as the Michelangelo and the Wild.







start the shotgun project, and Bosis is quick to point out that all consequent changes, additions and improvements have been the result of a team effort.

Outworkers, with engraver Naida Martinelli top among them, are used as needed. Martinelli was born in Brescia in 1952 and has lived in Gardone, Val Trompia, ever since. She was inspired by her uncle, Umberto Mutti, who was a master engraver with Beretta and joined that firm as an apprentice. She complemented her hands-on experience by graduating from art school as a teacher and subsequently has engraved guns for Bernardelli and Fabbri. Today she works almost exclusively for Bosis and appears capable of the myriad styles demanded by his clientele.

Luciano, too, has a broad education. Years spent with Perazzi building competition guns taught him the significance of total reliability. Years spent repairing Italian-owned British “bests” gave him an appreciation of mechanical design and an aesthetic appreciation that so clearly manifests itself in his own fine guns. Recently



Bosis uses Turkish and Russian blanks (above) as well as top master engravers in crafting its guns. Here are more examples of the company's Michelangelo sidelock over/under, with lock engineering originally based on the Boss.

Bosis began working with an engineer to turn his gunmaking sketches into CAD files ready for the most advanced machinery, but the original 30-year-old drawings still can be seen in the Bosis workshop. For years these were all the team relied on to turn solid bars of steel into gun actions. Today the Michelangelo over/under, introduced in 1980, is machined on the most advanced CNC machinery available, but it is clear that Bosis would like visitors to know that the gun still requires a lot of handwork.

I was barely through the door when Bosis thrust a smallbore Michelangelo into my hands. It was the most drop-dead-gorgeous thing I had seen with locks, a stock and a brace of barrels. If the Woodward is the Bentley of over/unders to the

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Lamborghini; moreover it is the Lamborghini as it might be styled by Pininfarina, the Italian design firm responsible for styling everything from the 1955 Ferrari 410 Superamerica to the 2008 Maserati Gran Turismo.

“It is very difficult to describe the features of Bosis guns,” said Paul Roberts, who imports the guns for the British market. “They basically make whatever you want in an O/U on a dedicated frame.” The mechanical engineering of the Bosis clearly is based on the Boss, but there similarities cease. By redesigning the lockwork so the bridle rests over columns machined integrally with the plate, the columns can be threaded for the specially designed Torx retaining screws, making them much stronger than screws simply threaded into the thickness of the sidelock wall. Torx screws hold a lot more than any other screw and help the bridle and entire lock system stay in place regardless of the vibrations developed while shooting. Furthermore, the special star-headed Torx screws reamed at 60 degrees yield more contact area and don’t shake loose even after the millions of vibrations caused by thousands of rounds. The only holes in the completely pinless locks are the threaded screw holes that go into the plate—but only halfway through. No exterior pins mar the engraver’s canvas. The mainspring is located above and behind the bridle where it is less likely to move—an important feature in a pinless gun where the mainspring stud can go only halfway through the sidelock. The bridle is also a little longer than usual and bent upward slightly to better contain and stabilize the spring. This technical improvement is also a distinctive cosmetic feature that allows every gun connoisseur to immediately recognize the new locks. Moreover, the mainspring hinge is farther away from the safety sear spring than in any other lock, allowing the use of a more elastic spring and ensuring better spring strength and resistance. In addition, one end of the mainspring is always engaged with the hammer, which can rebound only to the extent the gunmaker wants it to rebound.

These new Bosis locks are slimmer and, together with a more slender toplever and less-pronounced dishing at the barrel breeches, they create a simpler, more streamlined aesthetic. Or, as the Michelangelo catalog explains: “Even if there is

not much left to invent, there are still ways of substantially improving high-quality sporting firearms by combining technology and craftsmanship, using better material like aerospace steel and titanium alloys, light but at the same time more resistant chopper lump barrels.” It is with subtle improvements such as these that Bosis elevates Italian gunmaking beyond the traditions that inspired it.

Paul Roberts agrees: “They make wonderful-handling guns that are now very reliable. Though handmade, the guns incorporate high-tech features, such as special steel in their barrels, and the firm sources machine work of the highest quality on the components. Bosis’ greatest asset is flexibility.” The catalog for the Michelangelo is the only one I’ve seen that features details of the gun’s metallurgy.

If Luciano Bosis’ accomplishments at Perazzi were painted in broad strokes, the new .410 he showed me in Travagliato is a miniature masterpiece. It has the grace of a rapier but sufficient heft to handle like a driven-bird gun. Because it has three-inch chambers and the barrels are heavier than those found in vintage British .410s, there is none of the whippiness associated with a child’s first gun. For all that balanced bulk, it has the tiniest lockplates I’ve seen. Downsizing may cause panic in Detroit, but here in Travagliato it’s reason for mature celebration. This is a shotgun for a discriminating adult. The highly polished finish and pinless locks clearly are intended to emphasize the engraving, but when color case hardening is commissioned, Bosis turns to St. Ledger, in Birmingham, to get the correct look. Bosis also sources his springs abroad—in Belgium, because he considers that country’s to be the world’s finest.

In August 2004 at Sotheby’s prestigious Gleneagles sale, a pair of Bosis Michelangelo over/unders engraved by Angelo Galeazzi ran away from the top estimate and sold for a record £104,000. Gavin Gardiner, who presided over the sale, said afterward: “While there was selective bidding in some areas of the sale, the record price for the pair of Luciano Bosis guns demonstrates the continuing demand for exceptional over-and-under guns. Luciano Bosis is one of the leading exponents of gunmaking in Italy today. Though the company makes boxlock and sidelock doubles, it is best known for its over-and-unders whose graceful lines give them an unrivalled elegance.

“This pair was completed earlier this year [2004], and both guns have wonderfully figured exhibition-grade stocks.

These guns would be things of great beauty in their own right, but their embellishment by master gun engraver Angelo Galeazzi elevates them to the status of works of art. This exceptional pair was bought by a European private buyer. The record price paid for a Continental pair shows that the finest-quality European sporting arms decorated by top master engravers are now competing on equal terms with the best of Britain’s gunmakers.”

Bosis builds about two dozen over/under guns—mostly Michelangelo models—a year, with approximately half going to the UK and half to the US. The Michelangelo has some of the attributes of male jewelry or the bling associated with motorcars made in Modena. You wouldn’t take one chukar hunting any more than you would enter a Lamborghini Diablo in the Baja 1000. Which is why the firm has created the Bosis Wild. The name is intended to evoke the extreme conditions the gun is intended to endure: “. . . freezing cold and boiling hot, sand, dust, snow and the heavy merciless use you would expect from a competition gun.” Built on an O/U Anson & Deeley-style action with monoblock barrels, it is almost architectural in its simplicity.

Bosis has called the Wild “rustic,” although it is anything but. Still made individually in the time-honored hand-built fashion, the Wild is the gun to take out when lousy weather precludes using the Michelangelo. Few have been built, and the only one I have seen came with a dished-back boxlock action and was almost entirely free of engraving. The robust pistol hand was of straight walnut, whereas the rest of the stock was of exhibition quality. Best Turkish and Russian blanks and the same stockmakers and Tru-oil finish will be used on both the Michelangelo and the Wild. The same is true of engravers, with Pedretti, Naida Martinelli, Parravicini, Creative Arts and Galeazzi all being potentially available to engrave the Wild.

Luciano Bosis explained that the Wild is still a bespoke gun, and anything—even a sideplated version—is possible. The plain boxlock in the white will sell for about \$25,000, and a sideplated version would be about \$30,000—which, at about half the price of a Michelangelo, might make it worth actually using it for rough conditions. Only a 12-gauge version is currently available in field, sporting clays and trap configurations. With strength and reliability being the gun’s strong suits, competitive shots are the obvious

target market. And a delivery time of one year—versus four for the Michelangelo—is bound to make the Wild a success.

Bosis also builds a boxlock as well as a sidelock side-by-side. The former has an Anson & Deeley action and is known as the Country; the latter has a Holland & Holland action and is called the Queen. Both have proven popular with the discerning Italian market and still can be ordered as bespoke items.

Who hasn't imagined himself time traveling back to England to meet the men who designed, built and ultimately engraved their own names on the classics from the golden age of British gunmaking? Well for the price of an airline ticket one can meet the maestro who designs, builds and engraves the great guns of the new age of Italian masterpieces.

I asked John T. Hessney of JTH Agency, in Pittsford, New York, about his experiences with Bosis guns. "These guns are all handmade and of the best materials that are available. They are all custom ordered to customer specifications. The Michelangelo Extra is a sidelock action over/under. It costs around A60,000 in the white. Engraving costs can range from A10,000 to A40,000, depending on who the engraver is and how extensive the work is. We have a gun on order now for one of our customers. Bosis has been very good to work with in every way. We had our customer fly over to the factory and get custom fitted and pick out the wood he wanted. He had a special and warm experience."

Though a new Michelangelo O/U in the white won't leave you much change from \$85,000 and can take a couple of years to deliver, a Bosis gun is a relative bargain when compared with its Brit competitors. And comparisons are inevitable. Collectors and shooters alike buy British for tried-and-tested tradition, but recent Italian guns in general and Bosis guns in particular are as fresh as today's pasta and twice as stylish. In a global society, an increasingly international language of style is emerging, and Luciano Bosis knows it. As Britain, Belgium, Germany and the US cede fine gunmaking to Italy, style becomes significant, expressing the individuality as well as the wealth, status and taste of Luciano Bosis' clientele.

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Author's Note: For more information on Luciano Bosis, contact JTH Agency, 877-453-0927 or 585-381-3511; [www.jthagency.com](http://www.jthagency.com), or Sporting Products, LLC, 561-837-8625.