



BOSIS AND BEAUTIFUL

Italy's Luciano Bosis makes guns as tough and reliable as they are elegant and stylish.

BY VIC VENTERS
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF BOSIS



Opening spread photo and this page: Models of the Bosis Michelangelo, previous pages a 16-gauge and this page a 20-gauge, both engraved by Pedretti.



It is as hard to find an ugly sports car or shotgun made in Italy as it is an ill-formed cathedral or a mediocre meal.

In the Classical world, the ancients believed beauty and goodness were inseparable—that is, physical manifestations of beauty were considered outward expressions of inner qualities such as moral character and fitness of purpose.

Even in modern Italy, the concept of beauty and what it signifies remain powerful currents in the culture; the influence of beauty is everywhere—in architecture, art, fashion, food, jewelry, furniture, industrial design, and gunmaking. It is as hard to find an ugly sports car or shotgun made in Italy as it is an ill-formed cathedral or a mediocre meal.

That noted, making a shotgun beautiful and simultaneously good—“good” as in intrinsically reliable and safe—is easier conceived than achieved. Not always has substance matched style in the firearms in the land of *la dolce vita*, ultimately to the detriment of their utility afield. But in the small town of Travagliato, a few miles west of Brescia, amid the fertile farm fields of the Po River Valley, artisan gunmaker Luciano Bosis crafts a handful of sporting shotguns each year that by any definition match the Classical ideal of beauty inside and out, where form and function are conterminous and synthesized perfectly with one other.

Outgoing and jolly, Bosis wears a beret and big, round glasses and cracks a ready smile that belies the utter seriousness and passion with which he approaches the art and craft of best-quality gunmaking. Now 71, he has spent almost 60 of those

years on the bench, apprenticing at age 12 to a gunmaker in Brescia in 1950s. By the 1970s, he was actioning guns at Perazzi, at the time probably the most modern sporting-gun factory in the world and producing its most innovative and reliable break-action competition shotguns. From a small room he converted to a workshop at his home, Bosis spent his off hours working for the trade, and repairing vintage shotguns—and with particular relish those guns designed and made in Britain.

The ambitious craftsman was absorbing the best of gunmaking past and present, principles of which he would carry with him when he struck out from Perazzi in 1977 to build guns on his own. Even today, Bosis enthuses about century-old English guns and what they taught him.

“The materials they used were not even remotely comparable to the steels we have today, yet their craftsmanship was unbelievable,” said Bosis. “By working on these guns, I learned their mechanisms and operating principles, their virtues and their flaws, and also the importance of exquisite finishing and perfect fit—and of course concepts of grace, beauty, and elegance.” From Perazzi, there were lessons in the importance of modern materials and building guns that were reliable and durable—but also, critically, the ability to manage the production process with a team of craftsman so that best-quality guns, laboriously handcrafted over hundreds of hours, could

be delivered to waiting and extremely eager customers on time. “Building a gun is a step-by-step process,” he explained. “There are operations that cannot be skipped, sequences that cannot be changed. The trick is to move production along in a way without leaving any craftsmen empty-handed at any time.”

Anyone who has paid for an expensive bespoke gun and then waited in frustration as deadline deliveries grew longer—then longer still—will appreciate Bosis’s punctilious approach to time management.

Annual production—measured against giants like Beretta or Benelli—is minute, about 20 guns, and Bosis guns are among the most exclusive and expensive in Italy. Its flagship model, the sidelock over/under Michelangelo, starts at prices that almost reach \$100,000 and that is without extras or engraving, which can add tens of thousands of dollars to the bill. Even in an ailing world economy, Bosis doesn’t want for work.

The firm shares a characteristic in common with most of the small, craft-driven studios that power Italy’s economy; it is a family operation, just as are other luxury Italian gunmakers such as Fabbri, Fratelli Piotti, and Fratelli Rizzini.

The Bosis workshop is in the family home, itself converted from a 200-year-old farmhouse; with its cobbled courtyard and walls painted soft Parma yellow, it exudes the graceful ambience the Italians create so effortlessly in even the most

utilitarian settings. Wife Giuliana will greet you in the living room with tiny cups of steaming espresso and delicate cakes; daughter Laura translates and runs business operations day-to-day. In the workshop, Luciano Bosis will be found (always) at his bench with a file in hand and nearby two craftsmen work likewise on their stands: Botticini Francesco tests the guns and prepares them for engraving; and nephew Massimo Scalvini is a finisher and final tester. And there, on a shelf under Luciano’s bench: faithful Tobi, the family dog, at his master’s feet by day and (Laura confides) in his bedroom at night.

It’s the essence of *attiva di famiglia*, the Italian family business, but in one crucial aspect Bosis has tacked a course different from its competitors in nearby Gardone Val Trompia. In the boom years, the 1990s and a little later, bespoke Italian gunmaking by and large went vertical—investing heavily in CNC machinery and taking manufacturing in-house. All well and good when times are good, but crushing overhead for a family firm to carry when the economy sours and orders tank with it.

The Bosis workshop, by contrast, holds no computer-controlled machinery, only a few simple machine tools and lots of files, hammers, and turn screws. Bosis craftsmen are indeed Old World artisans, but Luciano and his team use traditional handwork to complement 21st Century manufacturing technology and materials, not in lieu of it. Rather than purchase expensive

machinery, Bosis outsources the manufacture of its components to high-tech specialist firms in and around Brescia, firms that work to the highest standards and keep abreast of the latest technology. Bosis thus concentrates on the craft aspects of building best guns—and from the beginning has labored to improve their mechanical designs.

Bosis is a perfectionist and an innovator too—qualities not always simultaneously found in a craftsman—and he has never rested on the laurels gunmakers earned long ago.

“His mind is always churning,” explains his daughter. “He loves new things and improving old ones.”

Early on, the firm started with side-by-sides, boxlocks, and Holland-type sidelocks, and the latter is still offered and occasionally built. But Bosis has made its reputation on the sidelock over/under—in Luciano’s case, his baby, the “Modelo Michelangelo,” now offered in scaled frames in gauges 12, 20, 16 and 28, and .410 bore.

Its earliest inspiration comes by London’s great Boss & Co. design of 1909, with its side-mounted barrel hinges, bifurcated lumps, and a locking bolt that engages recesses in the face of the barrel breech—features that permit a sleek and shallow action. Belgium’s Lebeau Courally later adapted the Boss design, strengthening its action and improving its cocking mechanism, and it is to Lebeau that Luciano tips his beret as the Michelangelo’s most immediate design antecedent.

The rest, though, stems largely from Bosis with, as he insists, much input from the late Franco Zini (a craftsman who started with Luciano) and Scalvini—and the gunmakers have literally spent decades refining the action and the lockwork. The most recent locks are “pinless”—that is, they do not protrude through the lockplates to mar any engraving; the bridle, which is specially shaped to stabilize the sears and springs, rests on columns integral to the lockplate and is secured by Torx screws threaded at an angle to maximize their metal-to-metal contact, thus preventing components from loosening over time, even after prolonged use of the heaviest loads.

Where perfected mechanical designs end, Luciano’s obsession with advanced metallurgy begins. He sources main springs from Belgium, hand-forged by a maker Bosis believes is the world’s best. His catalog provides detailed explanations for the steels used for barrels and actions, how they are made and heat-treated and the practical benefits of their use. His latest creation is the Challenger, a sidelock made with a titanium frame and barrels of Maraging steel, the latter an aerospace-grade alloy so tough and light it is used as the skin for rockets and in making gas centrifuges for uranium enrichment. Metals such as these are difficult to work, and even in raw form are very expensive.

“My father is always trying to make his guns better, to improve and modernize and change,” explained Laura. “He doesn’t care how much something will cost—only if it is feasible to use and will make the gun better.”

Luciano’s pursuit of mechanical perfection has made Bosis guns darlings in live-bird pigeon rings—the Formula 1 of the wingshooting sports, where tens of thousands of dollars can ride on the outcome of a single shot. Lars Jacob, a shooting instructor and the gunroom manager for Bosis dealer and showroom Covey & Nye, says he sees why: “They are ultra-reliable and handle beautifully,” Jacob said, “and are also among the softest-shooting and best-patterning guns I’ve ever used.”

Then there is physical beauty, that outward manifestation of goodness in Italian eyes. The Michelangelo has a distinctive aesthetic: elegantly sculpted fences set off by the steep cut-back in the action behind, which manages to emphasize both crisp lines and the action’s complementary curves. Bosis guns of course serve as canvases for some of Italy’s greatest engravers: Giancarlo and Stefano Pedretti, Mario Terzi, Naida Martinelli, just to name a few.

I have heard some top English gunmakers comment with frustration that opulent engraving overshadows their craftsmanship. This is no concern for Luciano Bosis: “A fine gun is the result of years of work, best materials, and incredible skills and craftsmanship,” he said. “But engraving adds value: it is like a beautiful dress on a woman who is beautiful herself.” ✨

Detail of the Bosis Michelangelo

THE BOSIS TALL TIMBERS BOBWHITE GUN

When Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy wanted to commission a first-of-its-kind commemorative shotgun, it turned to Luciano Bosis and engraver Stefano Pedretti.

The Tall Timbers Bobwhite Gun—a sleek, round-body, sideplated “Wild” model—is engraved with scenes of bobwhites in habitat typical of the Southeast surrounded by lush patterns of English rose and scroll. The Wild—a boxlock with triggerplate-mounted locks—is a more affordable entrée to the Bosis line. Bosis and Pedretti delivered the gun to Tall Timbers at less than cost, as part of their commitment to helping raise funds for gamebird conservation in America. Tall Timbers offered this gun for sale as part of a package that included a donated once-in-a-lifetime wild quail hunt on a special Red Hills plantation. Profits from sales are earmarked for the conservation organization’s quail research and conservation programs.

“The Tall Timbers Gun No. 1 is absolutely stunning and lively in the hands as well—just right for a wild bobwhite flush. We are so proud that such a fine shotgun bears Tall Timbers’ name; similar to how Luciano and Stefano seek to be the best in their craft, we seek to provide the best research-based information in quail management and conservation,” said Dr. Bill Palmer, president and CEO of Tall Timbers Research, Inc. “I have always been a ‘best gun’ aficionado, so to have one of the greatest gunmakers team up with a best engraver to design a gun to support Tall Timbers’ quail conservation across the Southeast

was incredibly rewarding and effective.”

Tall Timbers Research Station was founded in 1958 by Henry L. Beadel, the owner of Tall Timbers Plantation, at the behest of his friend naturalist and ornithologist Herbert Stoddard, as a research station to study the effects of fire on plant and animal communities in the Southern pine ecosystem. Stoddard’s recommendations formed the backbone for wild-quail management in the Southeast for much of the 20th Century. Under Palmer’s auspices, Tall Timber’s recommended management practices have been advanced and modified in recent decades and today the private quail plantations in the region enjoy wild-bobwhite populations that exceed those of the best years in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—an astounding contrast to the rest of the Southeast, where wild-bobwhite populations have plummeted more than 95 percent over the last half-century.

“The habitat around Tallahassee, Thomasville, and Albany are the last bastions of healthy wild-bobwhite populations in the Southeast,” Palmer said, “and we’ve proved we can bring bobwhites back from the brink. Our goal at Tall Timbers is to spread our research knowledge to landowners throughout the Southeast and to provide a model for agencies to implement effective management strategies on public lands. There’s a huge opportunity to help wild quail recover.”

—Vic Venters

For more information, contact Dr. Bill Palmer, Bill@ttrs.org; www.talltimbers.org.



The Tall Timbers Bobwhite Gun by Bosis with engraving by Stefano Pedretti is engraved with scenes of bobwhites in habitat typical of the Southeast, surrounded by English scroll.