

The Birth of a Masterpiece

Pierre Richard

A middle-aged man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a blue and white striped short-sleeved shirt, is holding a large, ornate smoking pipe in his left hand and a lit cigarette in his right hand. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. In the background, there is a framed picture on the wall and a glass display case containing various items.

« Let us be modest and pay a respectful homage to our peers who invented it all. »

(Pierre Morel)



The subject for the «Meilleurs Ouvriers de France 2007» competition was the fabrication of a ULM tobacco pipe. These exist in two variances; the Ulmer Kloben and the Hungarian form, which was the one imposed for this competition.



In Germany, apart from the rare lead, iron and clay pipes that date, apparently, from the Thirty Years' War, pipe smokers would only smoke pipes made of wood; elm root, alder, birch, maple and boxwood up until the end of the 18th Century. They were called « Ulm Pipes » even if they were not only produced in that town, but also in the vast neighboring country. Thus the oldest known archive document (1695) doesn't come from Ulm itself, but from Geislingen.

This historical reminder will definitely help the connoisseur to better position in space and time these marvelous objects, witnesses of a customs refinement now disappeared. One should know that a pipe was so precious back then that it was passed on from father to son.



A quick look at a pipemaker's studio around 1835 with the various phases of production: filing, drilling, assembling and polishing.

Two different basic shapes for this pipe: the "Ulmer Kloben" with a protruding angle on the underside of the pipe bowl and the Hungarian form with a tall, narrow bowl which always exceeds the neck of the pipe. The pipe bowls were adorned with luxurious covers and silver chains.



Months of reflection, information and raw material research were required for Master Pipemaker Pierre Morel to finally produce this masterpiece imposed for the attribution of the "Meilleurs Ouvrier de France en 2007" award.

Months of planning, research and hard work rewarded after decades of work and global recognition of his talent by his peers from all continents over the years.

Classified to the level of art pieces, his pieces (all hand-made) are only produced in small quantity, each bearing a tiny detail that differentiates it from the other, invisible to the layman or even a connoisseur who dreams of having his own "Morel".

I hope that this booklet will shed a new and instructive light on the few different manufacturing stages of this award winning pipe, a Masterpiece really.



As Pierre Morel said: "Once the subject of the competition for the «Meilleurs Ouvrier de France en 2007» competition was unveiled this year, a "Ulm pipe" with very specific plans and dimensions, the most difficult part for me was sourcing the raw material (briar, buffalo horn, ivory, silver ...) to make it. I broke about 80 pounds of briar and examined 25 pounds of buffalo horns.

Finding a piece of briar without a single defect in the dimensions imposed by the pipe, harboring a perfect grain, is madness. Not to mention the disappointment after each unsuccessful attempt, because finding the required piece of briar is part of the work required. "



*A few important
steps of
manufacturing*

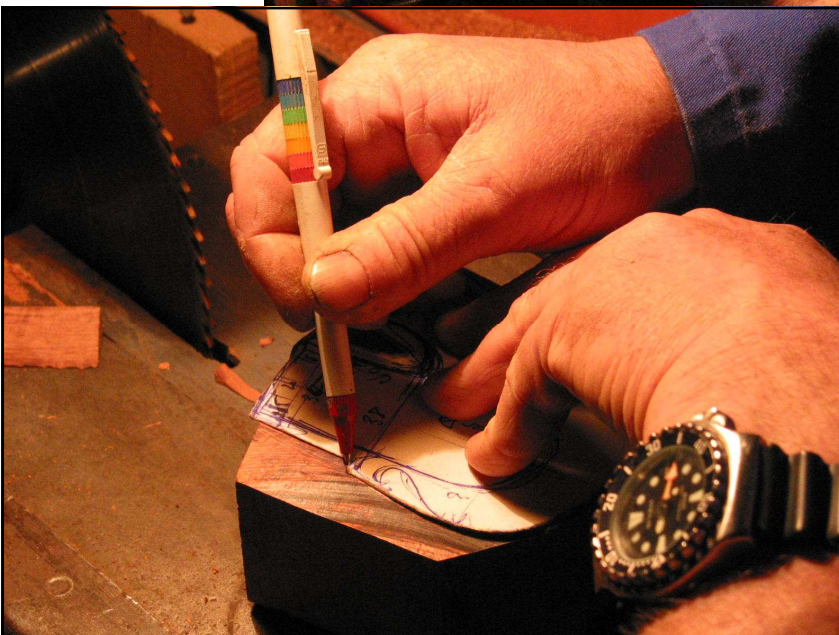


After an initial screening, the briar root is then cut, examined carefully and then traced to the dimensions of the pipe on a piece that can contain it.



Briar roots

*Initial cutting
with a circular
saw*



*Tracing according
to the candidate's
drawing.*



After choosing the best briar plateaux, sawn once to see their interior grain and then sketched for the pipe in the specified dimensions, arrives the moment of contouring with a circular saw, done freehand, following as best as possible the model. Then follows the roughing done with tools specially made by the pipemaker that gives the shape and depth of the pipe chamber (here 10 cm).



Contouring with circular saw



Roughing



The bad surprises succeed, shabbily hidden in the briar piece that was believed perfect, defects are discovered, working hours and rejected briar accumulate. Finally comes the beautiful briar wood we hoped for, the one that will meet our expectations for the following passes. The tenon turning will allow it to receive the attributes later installed and allow the drilling of the draft hole.



*Multiple
unsuccessful trials*

*Mounting,
tenon turning*



*Drilling of
the draft hole*



The pipe begins to take shape, a very sharp rotary rasp attacks the briar for the shaping, respecting a perfect symmetry guided by the candidate's precise eye before, between the skilled hands of the Master, a sanding wheel softens the steel's bites. When finally the pipe's shape, a Ulm pipe of Hungarian form, corresponds to the vision of the Master, it's his fingers who almost lovingly caress the pipe's sweeping curves with fine grit sandpaper for a final sanding.



Shaping with rotary rasp



Sanding wheel



The inescapable hand sanding



Designing unique pipes is also to imagine and build the pipe's stem to perfectly complement her body in perfect harmony. A candidate for the «Meilleurs Ouvrier de France» competition should be able to do that.

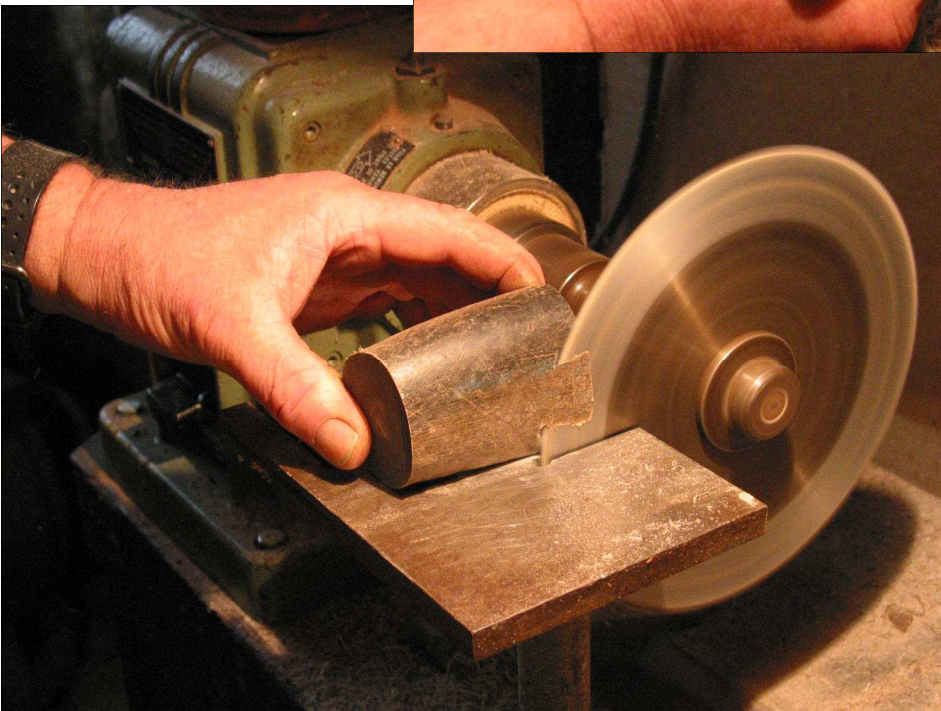
To achieve this, 25 kilos of buffalo horn were necessary, sorted and selected as the horn, like the briar, is disingenuous and often hides tiny flaws that only a trained eye can see before going deeper into the work phases.



*Raw buffalo
horns*



Horn cutting



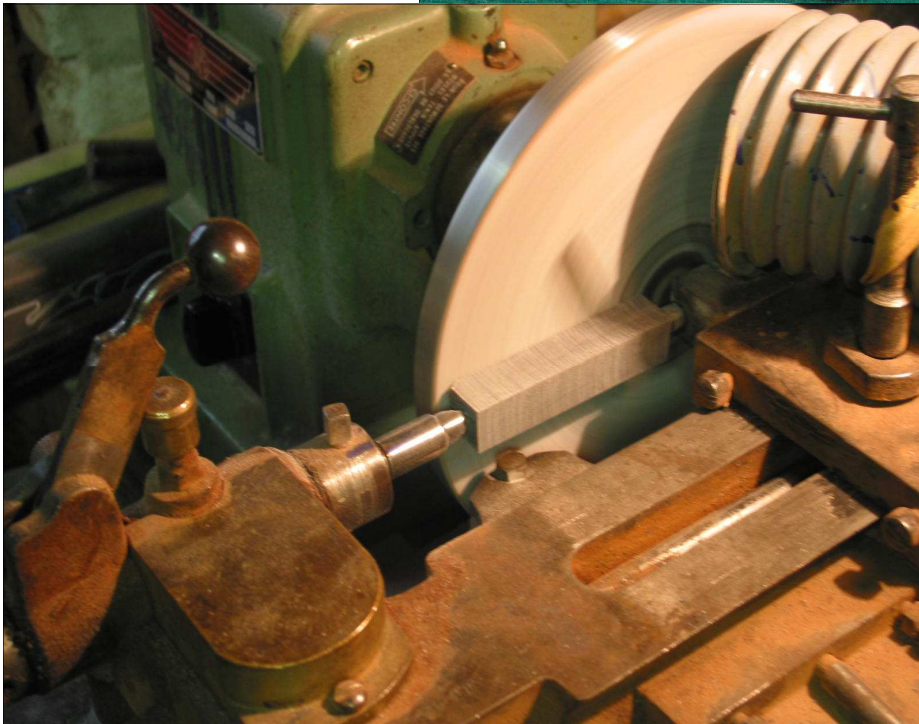


At this stage, the pipe's beautiful body is completed, and must now be adorned with the stem that is in itself a monument of knowledge with its mix of materials, buffalo horns (25 kilos of horn to find the perfect piece) and complex ivory parts that will complement each other in subtle tracery and inlay that only a master at the top of his art can accomplish.



*Basic elements
Stem and inlay*

*Very difficult
creation and fa-
brication*



*Preforming the
horn with a
flattening machine*



The finest materials are chosen, and must now be assembled. Inlays and turnings succeed before accomplishing a perfect result. Closely united, from the lens to the base of the pipe, the decorative elements can now take their place on the pipe's extension.



Turning the 9 cm extension



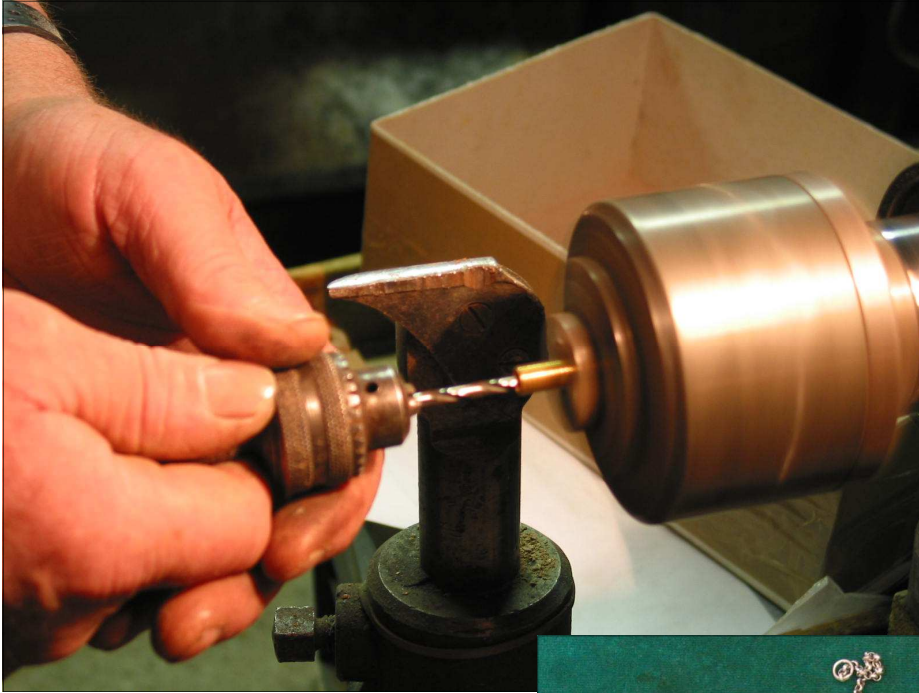
Stem ready to be assembled on the extension



détail



As Master Pierre Morel said: "I had to find a jeweler who was willing to make the solid silver attributes, parts, chain, rings and especially the cover. I carved it in wax and that was cast in solid silver by a friend of mine who is a sculptor. I even gave up jewelry from my youth to have the necessary material. But the result is beautiful, I have no regrets. "



*Fabrication
of the assembly
screws*

*Silver parts and
attributes*



*Before final as-
sembly*



*A lifetime of work,
multiple experiences,
research and quest for knowledge
summarized in
one pipe ...*

*A long labor in pain
But in joy ...*





After receiving the personal congratulations of Olga Saurat, President of the «Société des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France» for brilliantly obtaining the title of MOF during the graduation ceremony at the Sorbonne University before the gold of the Elysee, who better than Peter Morel could be more elegant with the robe of Saint-Claude's Master Pipemakers and give me the greatest pleasure to be admitted to the Noble Brotherhood, sponsoring me a few months after the consecration?



A final word ...

As emphasized in her speech by Olga Saurat, President of the Société des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France: « Throughout its history, France has counted a large number of artisans and workers, companions, labour contractors and anonymous builders as well as inspired goldsmiths whose talent and passion have left imperishable traces in every century, testimony of hard work and an accomplished technique (...) This excellence pushed to its highest level is the hallmark of the business, but it is mainly the result of a passion, and in a mechanized society oriented in its socio-occupational choices, we can rejoice that the passion that animated our ancestors, the "cathedral builders" has survived and still animates many professionals and young people. »

It is perfectly correct but one should add how the participant in this event sees his life turned upside down. He is, in most cases, almost at the peak of his abilities in his daily work, and doubts on his ability to meet the requirements set by the creators of the subject and starts to fear failure in this prestigious competition .

Then begins for the pipemaker registered in *Tournerie*, the quest to find the perfect briar, disappointing trials, the sleepless nights, the long days of work often poorly rewarded, false hopes when viciously appears hidden flaws in the wood that take him back to step one. Attributes also mingle with despair, shabby buffalo horn , difficult to work with, etc...

Difficult months succeed before the final test results but with, at heart, the satisfaction of a job well done. Although, as an intelligent man once said, "Only fools are completely satisfied. "(Pehem Sr.)

Then , as Pierre Morel said, let us be modest and pay a respectful homage to our peers who invented it all. .

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