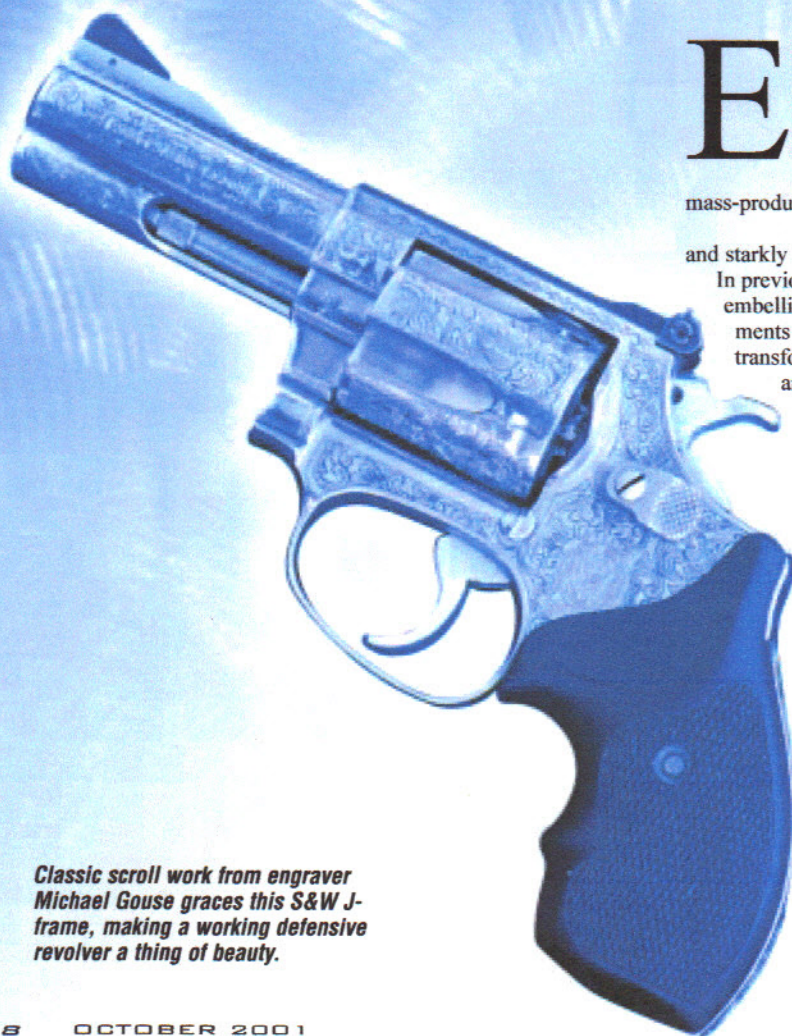


Meet The Gunsmith **MICHAEL GOUSE**

This talented engraver captures the spirit of the day when a gun was a work of art, as well as a working tool.

By Michael Cumpston



Classic scroll work from engraver Michael Gouse graces this S&W J-frame, making a working defensive revolver a thing of beauty.

Engraving fine firearms is a craft as old as firearms themselves. The 20th century has seen an explosion of firearms development, however, modern mass-production has caused most arms to take on a uniform and starkly utilitarian appearance.

In previous centuries, by contrast, firearms were frequently embellished with engraving, or with other finish treatments solely for esthetic reasons. The skills required to transform a common firearm into an uncommon work of art are not lost however, as the work of engraver Michael Gouse shows.

The Artist

Gouse Freelance Engraving is a family business located in Hamilton, Mont., in the shadow of the Bitterroot Mountains. It is here that Michael Gouse applies his art both for private individuals, and for such notable traditional arms makers as the Ballard Rifle Co., Lone Star Rifle Co., The American Hunting Rifle Co. and Oglesby & Oglesby.

Gouse began his career as a pen-and-ink artist and an illustrator of books. His abiding interest in firearms eventually lead him to apply his artistic bent to gun engraving, and he has been a full time engraver for over 10 years. While he practices in a full range of engraving styles — including Nimschke, Young, Helfricht, German relief and Arabesque — he

continued on page 65

MICHAEL GROUSE

continued from page 18

finds that most of his clientele prefer American scroll or a relief-cut oak-leaf and acorn design.

Gouse maintains an excellent Web page which features crisp images of a variety of examples of his work. A brass-framed Henry caught our attention. It was completely covered with a pleasing and well executed leaf and scroll pattern that bespoke a fine sense of artistic balance and clear mastery of the modern tools of the engraver's art.

The Project

The quoted price for this and other examples of his work was very attractive. Such a treatment could reasonably be applied to a working firearm without relegating it to the status of a display case artifact.

With this in mind, we contacted Gouse to inquire about some American scroll style work on a Smith & Wesson model 60-4, an adjustable sighted, 3" barreled variation of the Chiefs Special. This is definitely a working gun. With its easy portability, and accuracy with a wide range of .38 Special loads, it is among Smith & Wesson's finest-ever Kit Guns.

Michael told me that he had applied an American scroll pattern to a number of Smith J-frames with pleasing results. A

friend in Montana had just picked up his Chiefs Special rattlesnake gun, and swore that the Gouse engraving had actually enhanced the little snub's crotalid-busting capabilities. Full coverage on the revolver would cost about \$250 to \$300, and we would have it back within a couple of weeks of its arrival at the shop.

The pattern would harmonize with the revolver's practical boot grips, and would also go nicely with a set of frame-fitting walnut stocks of the traditional style. All in all, it really did sound too good to be true.

We shipped the S&W, and in short order received a call confirming the safe arrival of my revolver. Gouse had a couple of questions about details of the work, and about procedures for return of the finished product. A later call provided advance notice of the return shipping date, followed by an e-mail confirmation that the Kit Gun was on the way.

All contacts from the Gouse shop were conducted in a pleasant and business-like manner, with services delivered in complete accord with the advertised expectations. The finished product met and exceeded our own inherently cautious hopes.

An Elegant Outcome

Initial impressions are important in matters such as this, and we were extremely happy with the overall package. The design is well suited to the size and profile of the

Kit Gun. The leaf and scroll patterns are well defined and executed with a strength and sureness that holds fast even under the magnification of a watchmaker's loupe. New facets of detail and design are revealed with every change in light and viewing angle, and my already prized revolver has become infinitely more valued by the transformation.

Gouse welcomes telephone or e-mail inquiries. He prefers to complete the majority of jobs within a two to four week turn around period, and definitely does not like to back-log or, as he says "sit on" the customer's gun. His web site provides price range information for engraving on a variety of guns, and the current pricing on a Single Action Army is a fair indicator of the competitive aspect of his pricing:

Half-Coverage — \$250 to \$275

Full Coverage — \$475 to \$550



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Gouse Freelance Engraving