


ARTISAN TALENT TURNS A POST-WAR COLT SAA INTO A 'CLASSIC'

ROY HUNTINGTON • PHOTOS: RON BEZ



It's the little things adding up to the whole here. The brass-plated ejector spring mirrors the originals, while the fire-blued pins and screws add a bit of snap — like lipstick on a pretty girl! The “black powder” frame is evident here with the singlescrew on the front of the frame.

PEACEMAKER SPECIALISTS

The 1880s was arguably the peak of the Victorian era art form. During this period, craftsmen — more artisans than not — performed inordinately ornate feats with metal and wood. Once functionality was established, the bulk of their work went into the details, the


“pleasing of the eye” portion of the job. Look at the ornate Victorian “Painted Ladies” homes for classic examples — still popular. Did they *need* to detail them like that? Hardly. But in those bygone times, style and grace were as important, perhaps more important, than simple functionality.

These same details can be seen on the classic gun designs of the era. But alas, all too often this attention to detail has been demolished in the quest for speed of production and to meet a price point. Injection mold the frame? Sure. Stamp out a slide? You bet. Soul-less though. At least we still have custom gunsmiths alive today to cast light in the shadows. Among them, among the very top of the crowd actually, resides Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists.

How do I know? Eddie and I happen to be friends too, and I’m the proud owner of Colts he’s graced with his touch. I speak from personal experience here. What you’re reading isn’t just the cut and paste of info from websites — common with much of the digital noise these days. I own and shoot guns he’s worked on, and have for the past 20 years. I know his work.

The Goal Here?

Easy — and hard. It’s easy to say: “Let’s start with a plain Jane modern Colt Peacemaker and re-apply the lost



Those tiny touches turn a common gun into the uncommon. The checkering with border on the hammer spur and “original”-look barrel marks paint a picture of a modern gun made to look “classic.” However, a trained eye can easily spot an authentic original.



A minty Colt SAA from the 1880s? Nope! Fooled you. It's actually a classic re-created by Peacemaker Specialists — from a post-war Colt!

Victorian details. To do this right takes attention to three important facets of the process. And it takes the talent to do it. It's a bit like a "Resto-Mod" in the car world. You take a classic car, then while keeping the timeless lines and feel, upgrade parts and performance. So, what Eddie is doing here is essentially making a "Resto-Mod" Colt. Interesting.

Knowing exactly *what* details have been omitted is first. You can't fix what you don't know "needs fixing." Having the ability to create these lost details using hand tools and old school machine processes is part two. And last, and at least as important as the first two, is knowing how to apply the vintage finishes all-important to enhancing what has been created. If the finish fails, then it takes away from the whole. So let's ignore the terms "Cold Blue" or "Baked On Finish" here please — at least for now?

What Eddie accomplishes is often subtle, and unless you have a keen eye, one Colt may look like another. But like anything special, to the owner — and their discerning eye — it builds pride of ownership and an appreciation of the classic artists of old. A dividend? The ability to actually shoot your gun without harming an ancient, highly collectible artifact of the golden age of gun making. There is rhyme to this effort — and reasoning.

Three Perspectives

Eddie Janis makes it clear even if your dream gun might never be fired, it could still defend your family. "I make sure my build guns are reliable and function at a high level of smoothness," explained Eddie. "If your Colt doesn't go bang every time — why have it?" He's right, of course. A custom knife that isn't sharp pales next to one you can shave



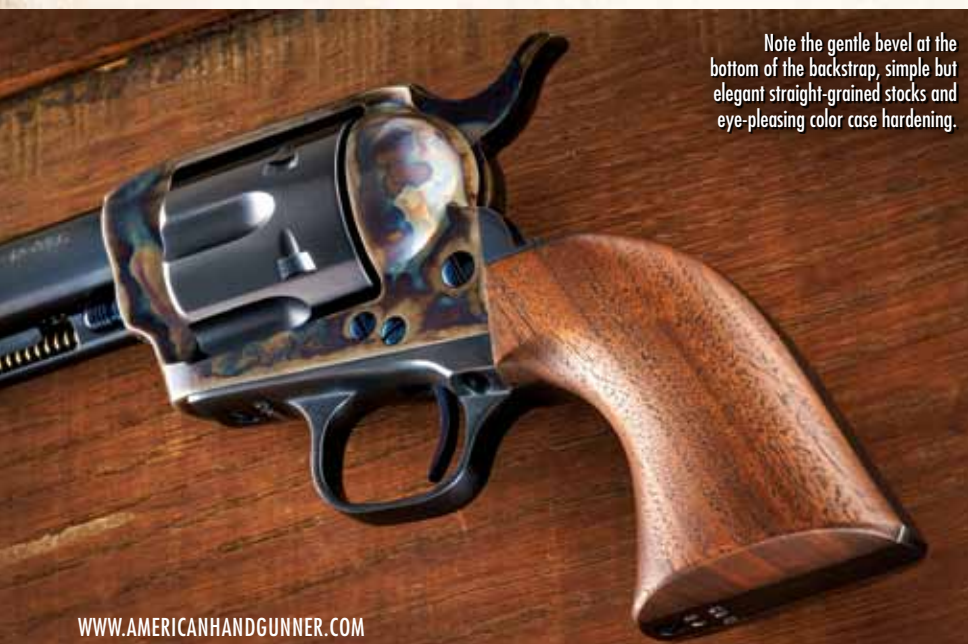
Here, in the "white" (meaning without finish on it yet) is the "new" cylinder having an elegantly beveled front edge and enhanced flutes. Careful work by a careful master of the art.

with. One is simply eye candy, while the other is for "real." Eddie only builds "for real" guns, even if they are silver plated, engraved and have carved ivory grips. They still work. Perfectly.

The mechanics are like most custom work, and smoothing and polishing the frame (in seven specific places, by the way) begins the process. Removing all friction is critical and getting rid of those factory tool marks, burrs, uneven surfaces and worse, builds the foundation for what follows.

A close inspection of the stock parts assures what's not up to speed is tossed and replaced with high quality replacement parts from Peacemaker Specialists. Everything is then stoned and polished and every part is adjusted to fit, well — perfectly. Then they are modified to extend the service life 10-fold. How does he do this? That's a bit of Eddie Janis magic we can't get into. Suffice to say, one of my own Colts

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Note the gentle bevel at the bottom of the backstrap, simple but elegant straight-grained stocks and eye-pleasing color case hardening.

PEACEMAKER

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Eddie attended to, yes, some 20 years ago — a 4¾" .45 Colt, has well over 11,000 rounds through it and is still tight, slick and fast. Try that with a stock Colt.

The Peacemaker "Gunfighter" main-spring, sear and bolt springs are hand-fitted as part of this process. These springs are manufactured to Eddie's design, and are actually made one at a time by hand, then carefully heat treated — one at a time. These springs are the most advanced single-action army springs on the planet — as well as the most expensive. They're guaranteed for life. They're also not the piano wire "reproduction" springs you see, but flat springs like the originals. But they happen to be full of the Peacemaker Specialists' magic.

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When I first cocked the hammer on one of Eddie's guns I vividly recall thinking it was broken. The effort was so light as to cause me to doubt my own senses. I remember stopping, then looking up at Eddie as if to say, "What's wrong here?" He grinned. "Smooth and light, huh?" I grinned back. Smooth and light, indeed. There was nothing wrong, only a great deal right.

Eddie's attention to removing friction eliminates the need for heavy springs. In a stock gun, heavy springs are needed to sort of "force" parts to work together, overcoming inconsistencies in angles, surfaces and cams. Perfect fitting means a Colt feeling so smooth you will swear it's running on ball bearings. It honestly does feel like the surfaces are high quality Teutonic bearings.


But they're not.

Once you have a Gunslinger Deluxe action job, it's guaranteed for the life of the owner, no matter how much you shoot your Colt. And that's not just hype. I have one, I shoot it, this is all true — and it's never broken once, ever.

Accuracy

One step to optimizing the accuracy of your peacemaker is done by cutting an 11-degree forcing cone

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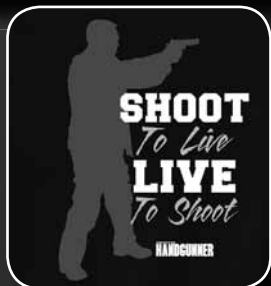


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on the back of the barrel to accept the fired bullet and guide it carefully into the bore. Most experienced Colt shooters rely exclusively on lead bullets, and these are soft, deforming easily. Because of what's called "tolerance stacking" — essentially meaning each manufacturing step introduces a bit of slop — perfect alignment is almost impossible in most revolvers; especially those whose design dates back to 1873. When the bullet transitions from the cylinder to the barrel it normally hits one side of the cone harder than the other. Cutting an 11-degree forcing cone allows a new gentler angle on the funnel of the barrel to ease the bullet into the rifling more smoothly. The thought is less bullet deformation allows the bullet to fit the bore more precisely, hence deliver more accuracy at the target. And it works.

A central accuracy step to go with this is to custom re-chamber your cylinder to match the exact size of the barrel on your particular .45 Colt. This modification requires replacing the stock cylinder with a .357 Colt cylinder re-chambered with smaller chamber throats. If done right — and Eddie does it right — this can shrink groups by 50 percent. Think about that. Say, your gun was shooting 4" at 25 yards. Now it will shoot 2" — or better.

A nice final "accuracy" touch is the fact Eddie will personally test fire and sight in your Colt with *your* loads, or use Black Hills Ammunition. He adjusts windage to print dead center at 25 yards. You'll be able to experience the wonderful, but all-too-rare feeling, of having a Colt SAA hit *exactly* where you aim.

Beautification

On this particular Colt Eddie started with a beautiful perfectly fitted straight grain walnut stock with a hand rubbed finish, in the one-piece style of the early 1st generation Colts. Then it got what Peacemaker Specialists calls their "1880s Package."

During the early years of Colt production the SAA was manufactured with many small details — adding up to a pistol comfortable to shoot as well as one visually appealing. During the retro-fitting for this project, Eddie included as many of these early Victorian-style details as possible, and the total package is a careful blend of these features. Alone they might be pleasant to look at, or feel good in the hand, but truly, the sum of the parts in this case adds up to much more than you might think possible.

No pistol recoiling in your hand should have sharp edges on the grip, so this one is neatly beveled at the heel and toe. Also, look for the bevel at the front of the ejector tube, and installation of

a brass plated ejector spring as used on all 1880s Colt SAAs. The bevel is much easier on the leather on the inside of your holster, and it's all authentic eye candy.

Beveling and re-fluting the cylinder not only look great — with the flutes bigger, wider, and round at the back — but remove the sharp corners at the front. Again, easier on the holster and your hands.

Polishing off the modern barrel address and caliber markings and re-stamping with the authentic-looking 1st generation "2-line" address and "45 Colt" caliber markings simply looks very classy. It's the pride of ownership thing.

This next is a tiny thing, but adds much. Checkering the hammer spur and color case hardening it to match the frame seems minor, but it's not. The personality of the gun comes to life when it's cocked, and your thumb will find this small detail again and again. You'll likely smile each time. It's practical too, and while the expression of hand checkering with a fine line border speaks softly — it still makes a statement.

Eddie even hand stamped the serial numbers on the backstrap and trigger guard on this Colt. That's a nice vintage touch, giving the Colt a turn of the century look. You'll need to look closely for some touches, but they're there, nonetheless.

The finish is strictly a 1st Generation style blue and color case hardening combo, celebrated with fire blue appointments. This may seem unrestrained extravagance to some, but there's no denying the huge improvement over the stock shiny black oxide finish on modern Colts. Call it a celebration of immoderation.

Suddenly, you're looking at a gun you might have admired resting in a curved glass display case in Tombstone in 1882. Imagine the clerk reaching in, green visor on his forehead, clicking open the gate as he thumbs back the hammer two clicks, handing it to you. "Be in town long?" he says, glancing at your dusty range gear, wondering if you can afford the \$18 price tag.

"Nope, just passing with the herd, but I got my pay in my pocket. I'll take the Colt, and two boxes of cat'ridges too."

Think hard on this. Life is short, too short. After Eddie worked on my guns all those years ago, I commented I might carry an Italian clone when in the desert rather than messing up a Colt. "You're nuts," he said. "That's crazy. Enjoy them while you can. Carry 'em, shoot 'em, appreciate what you have. You worked hard for them, so use them!"

He's right, you know.



For more info: www.americanhandgunner.com/index; Peacemaker Specialists (805) 238-9100, 144 Via Fuchsia, Paso Robles, CA 93446