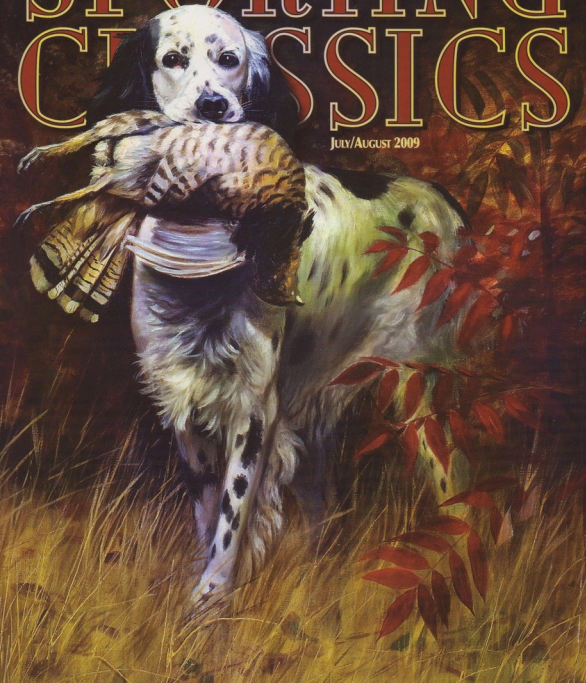


# SPORTING CLASSICS

JULY/AUGUST 2009



# Shotguns

By Robert Matthews

I don't need another gun. Fifty-odd years of fervent gun-trading have left me with a very nice assemblage of shotguns. I wouldn't exactly call it a collection. There is no theme, no rhyme or reason to it. I just have something for everything. Mostly side-by-sides.

There are some nice old American guns, a couple of fine Italians, a triad of British Bests. Hammer guns and hammerless, there is at least one for every shotgunning purpose that I can imagine. Got a "rainy day" gun to back up each of the headliners. Even have a couple of repeaters and an over-under. I don't need another gun.

I ran into Dieter Krieghoff the other day, and we got to talking about guns. He is justly proud of the guns that he makes. Said that I needed to look at his sidelock Essencia, especially the new small-frame in 28 gauge and .410. Production is fairly limited and all of the early guns sold out very quickly, so I hadn't handled one. I told him that I wouldn't mind looking, but that I didn't need another gun.

We visited for a while, and laughed about my history with Krieghoff. Long ago I used to have a K80 and it was a great gun. Back in the days when my eyes were

*Krieghoff's beautiful Essencia is a stunning reiteration of an antique concept, resurrected in modern terms using thoroughly modern materials and technology.*



TERRY ALLEN

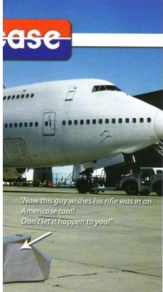
*This 20-bore Essencia (top) and its companion 28 feature Turkish walnut stocks. Single triggers and Prince of Wales grips are optional.*

keen and reflexes were quick, I labored under the illusion that I had enough talent to shoot a shotgun competitively. Many "hot shots" of the era were using K80s, which seemed to be the ideal tool to lift me from the ranks of the also-rans and into a champion.

Unfortunately, it takes more than a great gun to make a champion, and I was soon disabused of such notions by some evil men who did in fact possess such a talent, and who were quite happy to periodically relieve me of all of my spare cash. I finally gave it up when the rumor surfaced that Krieghoff was considering paying me to stop using their products in competition.

In time, I realized there weren't so damned many witnesses in the bird fields and that pointing dogs seldom tell tales. After my epiphany, I took up the side-by-side again and went bird-hunting with a vengeance. When the K20 came out, I briefly considered acquiring one for upland shooting, but by then I had re-devoted myself to the side-by-side. I never went back. The good news in this story is that

along the way, I had become intimately acquainted with the wonderful craftsmanship of Krieghoff.



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Fast-forwarding a few decades, I found myself standing on the front porch of the lodge at Wynfield Plantation near Albany, Georgia, fondling another Krieghoff gun. And the barrels were placed properly in relation to each other. After our meeting, Dieter put me in touch with Alex Diehl, general manager of Krieghoff International, and one thing led to another the way they will. A month later, on the eve of the last day of the Georgia quail season, I was holding a petite 28-gauge Essencia that weighed a paltry 5 pounds, 13 ounces. The lovely little thing was a loaner, on its way to Mike DeChevieux who had graciously given his permission for us to use it. Then Alex uncased a 20-bore that hefted slightly less than 6 1/2 pounds, even with a set of 30-inch barrels.

Visually the guns were stunning. Like many of the early British Bests of the late 19th century, Essencias are true back-action sidelocks that carry the rounded, organic lines of their predecessors. Devoid of angles and corners, they look like something that grew from the earth rather than something made by man. Since the springs that power the locks are in the back of the action, the front can be rounded rather than "square" in cross-section. While Essencias do in fact resemble antique British back-locks, to state it so simply would do a gross injustice to them. They are not copies of anything, but are rather reiterations of an antique concept, resurrected in modern terms using thoroughly modern materials and technology. To the eye, they capture all the clichés of time and beauty and form and function. And all of the clichés fit. As with all things this good, they will in time become a cliché in their own right. If not for the fact that I don't need another gun, I would have to own one.

I had seen photographs of Essencias and knew they were lovely, but nothing had prepared me for the way they feel. "Feel" is always subjective, but the guns are so trim that the 20 feels like a 28. The 28 feels like a wand. The guns carry good weight for their respective gauges, which contributes to a silky

smooth swing, but the slimmest tells you your mind they weigh much less. The Essencias are tactile in the extreme, demanding to be touched, inviting in the way of an old lover slipping her hand into yours.

We talked and handled guns late into the night, and dawn came all too quickly. We awoke to a hard, pewter-gray sky and scudding black clouds that promised we would have limited time to play with our toys. We grabbed a hasty breakfast in the lodge dining room and happily introduced German-born Alex to grits. With a polite smile, he even claimed to like them!

Alex was saved from further experimentation when, right on cue, our guide and old friend Chuck Turner appeared at the front door, accompanied by a coterie of Wynfield's finest. Buck the pointer and my old buddy, an English cocker aptly named Comet, were among them. In no time at all we were speeding down a sandy road that slithered its way to the back of the plantation where we loosed the dogs and uncased the guns.

We were into quail in no time, and the guns got a thorough workout on the tiny brown bullets as they dodged and weaved among the pines. The dogs performed like the thoroughbreds they are. And so did the Essencias. For three hours we raced the storm, and when we finally lost the race, we dashed for the lodge where we cleaned the guns, dried them carefully and put them away.

The guns may have been out of sight, but they were not out of mind, for the Essencia is like the girl you could never quite forget — the one who simply had something extra. Perhaps something in her smile. Something in her walk. Something that you couldn't quite single out, but which distinguished her from all the other pretty girls. She was the one that you married, or if not, the one that still haunts you after all these years. And you still don't know how you let her get away. And . . .

You'll have to excuse me now. I have to go see my banker. I just realized that I do need another gun.