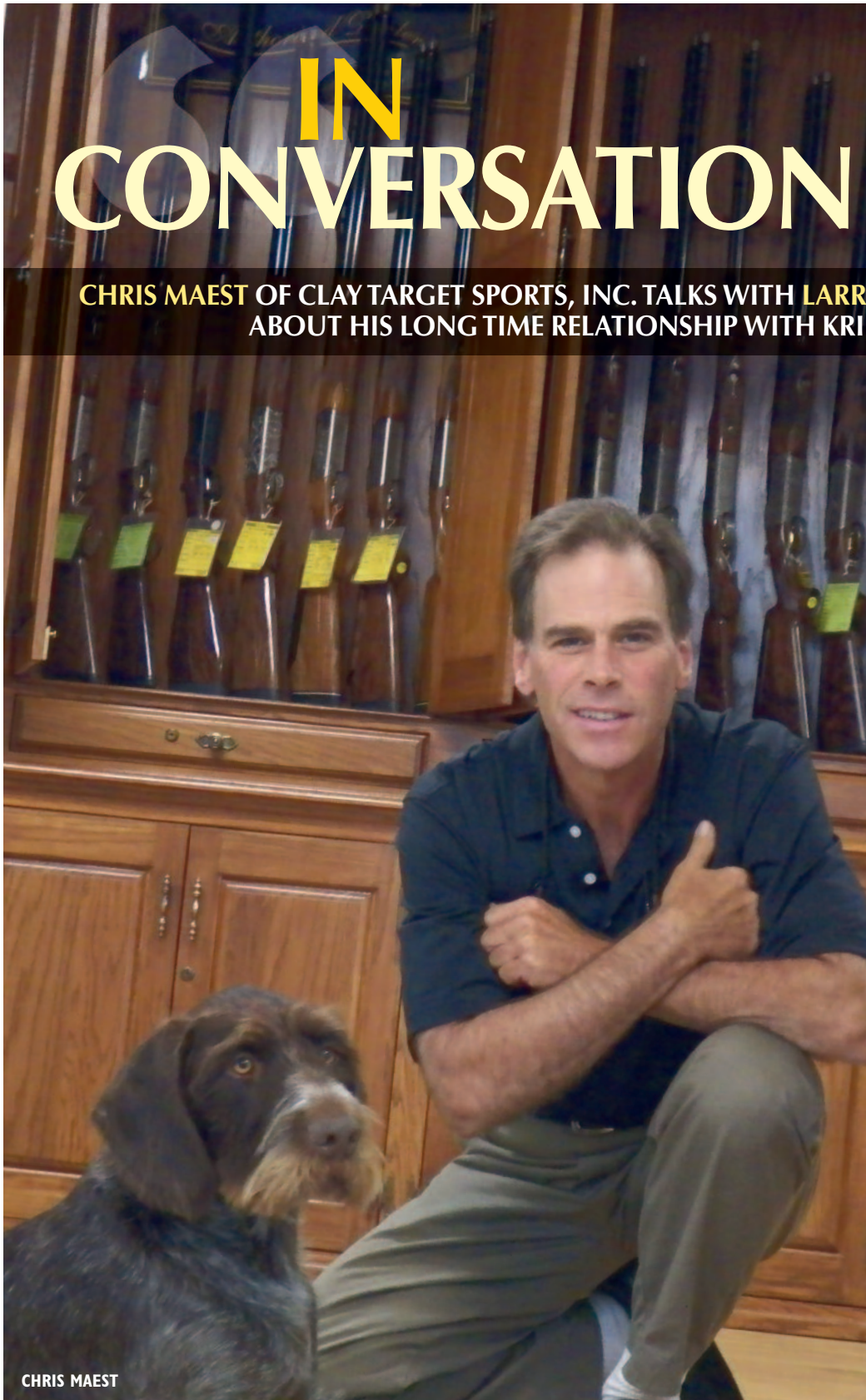


IN CONVERSATION

CHRIS MAEST OF CLAY TARGET SPORTS, INC. TALKS WITH LARRY GRENEVICKI, M.ED. ABOUT HIS LONG TIME RELATIONSHIP WITH KRIEGHOFF



CHRIS MAEST

Meeting with Chris Maest at his showroom and shop in Princeton (NJ) was a reunion of sorts. We first met a few months after he opened his business, Clay Target Sports Inc. in 1994 when I became a customer. Now, some 18 years later, I took the opportunity to return to interview Maest about his long time well established business of providing shotgun enthusiasts with quality shotguns. I was interested to hear about his formidable background and training and his outlook on business in such a very specialized field. I found Maest to be open-minded about his earlier business ventures and current business and it quickly became clear that he's a true businessman with a solid gunsmithing background that supports his chosen occupation and profession extremely well.

Early Days

It all began back in 1980 at the School of Trades in Lakewood, Colorado. Maest was enrolled in the Gunsmithing Degree Program – a three-year program that was intense in its gunsmithing offerings of all guns (hand guns and long guns). The program revolved around the term D&F,



THESE HAND TOOLS WERE MADE BY MAEST EARLY ON AT GUNSMITHING SCHOOL.

meaning design and function – every part of a firearm can be repaired or restored. Back then, repair and restoration was taught utilizing hand tools. If it was a mechanical break, fix it with hand tools or make the part. If it was wood, repair it to its original condition or make its replacement – with hand tools. After mastering the craft of using hand tools, the gunsmithing curriculum advanced to using power equipment and machines. Maest quickly mastered both in order to perform gunsmithing and gun restoration projects.

Even before schooling, Maest had a fondness for shotguns that soon became a passion, eventually resulting in his chosen business. An opportunity during those early years arose when he became the first American hired by Krieghoff. He was working in California at the time – and accepted the offer.

Krieghoff immediately sent Maest to Ulm, Germany, to hone his gunsmithing skills on all Krieghoff firearms. During his 10 years or so of employment he had the opportunity to return to Ulm several times for refresher courses or for an introduction to new Krieghoff firearms being introduced into the sporting market. Even after setting up his own business, Maest and Krieghoff remain close in business dealings – his association with Krieghoff is as strong today as ever.

Own Business

Since its founding in 1994, the primary objective of Clay Target Sports has been to provide the competitive shooter with a quality, full service experience. It starts with the shooter purchasing a new shotgun and includes custom stock fitting and servicing the firearm during the course of ownership. “Whether it’s a customer buying their first shotgun, or a new or existing customer, everyone gets the same personal attention,” explains Maest.

“Each Krieghoff K-80 sold includes properly fitting the firearm to the specific and unique needs of the customer,” explains Maest. “Stock fitting includes length of pull, pitch adjustment, cast and adjustability of comb height. Other issues that arise (or are noticed during the fitting process) are also taken care of to ensure a perfect fit.” He went on to explain how he views the target site picture, how he corrects dominant eye issues, ensures the gun is comfortable to shoulder and how the gun feels (perceived recoil) when fired. He reviews the point of impact with each customer and has a routine to check gun mount and gun point so each mount has the gun pointing exactly where it needs to be – shot after shot.

Gun of the Year

Through his years of business, Maest has produced many high grade offerings for customers. His engraving renditions, having been approved by the customer, can be found on many fine shotguns and Krieghoff rifles. Each year Krieghoff awards the “Gun of the Year” citation to a

designer and gunsmith who has produced the “Best of the Best” firearm that year. These are high value ultra-custom guns of the very best quality, the finest finishing, the best of engraving and the best wood and stock finishing. It is the highest Krieghoff accolade a gun dealer can achieve – and Maest has won the award twice. The first was in 2006 and then repeated in 2011 – both designed by Maest. These awards attest to the knowledge that he has to develop something so very special in a gun. “That something special doesn’t come overnight,” said Maest. “Both took longer than two years to come full circle from manufacture, to metal finishing, to design of the custom

engraving and the selection and finish of specialty custom wood.”

Maest’s clientele is very broad based. He doesn’t rely on local shooters, but views the whole of the US as his market. Customers have come into his showroom from every State, with many repeat sales from as far afield as California and Colorado. Most sales are for competitive shotguns – not shotguns for hunting, though he does do a small number of custom Krieghoff rifles when a customer wants something special in both engraving and stock finishes.

The other premium shotgun marketed by Clay Target Sports is Blaser. Their range of F3 models, particularly the F3 Supersport, are always in strong demand. *(A full report on a recent visit to Blaser, Germany, and review of the F3 Supersport is featured elsewhere in this issue.)* Maest takes the opportunity now and again to go on the road with his shotguns. So, if you can’t make the time to visit his showroom in Princeton (NJ) but would like to meet up with him ‘on the road’ – visit his website www.claytargetsports.com where he lists the time and places of the shoots he is attending so that you can take a closer look at the F3 and range of K-80s that now includes the recently launched K-80 Parcours.

So, in closing, if you are just entering the market for a premium competitive shotgun with all





custom fitting and alterations included from a well-known and respected factory trained gunsmith, then Chris Maest of Clay Target Shotguns should make your short list. If you're in the market for something special

in metal finish, custom engraving, custom wood or maybe the "Best of the Best", Maest can accommodate your aspirations to have a shotgun that's individual and special to you – a true family heirloom. ■

