

FOUNDED IN 1790, THE FIRM JOHANN FANZOJ LOOKS BACK ON A TRADITION OF CRAFTSMANSHIP AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL UPHELD FOR MORE THAN NINE GENERATIONS. SHUNNING AWAY FROM MASS PRODUCTION, THE FIRM REMAINS DEDICATED TO THE TRADITION OF CREATING UNIQUE HUNTING WEAPONS BY HAND. EVERY YEAR A SMALL NUMBER OF EXCLUSIVE GUNS AND RIFLES LEAVES FANZOJ'S WORKSHOP, HANDCRAFTED AND CUSTOMIZED TO PERFECTION, INCORPORATING THE CUSTOMER'S AESTHETIC PREFERENCES AND PRECISION REQUIREMENTS. FROM THE ELEGANT "PIRSCHSTUTZEN," THE LIGHTWEIGHT THREE-BARRELED RIFLE, TO THE BIG GAME DOUBLE BARREL RIFLES, EVERY WEAPON IS ONE OF A KIND.



FRANZOJ RIFLES

The art of gunmaking in Ferlach dates back to the 16th century. Thanks to the nearby natural resources of iron and timber, water from rivers cascading down the Karawanken mountains and an already well-established workforce of skilled iron- and metalworkers, a weapon industry evolved that would soon become world famous.

For over two centuries, state-of-the-art technology and unsurpassed Old World craftsmanship have defined the hunting weapons handcrafted by the Johann Fanzoj company. With the current company director Daniela Fanzoj, her father Johann Fanzoj senior and her brother Patrick, the excitement for this unique craft is distinctly living on ensuring success in the future with creative and innovative ideas for production coupled with the traditional values of a family company.

What was the first object you saw that elicited a deep desire to obtain it ?

I am quite simple in my needs, but do recall the single and only occurrence in my life when I felt a deep and instant desire to own something: a small house in a small fishing village on the Croatian seaside, made of natural stone, with playful staircases, a lovingly designed garden with a stone sculpture of a donkey, with cacti planted in its saddle bags on each side, with an open fireplace outside. This triggered most beautiful memories, notions of complete silence, of wind in the hair, salt on the skin, an absurdly turquoise blue sea, howling wind and crashing waves in winter, figs harvested from one's own trees: a wonderful vision of a "simple life" – a place where my children would return home with their children.

What is the history of your company?

Our family firm was founded in 1790, and does indeed have a long history. We come from a small town in the South of Austria where the weapon industry dates back to the 16th century. Interestingly enough, here in Ferlach a level of handicraft skill has been preserved that elsewhere is long forgotten.

How did you personally get involved in the family business?

When I took over the company 12 years ago (I was actually thrown into it) we were making completely different products – solid rifles, for the conservative hunter, like all other artisan workshops in town. To me the direction was clear. The first years were a time of drought. Implementing changes to something that has been done that way for over hundred years into our products is a time-consuming, expensive process.

What is the personal motivation for your work?

If somebody opens a gun case with a Johann Fanzoj rifle in 100 years, or sees our work in some museum, and says, "Wow, those guys are incredible." Leaving a trace in history, doing one's best – isn't that a privilege, much more than the average person will ever have the possibility to say about himself?

It is not only about "decoration," we do wonderfully simple, clean objects as well. Of course it is always the catchy engravings that get the most attention. But fine gun making is not about this at all. The best gun is a combination of sophisticated design, the best materials, considerations about lines and shape, surface treatment, polishing, exact work.

In a world where handwork is becoming more and more extinct we do have the attitude and abilities to combine all those aspects.

What inspires you, what inspires the design of your product?

To me, life is like a big playground, there are so many sources of ideas around, ready to be picked up. The whole world is a source of inspiration. I study other products from completely different fields, which benefits they provide to the customer, which kind of emotions they steer. Sometimes it is a material mix in a new luxury car's interior, an innovative technical idea or a creative high-class presentation of an object that fascinates me. When I visit museums I might find inspiration in some ornament on the ceiling, in pictures, sculptures, and books, of course, lots of books. So any field in human history, art, etcetera is a potential source of inspiration. Nature is a great source of inspiration, of course. I bought books about frogs and butterflies recently, and am fascinated by their colors and patterns. Who knows if we might use that some day? When thinking of animals to be depicted, or theming a rifle to a certain animal I find it important to study the animal and then wait for the sparking idea. We just built a rifle themed to the "Leopard/ Black Panther." To me it is very important to catch the essence, how and where the animal lives, his habits, his shamanistic and spiritual meaning. I take many pictures and talk to hunters. A clear idea forms - how the rifle must be.

When featuring American Indians one time we had the opportunity to dip into their culture, their signs, colors, symbols. We try never to be trivial, too simplified, stereotyping in our depictions.

What is your favorite part of the job?

Traditional gun making is very conservative, it is sometimes still a surprise to me how readily our direction has been accepted and further requested by customers from all over the world.

It seems we are even tapping new markets of customers, younger, affluent, very conscious about their lifestyle and very interested and knowledgeable. They want to see sophistication and improvement, even in a handcrafted rifle.

When working with artisanal methods on one piece at a time, there are no boundaries to creating exquisitely unique objects, other than our own (and our customer's) imagination.

What makes your rifles remarkable examples of luxury?

To me a handcrafted object must be beautiful, sexy – its shape flowing, the lines purposefully leading into another. Handwork must visually perform something where machine work cannot follow. And this must show instantly. Even if many people do not understand the laws of symmetry and beauty, they realize when something is beautiful.

And yes, a weapon can be beautiful. It is the combination of cool, perfect steel, beautifully shaped and polished with graceful lines and arches, precious root wood from hundreds-of-years old walnut trees and a smooth mirror-like surface. It is the series of "clack" sounds when opening and closing a perfectly finished and regulated hunting rifle.

Each individual part of the rifle is hand-crafted with the level of detail found only in the world's finest firearms, and the gun maker's skill and pursuit of perfection are visible down to the smallest part in this rifle with exacting wood-to-metal fit, perfect polishing of the metal and flawlessly executed engravings to suit. The smell of "old-world" oil and metal has a very specific smell.

We then sit together with our engravers and goldsmith – talk it over, do some brainstorming – which is great fun. It is just a highly creative work atmosphere. We always try to make truly one-of-a-kind pieces, and yes, we are expensive – of course! And you always get what you pay for I tend to tell our customers.



What differentiates your rifles from others?

Everybody can make guns today; the machines are able to spit out as many parts as you want. But being able to do the creative work, the design work and come up with new technical solutions and offer utmost unique objects, one-of-a kind and only built one time, hardly any company can offer today. This and in addition creative ideas to personalize your item in a way that expresses the customer's lifestyle and personality is the right mix for success it seems.

The customer does not want a rifle "overloaded" with decoration, gold, etcetera. We continuously find that our decision and investment of the past years was "right on the money." The customer wants to see a sophisticated product, to see research and improvement in a luxury product. Additionally with our rifle he gets the old-world flair, the visible slowness, the good feelings in the execution, entrusting yourself and your money into the skilled hands of master craftsman who slowly and meticulously form solid steel into precious objects of lasting value.

Whatever we do the product must be elegant. Although the design gets bolder every year we strictly take care never to leave the narrow path of elegance and good taste.

What do you strive for in the future?

A strive for perfection, this constant urge to top ourselves - innovation and improvement. We are taking up any challenge to further improve the product. In our business any trace of improvement takes time, at least a year. Everything still goes slow. We have a clear idea about production capacity and we do not want to increase the output.

We are personally involved and have great enthusiasm. We are not in for growth, we work with our own money, in our own rhythm – and are striving for perfection over and over again. We are making object (almost) for eternity – heirlooms.

What inspires you, what inspires the design of your product?

Most people (and we like these customers best) do understand what is going on when they visit our workshop. Handicraft here is not mere "lip-service." We really are doing everything by hand.

It is a moment of awe when people enter our showroom and get a feel of the finished product: the fine shapes and lines of the metal parts, where a machine could never go, the flawless mirrored surface of the wooden stock, result of several months of sand-papering and oiling, that can only be achieved when everything – started from the slow "drying process" of the stock blank, that are stored for about 10 years in our wood chamber, is done with the slowness and exactitude.



