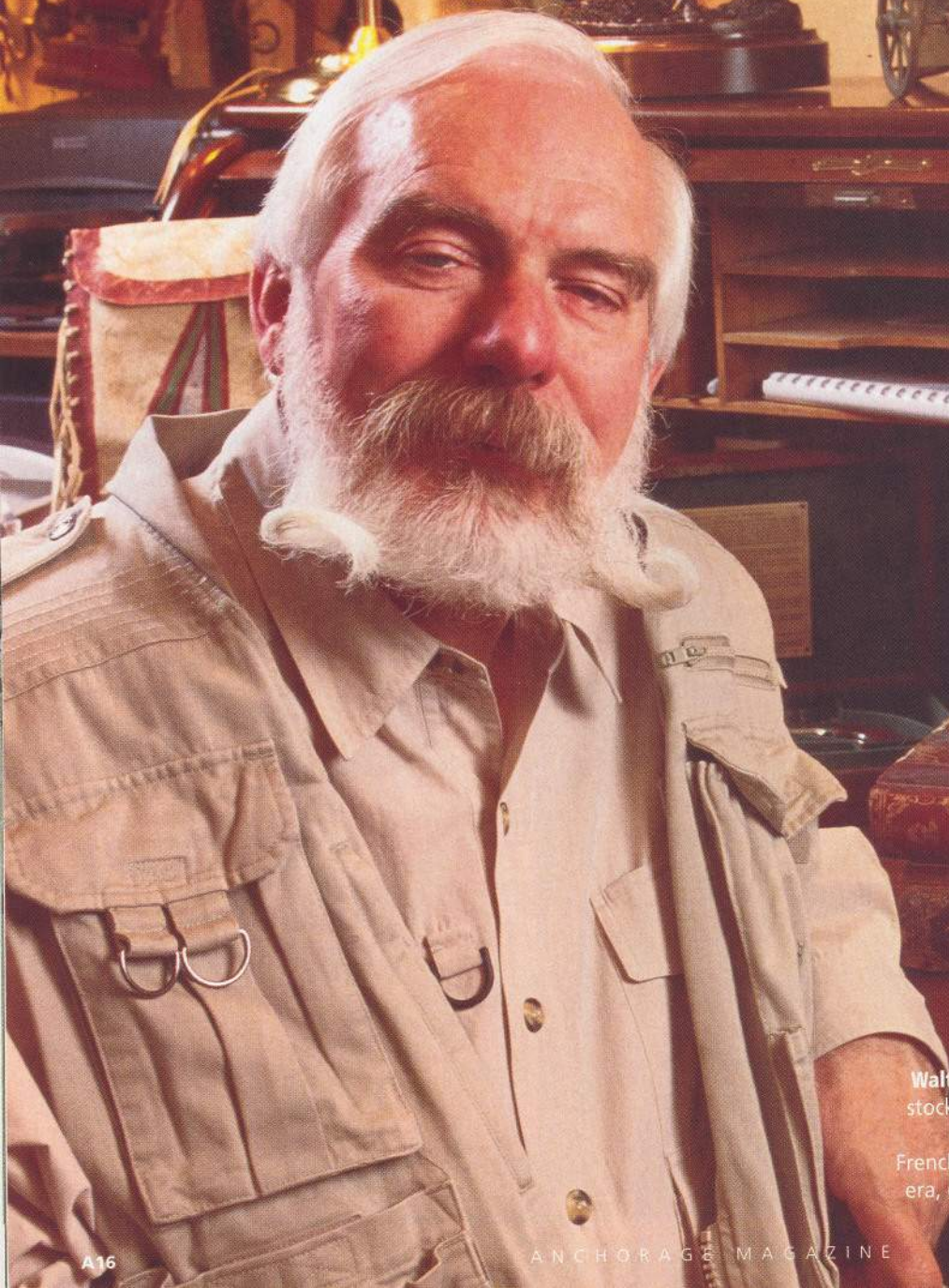


The Roosevelt Room



Walter Earl, proprietor of the Antique Gallery, stocks a world-renowned inventory of historic guns and other collectibles, including this French Grenadier helmet from the Napoleon III era, circa 1850. The helmet is priced at \$1,200.

A Martial Museum Where the Collection Is For Sale

BY TOM REALE

PHOTOS BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Behind a plain storefront at the fashionable end of Fourth Avenue sits Anchorage's version of the History Channel's "The Story of the Gun," complete with an ever-changing inventory of exhibits. Unlike the TV series or artifacts in a museum, here you can handle the eclectic collection, and if sufficiently enthralled and you have a checking account that'll take the hit, you can walk out with the object of your affection.

Upon entering the Antique Gallery you're transported into another world. The front portion of the shop holds paintings, sculptures, ceramics, clocks and watches, needlepoint, and so much etcetera a person could be overwhelmed. However, if your goal is to explore the world of firearms, head straight to the back of the shop. There you'll find the Theodore Roosevelt Room and a dynamic miscellany of historic guns, among many other things.

Historic martial and sporting paraphernalia fill the room. To the left and right are Wild West items including single-action six-shooters and holsters. Just ahead are Victorian suits of armor, military uniforms from the Civil War and signal cannons used to send messages between sailing ships before the age of radio.

Wandering in a bit farther, there's a small island of glass display cases guarded by the suits of armor, and circling it, you're confronted by a complete, 18th-century Japanese Samurai battle suit. Down one wall of the shop is a row of Winchesters, with enough lever action rifles to outfit a posse.

Toward the back is an alcove containing African items ranging from spears and tribal masks to Cape buffalo heads and a huge pair of replica elephant tusks, as well as a couple of casually placed pith helmets.

In another nook there are shotguns and bolt-action rifles, more glass display cases and a rack holding an ancient crossbow and a couple of Revolutionary war muskets. The display table here holds some antique duck decoys and there's a cluster of blunderbusses stacked in a corner.

Down the center of the room, a long table displays an assortment of glass decanters, waterfowl decoys, pewter mugs and tankards. Overseeing all of this is a collection of African game mounts arrayed along the walls.

This amazing place has been put together and kept in a state of constant change by Walter Earl. Because Earl doesn't advertise, the shop is a well-kept secret, but he nonetheless buys and

sells to locals and customers all over the world. If there's an "average" customer for the Roosevelt Room, it's someone who is a world traveler, knowledgeable in antiques, and who has the resources to indulge in high-end collectibles. Prominent past customers include Jack Nicholson, Tom Selleck and Steven Segal.

Earl started in the antiques trade more than 40 years ago in Grand Rapids, Mich., by literally following in his father's footsteps. He traveled with his father to antique shows and acquired a taste for the business early on. He established his Anchorage store about 17 years ago and nurtures it by attending some 35 shows a year, buying and selling antiques of all sorts. He looks over pieces from collections and estate sales, establishing value based on years of experience in the trade. This alone is reason to marvel as you look around the shop at the tremendous variety of items.

"This is a pretty interesting shop, since we have all sorts of things, from French fashion dolls to double rifles," Earl said.

Speaking of double rifles, the Roosevelt Room recently contained a .450 Nitro-Express-caliber Rigby and a .577 Nitro-caliber Webley and Scott. Unlike the relatively common double-barreled shotguns, double rifles are a very specialized item. There are a handful of makers of these "London Best" guns, and the craftsmanship, materials, and engraving on these articles are

unparalleled. In his book "Good Guns," author Stephen Bodio wrote that a Best gun fits, "to the precision of one particle of smoke, (and) will not close if a cigarette paper is inserted between its faces."

The quality of these firearms is reflected in the prices—the Rigby was listed at \$34,000 and the Webley at \$28,000. And it's a good bet they've already been sold—there's an active market for these firearms and Earl received a couple of serious inquiries within a week of acquiring them.

These are not the sort of guns you'd want to take to the top of a Chugach peak on a sheep hunt, but their significant weight



For \$6,800, you can own this hammered-steel Victorian suit of armor from the 1850s.

Details:

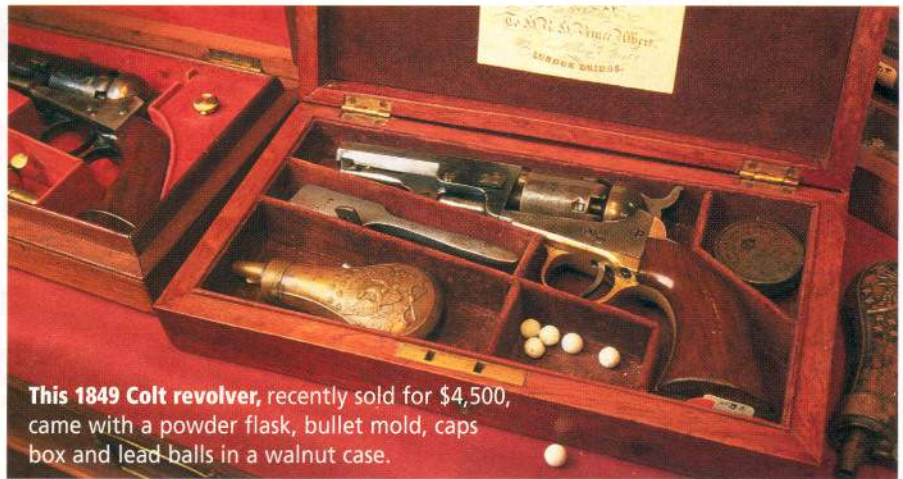
The Antique Gallery and Roosevelt Room is located at 1001 W. Fourth Ave., Suite B, Anchorage 99501. 276-8986. Operating hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days, with extended hours till 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday during the summer. To view a selection of pieces available, there are three Web sites to check out:
www.theantiquegallery.com
www.windowtoalaska.com
www.therooseveltroom.com

would be comforting should you head into the African bush after a Cape buffalo. That's the sort of job they were made for; providing two very quick shots with very big bullets and a minimum of mechanical fuss; reliable when your life depends on it.

Alongside the martial implements are curiosities such as knives that incorporate flintlock guns in their handles, an ancient powder tester mounted on a pistol frame and a "fit gun," an adjustable, double-barreled piece used to custom-fit a gun to an individual. The stock can be angled slightly left and right, and the barrels tilted slightly up and down so that the gun you buy shoots where you point it. Charlie Baker was minding the store during one of my visits, and with a quick look at my physical dimensions he made a couple of slight changes to the gun's settings. He instructed me to close my eyes and bring the gun to my shoulder, then open my eyes. I was sighting down the center of the barrels, with the front bead pointing right were I was looking. It was as if the gun was made for me which, in a sense, it had been.

Elsewhere in the shop, the sheer variety of antique weapons is impressive. On a recent day the inventory included a wheel-lock musket from the 1620s, a quillon hand cannon from the early 1500s, flintlock muskets and pistols, black powder shotguns and bolt-action Springfield rifles. Things come and go on a daily basis, so it's the sort of place you can enjoy repeatedly, never knowing what has come in since your last visit.

TOM REALE is a free-lance writer based in Anchorage.



This 1849 Colt revolver, recently sold for \$4,500, came with a powder flask, bullet mold, caps box and lead balls in a walnut case.

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