

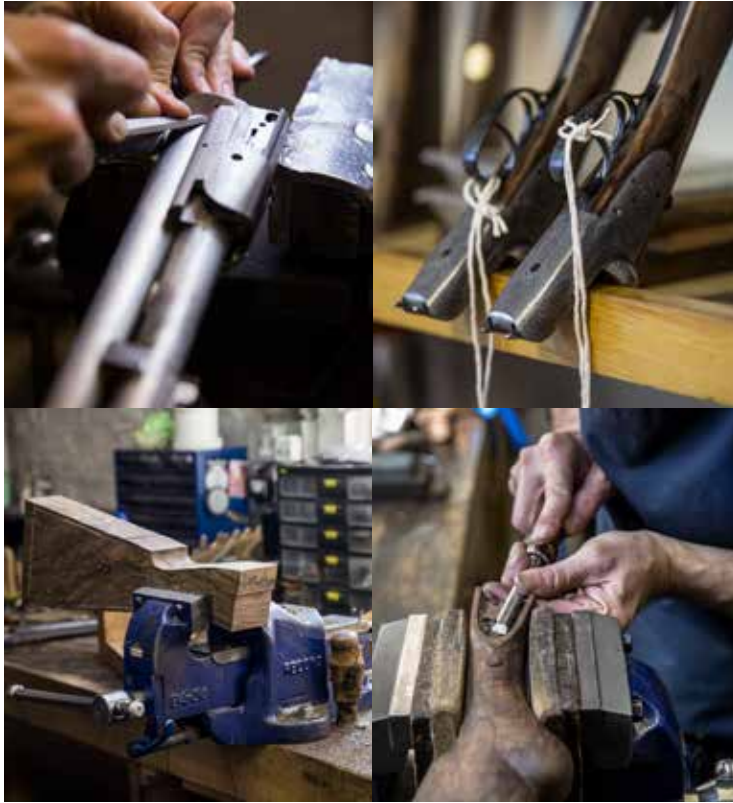


The man with the golden guns

American Arthur DeMoulas was so keen on gunmaker Boss & Co that he bought the company – lock, stock and two smoking barrels. *Alec Marsh* headed over to Kew to shoot the breeze

GO TO KEW ON a Saturday morning, and you're liable to be run down by hundreds of tourists and Londoners with young families making their way to the Royal Botanic Gardens. But head across the picturesque Kew Green the other way – passing St Anne's Church, where Gainsborough and Zoffany number among the residents, and you'll discover an altogether different London gem. It's also one that you won't find on a tourist map.

Situated in an anonymous Victorian building by the river is Boss & Co, the venerable London maker of guns and rifles since 1812. That's the year Napoleon retreated from Moscow and Britain went to war with the >



The team at Boss & Co use entirely traditional manufacturing processes when making the guns

United States (and won). So it's a long time ago. In that time Boss has established itself as one of the world's foremost gunsmiths, famed in particular for the elegance, beauty and technical pre-eminence of its single-trigger, over and under shotguns.

Formerly of Mount Street and Dover Street, Boss moved to Kew a little over a decade ago. Five years ago the company changed hands, and it is its present owner, Arthur DeMoulas, scion of a billionaire New England supermarket family, who opens the door to greet us. DeMoulas is dressed in chocolate-brown needle cords, a country shirt and a green gilet – in fact, not so very dissimilar to the last time I saw him, partridge shooting in Berwickshire.

He leads us through the rather austere lobby into his office, where he sits behind a dark-stained wooden knee-hole desk – complete with green leather inlay. Certificates – one bearing the name of John Robertson, famed owner of Boss in the 1920s – and old pictures dot the wall behind. The cramped space smells of gun oil, and is reminiscent of a sheriff's office

from a western. Appropriately enough, there's just a bit of John Wayne in the plain-speaking DeMoulas, too. He shoots from the hip, is uncompromising and has double-barrelled passion for Boss.

He first heard about Boss more than 30 years ago and travelled to London to visit the gunsmith for himself and buy a pair of their guns. It says something that he left the shop empty-handed and bought his guns elsewhere. DeMoulas tells me that he wanted the company to be run the way it should be – and he vowed to buy the company, which he almost achieved in 2001. It then took another 14 years to succeed – having 'bird-dogged' the company. He's clearly relished every minute of it since.

'We are just a gunmaker,' DeMoulas explains. 'When I say that "just" – that's an understatement. We make best guns. That's all we do,' he booms. 'Best guns.' When he bought the company, Boss was in the throes of expanding its production processes to make a second-tier gun – one that was more affordable, in other words – as many of the other leading London

gunmakers have. DeMoulas was having none of that. And you have to admire him for it. He is expanding the product line, though, and confirms that new products are coming soon.

'What we do here,' he declares, 'is we make London-made best guns and we do it in the old-fashioned way, like they did in the 1920s.' That means everything is made using hand tools – meticulously, by craftsmen with little or no machining and no automation. 'If I can tell you anything about Boss, it's that. That's our ethos.'

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He shows me upstairs around the factory, where the headcount has grown from nine in 2015 to 20 today. I meet an actioner – the craftsman responsible for making and shaping the action of the gun. It occurs to me that watching the demonstration of the mechanism of the famous Boss single trigger is like watching a horologist at work.

Next door, another member of the team is filing down the chambers of the barrels to create two eye-perfect hemispheres that will in due course be adorned with the beautiful engraving wrought by the man working in the adjacent room. Up three stairs and turn a corner, we find a rack of gun blanks – pieces of fine Turkish walnut – soon to be gleaming stocks for guns. There's the stock-maker and a space for his apprentice. On the other side of the room another craftsman is at work. 'Many people aren't aware of how bespoke we are,' says DeMoulas.

A customer recently asked him if he could build a specific gun they had in mind. 'Of course we will build one!' DeMoulas told him, before rattling off a list of configurations of guns and rifles that he's only too happy to make if and when customers ask for them.

'I want to leave it in a much better place than when I found it,' DeMoulas tells me before we leave. 'I'm really a trustee of the company. This is a British company; everything is done here. That's really important to me. It's meaningful because it's regenerating one of the best gunmakers in the world.' 