



BISON MADE

Bringing American Quality Back

By Rhett Baruch



CRAFTSMANSHIP IS BECOMING A LOST ART IN THIS COUNTRY. It's nothing new, we have been outsourcing for years. The result is a market saturated with cheap, foreign-made products that take away from the values this country was built upon. Not that I am against foreign trade, but there has to be a standard. Also, I'm not implying that any product designed and manufactured stateside is better and worth paying more for than its foreign counterpart. We just need to become more conscious shoppers for many reasons. It's about assuring what you're buying is a through-and-through legitimate piece. And if the purchase supports a local economy, that's even better.

There is also the notion of the grandfather principal—buy something once and use it forever. Something you can rely upon on a daily basis without having to think twice about it; something you can pass on to someone special in your life in case you no longer want or need it. It is truly meaningful to be proud of purchases and to affirm that what you hold in your hand is really worth something. Luxury and quality is a mindset that can easily be carried throughout one's life; it should not stop with your iPhone or Prius. And in the case of Bison Made leather goods, this philosophy starts at your wallet.

Matt Pisarck and Sebastian Sandersius have come together to create beautiful, handmade leather accessories—excuse me, necessities. “We choose the emblem of the iconic North American animal to embody the ideals of strength, elegance and the traditions of this country.” The two started on Ebay, selling vintage razors (single-blade straight and safety razors) out of a bedroom closet. Sprouting from the idea of making an exceptionally awesome leather razor strop (a sharpening tool) when nothing else out there met the partners' requirements, leather has become the material of choice for these two entrepreneurs. Their original leather choice was a cordovan from Chicago-based Horween, one of the last two known tanneries still producing this product. For those of you unfamiliar with cordovan, it's a legendary Spanish leather that dates back nearly 400 years and is made from a horse's rump. Their product line now reaches coast to coast, to the Kiwis and even to Scotland—a feat this downtown Phoenix business can be proud of.

MonOrchid studios is the mothership, a 20,000 square foot ex-warehouse that is home to Songbird Coffee, various creative studios and galleries, and Bison Made's workspace. Their spot is full of mainly vintage industrial machinery. Knowing mechanics pretty well, I've seen some cool gadgets that do amazing things, but I found myself befuddled with the look of some of their equipment, and dead wrong with guesses as to its function. It would seem that each tool, press, drill, blade and hammer has its own individual task. It is a 12-step program of precision that is extremely meticulous. Understanding what it really takes to create something designed to last for decades or even a lifetime without failure is quite eye opening. Then there is also the quest to source the finest materials that will be formed by these various machines. When the final product is complete, you understand that the consumer's best interest has been held in high esteem.



How was Bison Made conceived?

Since 2007, we have been involved with the vintage shaving community through our online retail site Razor Emporium. Being involved with traditional shaving taught us a few things about the brilliant design of solid brass razors made 50+ years ago. After years of repairing and reconditioning old razors, we aspired to create a modern, stainless steel razor handle of our own. Through the process of designing and branding this product, the idea for Bison was born.

While seeking manufacturing avenues for our design, we came to understand that we would inevitably need to own a great deal of the process—simple things like creating a leather carrying case, or packaging that suited a high-end shaving instrument. Our standards could not be met through outsourcing, so we began to research leather construction by analyzing the simple goods found around us—wallets, phone accessories and straight razor strops. When held to high scrutiny, these everyday products showed a vast opportunity for improvement. The idea for high quality leather products beyond the razor's carrying case was set in motion.



Where are you two originally from and what brought you together?

We're both Phoenicians—Sebastian and I both attended school in downtown Phoenix and graduated from ASU. We met in high school in a rock band, "In Stereo." He's a drummer and I play guitar. After the band days ended, we found various ways to hang out, one of which was antiquing—finding and restoring razors.

What can be expected from a Bison Made piece?

While a design can be perfect on the drawing board, its real-life execution can prove more difficult. As we researched the materials we wanted to make our products with, we kept coming back to the American tradition of our brand. We sourced our leather from American tanneries like Horween because we understand that premium products rely on the highest of quality raw materials. Even the thread that holds our hand-stitched products together is a specialized variety. Our leather carry-goods include a lifetime guarantee. We use no rubbers, glues, liners or plastics in our products to ensure that Bison products will age beautifully to become future heirlooms.

Explain the rigors of the process it took to get where you are today?

Despite having great designs and great materials, the fit and finish of the product was something that took much revision to perfect. Through trial and error, we finalized just the right method of leather polishing and edge burnishing to give our products the luster and beauty that exceeds customer expectations. We perfected them over the course of months, making laser table prototypes and giving them to people we knew to test and review. Through this process, our *Designed for Life* standard was born.

What does the future hold?

We always aim to make things of quality. We've talked about briefcases, messenger bags, belts and even boots. However, right now our current focus is on a modern straight razor with carbon fiber handles. We still have aspirations for our stainless steel safety razor and hope to have that on the market in the next year. Bison is just beginning, and it will move into different avenues of leather goods and luxury men's toys.

Photos by **Wayne Rainey**