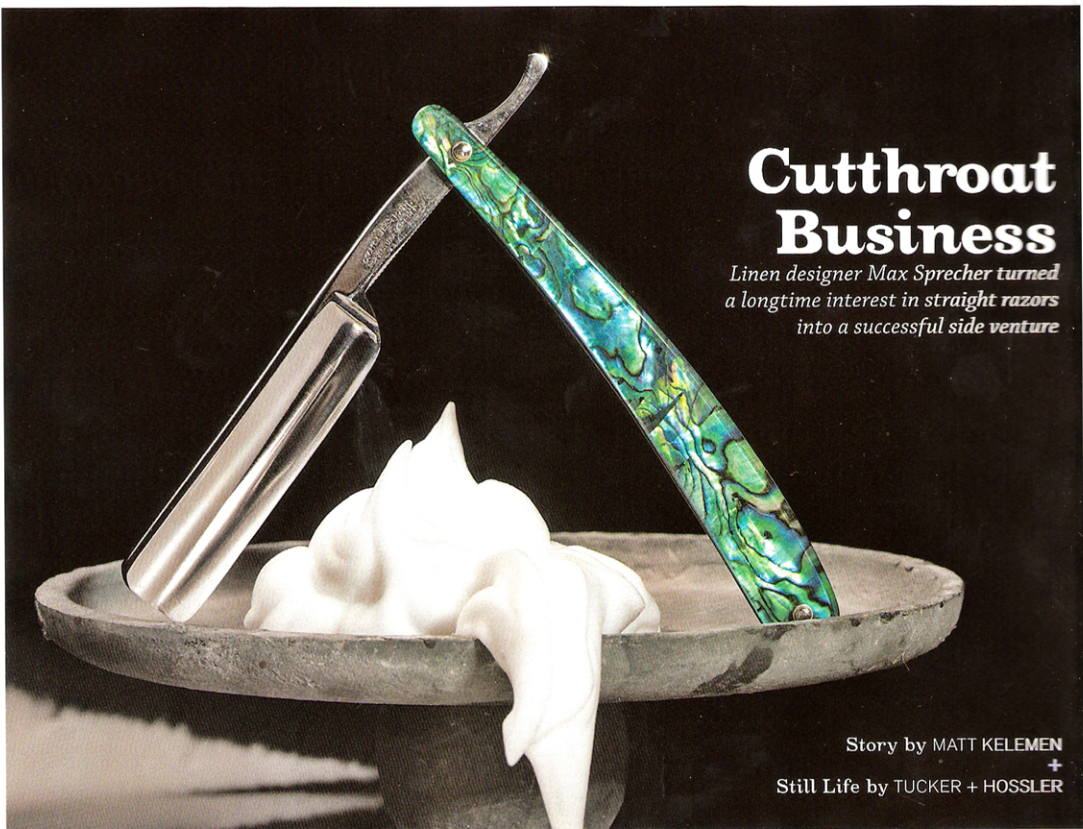


Cutthroat Business

Linen designer Max Sprecher turned a longtime interest in straight razors into a successful side venture



Story by MATT KELEMEN

Still Life by TUCKER + HOSSLER

Max Sprecher knows everything you need to know about the straight razor—so much so that after a quick conversation with him it's hard not to want to shave with one of these beautiful but dangerous-looking instruments. King C. Gillette popularized safety razors for a reason, didn't he?

Of course, Gillette wasn't too worried about masculinity, conservation, the need for ritual in an attention-deficit culture or a superior shave, but neither was Sprecher when he obtained his first "cutthroat" razor kit as a teen in Antwerp, Belgium. He just thought it was "manly and appealing," an impression formed by watching American westerns. "Shaving with a straight razor is like taming a wild horse," he says. "Hard at first, and you will cut yourself. But once you break through, it's easy and very rewarding."

Sprecher became an aficionado of forged stainless steel blades and leather strops, even as he evolved through numerous careers—diamond polisher, computer programmer, model and web designer. He

eventually met and married a linen wholesaler, Leigh Chandler, which led him to re-examine his roots.

His father was an interior designer and Antwerp was rich with advancements in architecture, fabrics and fashion. He began creating his own designs for linen pillows, selling them at his Madaspen Home online store along with Chandler's Papillon Linens products.

But something was missing to balance out the softness of their home decor business. Last year, Sprecher added straight razors to his site and obtained the tools and machines that allow him to sharpen hollowed-out blades and polish them to a mirror finish. He also began making "scales," or handles, out of exotic woods, acrylics, even micarta—a linen, canvas and paper composite.

The road to becoming a straight razor master was long and winding, but Sprecher has no regrets about keeping a nearly lost art form alive.

"I've always done what I wanted to do," he says. "In general, I have been blessed to express myself as an individual." **H**



Sprecher rescaled and restored this Swedish C.V. Heljestrand No. 4 razor (\$169) from the late 1800s. For more information, visit madaspenhome.com.