My .410 Rossi Squire Makeover Project

I was at a local gun show when I first saw this tragic example of the gun maker's craft. Upon further inspection, I realized that, while the old side by side was butt-ugly, it appeared to be mechanically sound and the barrels were both in good shape inside without any visible pitting. As I inspected the gun I realized that the general chunkiness of the stock would allow me a large degree of latitude, were I to resculpt it. The price was right (dirt cheap) so I decided to embark on the .410 Rossi Squire Makeover Project.

First things first, no sense in putting a lot of work into the gun without first checking to be certain the barrels shot to where they were pointed (see my earlier article on this site, The Importance of Patterning Your .410 For Point of Impact). I was pleased to discover that at 50 feet (15 meters) both barrels were spot on! It was looking more and more as if the guns only flaws were cosmetic

I took the above three photos shortly after I purchased the gun. To my eyes it was as if, prior to production, the manufacturer had called a design meeting to discuss just what could be done to make this the ugliest SXS ever produced.

The first thing I did was to remove the metal parts from the stock and forend and soak the wood parts in an acetone bath to remove the finish. Unfortunately, the gun is only about 30 years old and had a modern urethane finish that the acetone was unable to strip or even soften. Not a problem, since I'd planned to resculpt the prince-of-whales (POW) grip to an English style grip, as well as reshaping the unbelievably ugly beavertail forend into something much sleeker. Knowing how hot .410's barrels can get, I reluctantly decided to keep it a beavertail, only a much sleeker beavertail. While doing this, I sanded off the old finish being careful not to round the edges where the wood and metal met. One trick here is to always leave the butt plate attached, that way you won't round the wood between the butt plate and the stock. Being an inexpensive gun to begin with, there were areas where the metal was proud to the wood and vice-versa, since this was going to be a field gun, I didn't attempt to correct these types of blemishes.

My first step was to saw off the bottom of the POW grip with a sabre saw. Next, using my pocket knife, I whittled down the remainder of the grip. A wood rasp would have been quicker, but I didn't have one. I completed both the stock and the forend using a sanding block and various grades of sandpaper, starting with a coarse grit and finishing with a fine grit paper. A final rub down with steel wool and the stock was ready for staining.

Tools used to resculpt the stock

The stock right after I cut off the POW grip and carved off some of the excess wood.

The stock after sanding with the first coat of stain applied.

Here's the beavertail forend after resculpting and staining. I've slimmed it and tapered the nose.

The wood used in making the stock, while hard, tough, and durable is not walnut. I'd been posting my restoration progress on another board, at the suggestion of an experienced member, I stained the stock and forend using Minwax, Mahogany Red #225. After the initial staining, I gave it further character by using several applications of linseed oil stained with alkanet root to give the finish a pleasing red tint. I followed up with multiple coats of Tru-Oil, rubbing it down with 0000 steel wool between coats, and a final rubdown with 0000 steel wool to soften the glossy finish.

I polished the barrels down and a friend showed me how to reblacken (rust blue) them. The guns frame currently has a coin finish. While not my favorite finish, I don't like hot-blued (funeral gun) frames, so I've decided to leave it as is for the time being.

Barrels "in the white" prepped for blackening.

Here are photos of the finished project, another friend is going to show me how to checker it this fall.

The guns usefulness will definitely be helped by changing the dual full chokes to my favorite .410 choke configuration, modified/cylinder (or skeet). So far I'm very pleased with how it shoots and in the future plan to actually spend money on gunsmith worthy gun modifications such as opening up the chokes. My modifications so far have all been "sweat-equity" with perhaps $20-$30 invested in materials.

For the last few years, between the global recession and sickness/death in my family, I had to sell most of my shotguns, including a lovely British .410 SXS hammer gun and a true 36 gauge SXS muzzle loader. Though I was looking for an inexpensive .410 SXS (it's very hard to find inexpensive .410 SXS's here in the States), I actually began this project with the http://www.fourten.org.uk/ website in mind, hence the photo-documentation. This is a great website/.410 resource and more of us need to post on it. There's a whole interesting world having to do with the mighty .410. Come on, let's start posting.

Steve Thornhill