



THE INNOVATORS

THE MEN WHO RECYCLE AK-47s

Jewelers take aim at Africa's assault rifles.
By Horacio Silva

Peter Thum holds an assault rifle captured by UN troops near Sange, South Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo; steel and white-gold cuff links (which transform into a cuff) by Swiss jeweler Roland Iten (top, \$32,100).



Ever since Mikhail Kalashnikov, a sergeant in the Red Army, entered a post-World War II competition to design a compact, mass-producible assault rifle that could thrive in close combat against the new breed of German weaponry, the Avtomat Kalashnikova, or AK-47, as it is better known, has been an unlikely source of national pride, an emblem of Soviet ingenuity forged in steel. In the intervening decades, the weapon's easily copied design helped it spread like propaganda across the globe (there are an estimated 75 million AK-47s in circulation) and become a potent symbol of cheaply acquired death deliverable anywhere.

If Peter Thum and John Zapolski have their way, the AK-47 will one day be shorthand for sumptuous craftsmanship, originality and conscionable commerce. The business partners

FROM LEFT: MOISES SAMAN; ANITA SCHAEFLI

have formed Fonderie 47, a nascent high-end jewelry concern that is dedicated to the removal and destruction of AK-47s and other assault rifles in Africa.

“John and I had both witnessed firsthand kids with these rifles and were determined to do something about it,” Thum explains over lunch in Manhattan. “It’s a problem that is often overlooked in favor of larger weapons of mass destruction, but it’s a very real problem that affects any attempts at peace and prosperity.”

In 2010, Thum and Zapolski acquired a cache of confiscated AK-47s from rangers in the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where *Gorillas in the Mist* took place. The guns were destroyed in nearby Goma, and the pair brought back the parts in their luggage. Fonderie 47 takes steel from these decommissioned weapons and collaborates with some of the world’s most preeminent jewelers and craftsmen, including James de Givenchy (nephew of legendary designer Hubert), Philip Crangi and Roland Iten, to elevate the lowly material into the realm of the sublime, into dazzling accessories that do not betray their origins and stand alone as objects of desire.

Proceeds from sales of these small-run, big-ticket pieces at private events or by appointment (there are no stores) are donated to MAG, an international humanitarian group that removes land mines, unexploded bombs and other weapons left over after conflicts. In addition to destroying unsecured stockpiles of weapons that run the risk of being looted or recirculated, MAG works closely with communities to remove the threat of injury, violence and economic devastation by providing risk-education programs and employment.

“This is not a hollow gesture on the part of a company giving to a cause,” says Jennifer Lachman, executive director of MAG America. “Inspiring change by creating something beautiful from something ugly is built into the DNA of the Fonderie 47 brand and provides a very

of a brand. It’s the QWERTY keyboard of assault rifles.”

The two seemingly have the bona fides to make the noble enterprise work. Zapolski was a growth strategy consultant and before that worked at Wells Fargo. For

gestures won’t ring false, they are under pressure to make products or deliver services that are at least as good as, if not better than, those offered by non-purpose-driven ventures.

“It was super important for us to have a premium on craftsmanship and quality,” Thum says. “We wanted to work with people who were brilliant and could imbue this material with an entirely different resonance. But it was obviously also important to forge relationships with people who will have a lasting interest because of their creative and social motivations.”

The opportunity was not lost on Philip Crangi. “I’m a jewelry designer,” Crangi says, “but I am also a small-business owner, and sometimes we get lost in the madness—deadlines, things not doing well. This collaboration retooled my mind. I set out to be an artist and a craftsman, and this brought me back to that.” In Crangi’s hands, 18-karat gold is fused with Fonderie 47 steel to become, for example, a pair of earrings with an antique mirror finish effect, the purchase of which helps fund the elimination of 70 assault rifles from circulation in Africa.

When Thum approached James de Givenchy, whose Midtown Manhattan atelier is a monument to Gallic chic, about a possible collaboration, the jewelry designer—who had previously worked with steel and diamonds for his namesake collection—had a good idea about which approach to take. “I knew that I wanted to work with steel and diamonds and for the designs to be based on the shape of the egg,” de Givenchy says of the inspiration for his line, which includes a bracelet, a ring, earrings, a necklace and what he refers to only as an objet—a spectacular mix of steel, 47 diamonds and

The purchase of a steel and diamond necklace funds the elimination of 800 assault rifles.



Fonderie 47 steel, diamond, rose-gold and platinum necklace by James de Givenchy (\$240,000) and Fonderie 47 steel and gold earrings by Philip Crangi (\$23,000)

concrete option to people: Buy this luxury jewelry item and it helps MAG destroy a certain number of weapons in Africa.”

Thum and Zapolski knew they had to invert the AK-47 brand in order to beat it. “It was clear to us from the beginning,” Thum says, “that if you wanted to do something about the proliferation of these weapons, you had to use that object and turn it against itself because the AK-47 is a Goliath

his part, Thum, a former McKinsey analyst, clearly knows branding and social entrepreneurship. He previously started Ethos bottled water, a for-profit that funded water and sanitation initiatives in the emerging world. He has since sold Ethos to Starbucks, on whose not-for-profit board he sat until 2008.

The pair know better than anyone that to build a solid social business that stands out in the marketplace and whose



Custom ring with Fonderie 47 steel in 18-karat gold by Philip Crangi, \$25,600

rose gold all riveted together to resemble the twisted love child of a Fabergé egg, a zeppelin and a patchwork football.

Meanwhile, Roland Iten, a Swiss jeweler and craftsman, takes discarded gunmetal, blackens it and pairs it with white gold to create handsome rings and cuff links, whose smooth action is a testament to precise Swiss manufacturing.

The same emphasis on mechanics will soon be on display when Fonderie 47 releases its first timepiece. Produced by master watchmaker David Candau (creator of the \$1.5 million Jaeger-LeCoultre Hybris Mechanica à Grande Sonnerie) and fully manufactured and finished by craftsmen in the Vallée de Joux, Switzerland, each individually numbered watch in the set of 20 pieces will have a value of \$350,000, which can go toward funding the destruction of 1,000 assault rifles.

The roster and product selection may be expanding, but Thum warns not to expect Fonderie 47 to shift on its axis anytime soon. “The less that this stuff is made by human beings, the less real it is,” he says. “The more manufactured it is, the less intense the relationship between the process of creation and the person who is receiving it, and the less likely that we are going to succeed.”

For more information, go to fonderie47.com.

THE FINE PRINT

GET E-LUMINATED!

Author **Richard Mason** has set out to revolutionize the reading experience, heightening storytelling through technology. Just don't call the program an app. **By Alexandra Wolfe**

Richard Mason is sitting outside the closet-sized New York City café he goes to nearly every morning. In front of the best-selling novelist are two versions of his acclaimed manuscript *History of a Pleasure Seeker*, a coming-of-age tale set in Europe's Belle Epoque. One is the bright-blue leather-bound notebook in which he wrote the story in longhand, and the other is the same book on the iPad platform Mason has helped create. Though difficult to describe unless this sentence starts to sing or unveil photographs with the tap of a finger, his app—or “e-lumination,” as he calls it—feels as if it's at the forefront of a new literary medium, turning a tome into a movie, a concert and an encyclopedia all in one.

Mason spent two years developing the platform with his partner, Benjamin Morse, and a team of coders, designers and researchers. Besides being able to listen to the text (read by *Downton Abbey* actor Dan Stevens), the app, ahem, e-lumination, allows readers to view the setting through photos, read the historical context of a plot point and the hear music described in a scene. He was so meticulous about detail that he hired musicians, like

opera star Alex Richardson, to make fresh recordings. “I thought a lot about what's the key pleasure of reading,” Mason says, “and I think it's the joy that comes with using your imagination in collaboration with the author's and creating an experience that is wholly your own.” His illu-

minated manuscript, the first of many, does just that. ■

History of a Pleasure Seeker is available on the iPad; apple.com. The first 100 Platinum Card members to purchase the e-lumination will receive a signed copy of Mason's Natural Elements (Knopf).

