

CONVENTION PHOTOS

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\$5.00

conventions

16th annual richmond tattoo arts festival
14th annual north carolina tattoo convention

guest spots

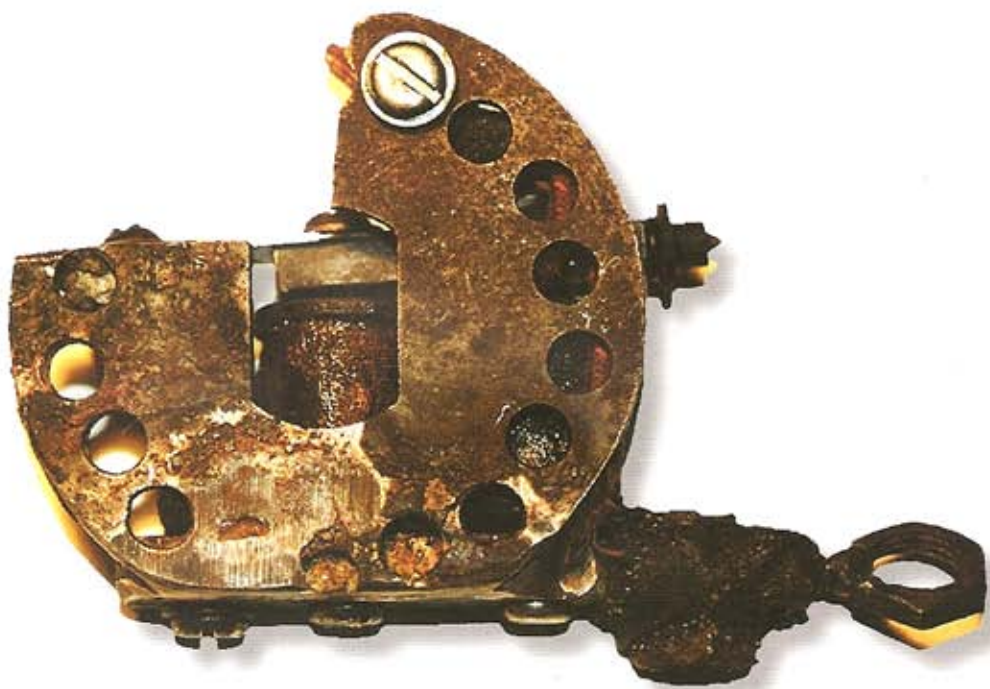
nate beavers
tony urbaneck
jeff cribb
big al

mayor of tattooville

20 questions with chis longo

features

artist on artist
tattoo etiquette
calling all ladies



TONY URBANEK

Chocolate Cake vs. Dog Crap

machine builder

"I guess I just like the feel of the old dirty machines."

BY MIKE EATON
EAST COAST INK MAGAZINE

There are too few people in the world that have a passion for what they do and even fewer that think whatever it is that they're doing has any true meaning. When is the last time you've met a musician that builds his own guitars, or a photographer that makes his own camera's? Tattoo machine builders are an extraordinary group of individuals. They take pride in what they do and believe that they're making a difference in the industry. Coincidentally, they are often living, breathing history books of the art itself and Tony Urbanek is no exception. His hand crafted tools of the trade are buzzing works of art. His frame styles range from the most traditionally basic, to the exotically shaped cutting edge of new school influence. He has an admirable respect for those that came before him and an attentive appreciation for those that carry the flame today.

tony urbanek



photo by tim sayer



INK: How long have you been building tattoo machines?

Tony: I started building machines in 1998, but didn't really hit it hard until 2000. When I first started tattooing in 1991, I bought a set of national Eagles and assembled them from kit form, so I guess you could say it started from there. It was cheaper to buy the kit and put them together yourself, plus I learned quite a bit about machines and function by doing so.

INK: What is your favorite frame material and why?

Tony: Lately, I've been liking the exotics, Meteorites, Mokume Gane & Damascus steel are my favorites right now. Although all of them are a little different to work with and they take a lot of time to finish, the final outcome is a beautiful machine.

INK: What do you think of brass and aluminum frames?

Tony: I'm not fond of aluminum machines, only because I had bad experiences in the past with an old set of Kaplan East coast frames. They were my very first machines, and at that time I had no idea how to tune them. Those machines ran hot as hell right out of the box, although I was probably running them at 15 volts or something! They used to burn the top of my index finger so badly, that I would have a blister from tattooing with them. I guess I need to take step back and do a few builds

on Aluminum.

My Church frame prototype was actually a 3 piece Rogers style setup with wood inlay. The only thing bad about brass is that it is soft, so if you pinch it too hard in a vice, or even drop the frame, it may bend or scratch super easy. On a mechanical perspective, brass being non-ferrous, (needing a yoke), soaks a lot of vibration, plus the confined U magnet system of a yoked machine keeps the magnet "bleed" to a minimum, thus creating a cleaner running machine in my opinion. Brass is sweet, yea.

INK: Neumas and rotaries are making a come back. Have you used either and if so what were your thoughts on them?

Tony: I dunno about the rotary ever coming back, seems more of a stepping stone, even novelty like situation to me anymore. I tried a rotary once: I still have it actually. I didn't have much success with it. I like my machines to have some "give". My rotary really didn't at all. I grew up with traditional sprung machines (and build them) so I stick to my roots in that respect. It's all in what a person likes for themselves, but I've seen some kick ass work done with rotaries. The Neumas are making a big appearance on the convention circuit this past 2 years out, so a lot of guys are catching on to them. I never have tried one but I've heard a lot of great

things about them. Look at Gabriel Cece and Sean Karn's work, those guys are doing great stuff with Neumas and I hear the application is consistent and clean, like a magic marker.

I know how to work with what I have and it would be a tough transition for me to change now. I guess I just like the feel of the old dirty machines!

INK: Who are your influences?

Tony: I have to categorize my influences in 3 different groups because each has had so much to offer and they all have taught me so much. Paul Rogers is my #1. Percy Waters and Milton Zeis... These guys are few of many that have paved the way for all of us builders and my favorite "old schoolers." They're my founding fathers. The guys who are big influences to me (that are alive) are Jerry Reigger, Mike Skiver, Kevin Corder, Seth Cifferi, Aaron Cain and Bernard of Denmark. These guys have influenced my style from day one (especially Aaron and Bernard) and some have even helped me refine my skills throughout the years. I talk with Jerry and Kevin all the time about tuning, building, etc. Kevin has been there since day 1 giving up major trade secret advice. He's helped me out a lot and I keep in touch with Jerry on a regular basis as well.

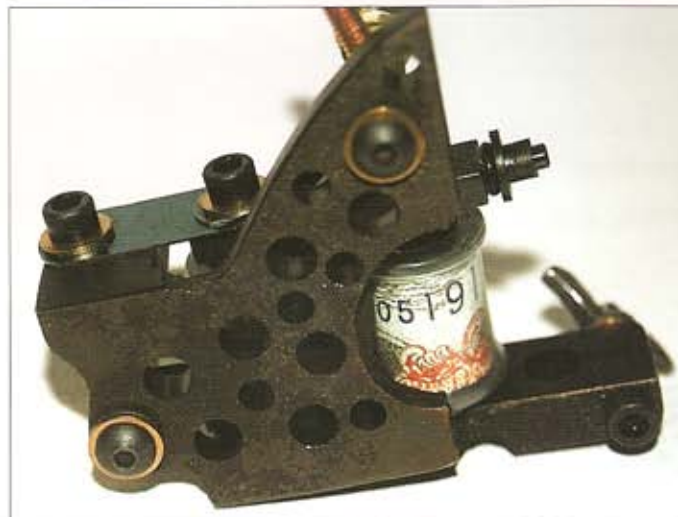
Mike Skiver has shared many of his secrets and taught me a wealth

of knowledge about machines and history. He is unbelievable. His museum is only 1 hour from me so we spend time together up there and he teaches me a lot about each builder, what they liked, who they were and what they were about. I could talk for days about Mike. The new guys on the building scene are great for teaching me new tricks and helping me refine my skills as well. Mike Adams, Bryce Stucke, Greg Digacento, etc. There's a bunch! These guys have different perspectives on what's going on in the building world. They're not afraid to cross the line and build some bizarre shit that is so off camber you just have to look at it like WTF? But that's kewl, it keeps us striving to be different and creative, which I support and feed off of.

INK: How important is it that an artist understands the mechanics of his/her machine?

Tony: I can't speak for everyone but I know for myself that machine mechanics are a major part of my daily tattoo application. I can easily pinpoint what's up with my gear once I got educated in building. So for myself, I don't know what I would do without that knowledge. I do feel it's important for an artist to know the what, why, and how's, of their machine in order to maintain "the flow" while their tattooing.

INK: Do you think the machines an artist chooses says anything

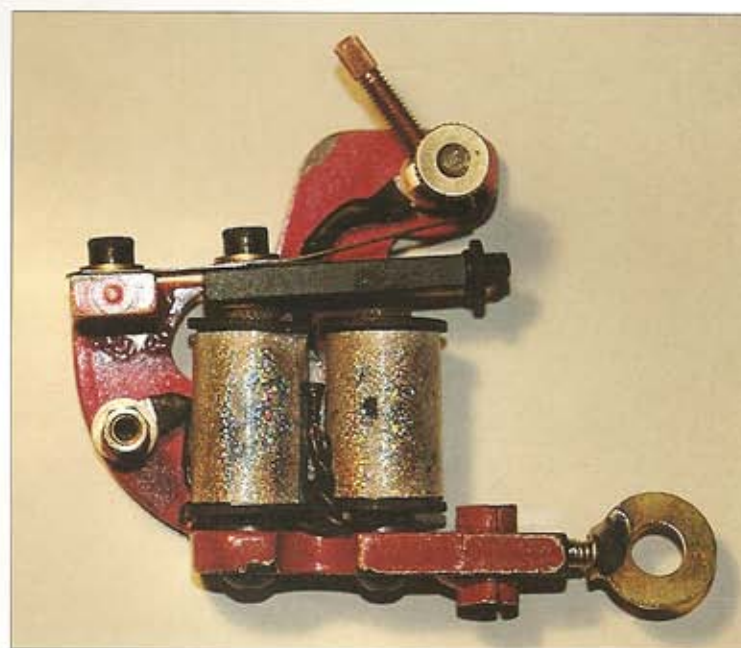


about them as a person?

Tony: Oh yea, certainly. When I sell an artist a machine, they're first drawn to a certain style or appearance. We work out the functional details afterwards. I've seen two types people buying machines over the years. First there are the old schoolers, who dig the crusty Paul Rogers, Sailor Jerry, Zeis, Jonesy stuff (nostalgic and clunky). These guys follow the traditional old school style of tattooing and dig on the look. The machines fall into that old style, so they go for them before the bio or clean stuff. The second types are the artsy progressive guys who are into the ornate, bio-technical, painterly tattooing styles. They go for the more ornate-classy machines I build like the bio organic carves or sleek geometric side plates with clean lines. I also have a few collectors, (especially Tom Painter) who buys all the serious customs and prototypes off of me before they can hit the market. Tom is probably my #1 collector in the US.

INK: How would you compare one of your handmade machines to one of the \$50 mass produced machines?

Tony: The time, energy, thought and love that goes into each and every machine I fabricate, build



or even piss on has more character, heart and class than a mass produced, cold hearted, thoughtless, hunk of shit, \$50 "gun"! Its like comparing chocolate cake to dog shit. **INK: Do you think the modern coil machine will ever become obsolete?**

Tony: Hopefully not in my lifetime, or ever for that matter. The coil machine is like the wheel. It is what it is. So why reinvent it? It's a technology that is stable and beautiful. Out of respect for our fore fathers of the machine building end of industry, I'm going to have to put a hard "NO" on this one.

One of the most commendable qualities of machine builders is their enthusiastic ability to speak their mind. In short, they tell it like it is. Of course individuals such as Urbanek give us the beautiful hand made machines that make the tattooists job possible but they also encourage us to take pride in what we do. They teach us to appreciate the human touch in what we do. They persuade us to remember the importance of our mark on the world and the people we meet. Builders like Tony Urbanek force us to be honest with ourselves and how we perceive this art. He who doesn't take pride in his tools surely can't be expected to take pride in his work.

INK

tony urbanek