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JAN/FEB 2011

Volume 21 Number 1

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VIO VIDEO CAM • BUELL BROTHERS • CAM SHAFT DYNAMICS • MIKE TOMAS**



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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011



ON THE COVER

Volume 21 • Number 1 • Our 171st Issue

Sometimes the best, most creative machines come out of the barns, garages, and basement workshops sprinkled throughout this great country. Nailing the magical formula is no easy feat and not easy to accomplish for a seasoned vet, let alone a total newcomer to the scene. With that bit of pomp and circumstance, meet Leo Tancreti, proprietor of Leo's Speed Shop and builder of the Flor de la Muerte.

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Bad, Black and Boosted

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SPOTLIGHT

The Shop and Industry Customs

We've learned that often times, some of the best work is done in some of the smallest, least acclaimed shops and that's certainly true of the two gear head havens in this issue's Spotlight. The Shop and Industry Customs are both located on Long Island and their days of anonymity are over. Come on and take a walk around with us.



Forward

2011 promises to be quite a year, yessiree. The world around us continues to demonstrate change is something we'd best learn to deal with and better yet embrace because, dear friends, fellow motorcycle enthusiasts and Americans, there is nothing we can do to successfully withstand the hydraulic pressures of change. Change is a wind we cannot help but bend to, it is relentless.

Along those lines, I've come to appreciate that not everyone embraces change the same way. Some folks resist, the proverbial sticks in the mud—and pay the price as saplings do in a mudslide; they snap, break, struggle, and eventually disappear. Some run from change, but that doesn't work. You can't outrun the fleet-footed beast of change. Others surf the tides of change, staying on top of the current, limber and flexible, open to the shifting course and finding a way to make the power of change work for them.

Change brings all sorts of other things to the forefront: opportunity for one. When things change, opportunity is abundant and some cool stuff can fall out of the ensuing movement. You have to be quick, you have to move with assuredness, and you have to have a sense of humor if you are going to succeed navigating the seas of change.

And so it is with *IronWorks*, that things continue to change, and in our case, change for the better and stronger. We've further refined our mission and will consistently deliver the great stuff you expect from us. For instance, we've lined up some really good (and diverse) column contributors for 2011, further broadening our voice, breadth, and perspective. All these folks ride, they have ideas, and they are talented. The subject matter they target will always center on the machines, riding and the riding experience, no calisthenics (mental or otherwise) or mind-cleansing mantras are on our editorial agenda. *Ironworks* is about bikes (V-Twins mostly), products and info that make the experience better (safer and more comfortable)—just to be clear.

Keeping within the theme of change, after being a faithful contributor for many a moon, Bert Baker, friend, advertiser, and supporter has asked for a sabbatical so he may



focus on his business and some new products he's got in development, to which we responded, "Right on!" Bert will continue to wax eloquent on everything from Coney Island hot dog farts to thieving trademark infringers, but without the pressure of monthly deadlines and my hassling phone calls.

With that news is the addition of two new voices to *IronWorks'* printed pages: the first, Mike Tomas, who you know as the visionary leader of Kiwi Indian. Mike is an interesting guy who has a lot of business, life, and motorcycle knowledge and is willing to share. Mike has been a long time friend of IW and we are glad to have him working with us.

The second contributor you'll know if you visit IWBlogger.com and that is Marilyn Bragg a.k.a Chessie. Chessie is gold: she writes, she shoots, she explores, and she most importantly rides her Sportster everywhere. I mean everywhere. This 1993 Sportster has in excess of 180,000 on it. Yeah, that's right, she rides everywhere. Chessie has been in the V-Twin business and world for quite some time and I feel like we have scored to have her join our team.

We've got a few projects underway in the IW Garage: Project FLHX being one. Taking this machine that a few short months ago was a stocker and transforming it into both a looker and a performance handling touring machine has been fun and an education in parts and process. Nothing better than working on your own bike to get a sense of how stuff works, day in and day out. We've addressed appearance, handling, and drivetrain as well as light engine mods. Coming up in future issues will be a deeper dive into engine work and a few other incremental upgrades and enhancements. The fact that this machine gets ridden a lot means that you'll benefit from the feedback from a first hand user's experience—namely mine.

We are writers and photographers that

ride and are proud of it. Although you won't find us covering events per se and the party at "so and so's" in our printed pages, you'll find us at these events, busy looking for machines to feature and people to engage for projects and contributions of knowledge. When we are out hobnobbing with bigwigs and hoi polloi, we have an agenda.

With all that said, we are looking for more "reader engagement," and hope that you'll take the opportunity to interact with us on the [IWBlogger](http://IWBlogger.com) site. Print is not the most interactive medium at our disposal and so we encourage you to use our very busy and vibrant site to connect with us. Blogmeister Sam Kanish is one busy man keeping [IWBlogger](http://IWBlogger.com) up to date on a daily basis with all the news that amuses and pertains to our V-Twin world. Sam is also a mean storyteller and funny as hell in his inimitable laid back manner, so I encourage you to check out [IWBlogger](http://IWBlogger.com) and look for his missives.

I have one request from our constituents—and that is to assist us in identifying talented local folks building bikes, performing customization, creating road going machines, and developing a body of work in the V-Twin arena. Looking for Spotlight subjects is something we could use your help with and if you know of a talented shop or individual who has built a number of machines of a high caliber and quality I'd like to know. Finding talented folks flying under the radar is something we've got a deep interest in, and if you can turn us on to some unsung talent, we'd be most appreciative.

So bring it on 2011, we are ready; gloves on hands, helmet tight, petcock switched, key turned, carb choked...ignition!

Happy New Year!

Yours on 2-wheels in 2011

Stephen Berner

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Spending the day @ Finch Custom Styled Cycles

A trip that was a treat and a treat that was a trip

Story and photos by Stephen Berner

I've been squatting on this story for a while now. It's been near seven months since I visited Finch Custom Styled Cycles in Pontiac, Michigan, with Meddling Editor Paul Holdsworth, and to be completely honest I haven't had a clue how to tell the story.

So I will just tell of the visit and let the images fill in the rest, chink the gaps, so to speak. Holdsworth and I were meandering aimlessly with a clear purpose in mind during our visit to Michigan. Seeing luminaries like Bert and Lisa Baker, Greg Gates from Gates Performance, Evan

from Plymouth Cycle & Speed, and Gary and Julie from Kustoms Inc. were planned stops. There was one special visit I asked Paul to set up and that was to Ron Finch's shop/house/art gallery/land of wonder. I had a pretty clear agenda with most of the stops we'd made up until that point but the visit to Finch was a lone exception.

There is so much written on the man that I am not even going to attempt to give you a rundown on his accomplishments and his well-deserved notoriety. Finch is a genuine OG. I recall reading about the man in magazines as a kid in the early '70s. He was wild, he was cool. In 1965 he opened Finch's

Custom Cycles and built it into a thriving shop that employed a bunch of people; he had a catalog of parts available. He hated it. Being a boss wasn't what Finch wanted, but it paid the bills and bikes gave him a good platform to express himself creatively. In time he made a break, reinvented himself and pursued the creative spirit.

Looking at Finch machines is a different kind of experience. You know you are looking at a motorcycle, all the cues are there, but what is layered on top is a touch of humor, a dose of brilliance, and an unbelievable amount of fabrication talent and creativity. These might be quirky, wild machines but





they are built with the precision and care of the finest timepieces. Finch sees things differently than we do.

Rod work and fins are some of the recurring and distinctive styling cues of Finch's work. Supported by his ever-loyal "Finchmen," the amount of time dedicated to the building of these machines borders on the unreal. Every single piece of metal must be individually cut and fit due to the fact that asymmetry is one of the driving forces of his work. Every hand wrought piece of each machine is unique in its dimensions, shape and position. Taking the time to study one of these machines is an exercise in focus, each and every quadrant, component and part is a story in and of itself.

Finch can also play well with others. Just look at his collaborations with Gary Maurer of Kustoms Inc. The latest machine to come

from this collaboration was on display in Michael Lichter's Eternal Combustion show at the Legendary Buffalo Chip this past Sturgis; beautiful and striking.

Using my ever-faithful Nuvi 660, Holdsworth and I navigated my rental box to a quiet, unassuming suburb of Pontiac, Michigan, in search of Finch. Tooling down the driveway past a quiet and immaculate house, I had the first glimpse of Finch's workshop/museum/house of wonder, flanked by blue/green glass—yes, glass. The glass boulders were shipped from a Pittsburgh Plate Glass factory in Ohio to Finch's place in Michigan in 1971 at an insanely reasonable expense. He simply had to move them here in 2001. The driveway drops you at a parking area overlooking a beautiful pond with, of course, a Finch fish sculpture stuck in the middle of it. Welcome.

Ron came out to greet Paul and I and we walked up into his shop. This is a guy who simply crackles with creative and life energy and you get the sense that there isn't enough time in the day for him to get his work done.

Finch's funhouse, where he has the unfettered freedom to express himself, has the rough dimensions of a big barn and it is packed to the gills with all types of stuff. Walking through the building to the front, Finch's latest creation "The Outsider"—a sidecar rig made from rod and all sorts of tools and found objects—was sitting outside in the sun. I'd seen the rig briefly at the V-Twin Expo and this was a great opportunity to study the machine. To say it's intense would be an understatement. I couldn't photograph it because it was promised to another magazine. But I can't look at a vehicle





like *The Outsider*, made completely from rod—sidecar and all—and not wonder, “What’s it like to ride in?” I asked Finch and he said, “I don’t know, no one has ever ridden in it. Let’s take a ride, you’ll find out.”

Before I knew it, I was sitting in the sidecar of *The Outsider* with Finch at the helm, speeding down his driveway into the quiet suburban street. I don’t often find myself a passenger, especially in a hack, but being a passenger in the sidecar with Finch driving around his “hood” was a blast. Nothing like sitting three inches from the ground with it passing as a blur beneath you or having your arm a half-inch from a spinning tire resting on a fender made from rod—in a sidecar made of rod—zipping down the street at speed with a grinning Finch next to you.

The tour of the shop started next and to say it is an amazing place would be to sell it short. There is motorcycle history hanging from the walls in every possible space, vying for attention next to a rack of meat grinders or barrels full of die punch-outs waiting to be

turned into wondrous Finch sculptures. Finch might be a pack rat and collect some peculiar stuff, but he knows exactly what he’s got and exactly where it’s located. It ain’t junk, it’s raw material.

The tour continued through the building and up to his “creature gallery”—his animal and insect sculptures made from found materials and wildly, vividly painted. An unbelievable amount of American and motorcycle memorabilia fill this wondrous building.

Finch works on only the project he wants, pursuing his muse. His building gives him enough space to fabricate his one-off masterpieces. A small, unassuming spray booth with a view of his pond is where he works his painterly magic. The paint that comes from Finch is legendary in its wildness, technical accuracy, and outright stunning beauty.

The tour continues, only to be broken up by Ruth, Finch’s wife and business head, (and an excellent cook). It was great to hear Ron and Ruth tell stories of their friends, of mishaps and adventures—all centered

around a two-wheeled, art-powered culture.

A walk around Finch’s property after lunch gave us a look at some of the artifacts the man has placed around his property. Manhole covers, fire hydrants and all matter of urban detritus litter the backcountry of Finch’s property in perfect planned disarray, interconnected by walking paths. Holdsworth had his wits about him and prompted me to open my camera bag then all too quickly it was time to go.

Epilogue: We’d like to thank Ron and Ruth Finch for their hospitality, attention and time. It was a really special treat and a memorable day. Thanks so much! **IW**



*RESOURCE

Finch’s Custom Styled Cycles
Pontiac, MI
www.finchscustoms.com

