

# Peter Hofer's Jaguar Rifle

A TECHNICAL TRIUMPH ADVANCES A CONSERVATION IDEAL

BY MICHAEL G. SABBETH

THIS RIFLE IS INTENDED TO BE A  
**METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF TWO  
FORCES:** THE SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION OF A  
RARE ANIMAL AND THE LEGITIMACY OF HUNTING  
FOR ADVANCING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION.



PETER HOFER'S JAGUAR RIFLE



A stunning case for an unmatched rifle

I have known Peter Hofer many years. I visited him at his elegant facility in Ferlach, located in southern Austria, approximately ten miles from Klagenfurt, the Carinthian capital. I have held several of his million-Euro firearms, teasing him to grant me a five-percent writer's discount towards a purchase. I went hunting with Peter for mouflon in Croatia and chatted with him for hours at DSC Conventions.

Peter attained his unique status in the sporting arms Pantheon by crafting firearms of preternatural beauty and designs that tiptoed into the rarified realm of genius. Writing about him over the years, I confide that I have worn out pages in Rodale's The Synonym Finder to select substitute words for 'extraordinary,' 'unique,' 'magnificent,' and similar superlatives.

I write these words not to boast about having a history with this remarkable gunmaker but rather to give credibility to my assessment that Peter sounded different during our telephone conversation a few weeks ago. He was intense and focused, yet solemn with a hint of melancholy. He didn't even tell any jokes. In my mind's eye, I saw one of his hands moving with agitation through his massive Beethoven-like head of hair. In this conversation Peter made more of an emphatic declaration rather than engaging in collegial conversation. He had a message for me.

The Jaguar rifle, Peter explained, is dedicated to the biggest

feline predator of the most species-rich habitat and the greatest freshwater reservoir on earth, the Amazon. It is described in the Jaguar Rifle brochure as the "green lung" of South America. Metaphoric for the majestic jaguar, the Amazon is the most powerful river on earth. Peter wanted to honor the exotic jaguar, of course, but he focused on describing how his views on the threats to hunting's viability, specifically the arrogance and ignorance of the anti-hunting activists, became the genesis for this remarkable rifle. Peter hopes his rifle will represent a physical incarnation of his resistance to blaming hunters for the jaguar's increasing perilous survival.

The Jaguar rifle, Peter struggled to convey, possessed a nature that went beyond beauty and unsurpassed mechanical excellence. Searching for precise words, he spoke rapidly in German to Claudia, his able office manager, asking, in essence, "Tell me what I am trying to say!" With assertive confidence, Claudia interjected, "With this rifle, Peter is trying to explain his philosophy about the value of hunting." I came to understand that the Jaguar rifle was intended to be Peter's metaphorical representation of two forces: the sustainable conservation of a rare animal and the legitimacy of hunting, generally, for advancing wildlife conservation. Thus, I understood the rifle's significance to Peter.



The Jaguar rifle presented in a glass case



Peter spent six years getting all the details of this firearm perfect

The Jaguar Rifle

As is customary, a client contacted Peter to build this bespoke Jaguar rifle, although on rare occasions, Peter will build a firearm on his own initiative to triumph over a technical challenge. During the six years required for this rifle's completion, the client and Peter often discussed the philosophy to be represented by the rifle. Every detail of the Jaguar was addressed painstakingly, but this special order incorporated the additional component of expressing a legacy statement. I note that I have held Peter Hofer firearms that indeed took ten years to complete.

The technical data of the Jaguar rifle describes a side-by-side double rifle in 500 Nitro Express 3-inch caliber. The massive extraordinarily strong Peter Hofer special action features a double underlug and a third bite. The sidelocks are pinless. The double triggers feature a floating front trigger and a two-stage rear trigger. The safety is non-automatic. Chopper lump 24-inch barrels are constructed of Böhler steel with an integral rear fixed V sight and and folding leaves regulated to 50 and 80 yards. The rifle is paired with a Swarovski Z6i 1-6x24 scope, reticle 4AI, zeroed at 110 yards and is secured with a Peter Hofer quick detachable swivel mount.

The 15.5-inch stock is crafted from Peter Hofer's highest-grade walnut and has a cheekpiece. The wood glows with what I describe as an inner luminescence, and the fibers or composition of the wood have the alluring and symbolic appearance of the spots of rifle's honored subject. The stock boasts a metal pistol grip cap, and the butt is covered with a black leather recoil pad. I mention as an aside that I have entered Hofer's temperature and humidity-controlled vault that holds his wood blanks as if it were a wine cellar holding priceless Bordeaux and Burgundy wines where held blanks that were over 500 years old!

What Peter describes as 'engraving' merits elaboration. The concept of 'engraving' has enlarged during the years I have been writing about the world's most prestigious

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## PETER HOFER'S JAGUAR RIFLE



*A variety of flora and fauna brilliantly engraved on the underside*



*The right side plate boasts a variety of colors from red and yellow to blue and green to create a vivid scene.*



*How many different species can you see engraved on the left side plate?*



*Aerial view of the tang*

firearms. No longer are craftsmen confined to the use of the hammer and gravers on the firearm's steel as expressed most brilliantly by the transcendent bulino style. Engraving now encompasses precious metal and enamel inlays. Peter's inspiration for the use of enamel was not whimsical, but rather blossomed from his studies of 3,000-year-old enamel works on burial objects in Cyprus, the finest enamel paintings he saw in the Kremlin and in the Hermitage of St. Petersburg, and the magnificent Fabergé eggs.

The Jaguar rifle engraving is embellished with solid gold inlays of white, yellow, red gold and platinum and multiple hues of enamel. The scene on the bottom of the action portraying the luminous jaguar attacking the unfortunate mammal exhibits the multiple shades of black and gray found in the most masterful execution of the bulino engraving style. The Jaguar rifle immortalizes the resplendent animal in the glory of its colorful and breath-taking habitat. In addition, however, to the jaguar representations, the engraving, the precious metals, and the enamel show a cascade of wildlife, including a crocodile, an anaconda, a capybara, an ocelot, a blue-and-yellow macaw, a toucan and tree frogs.

Among the daunting engraving challenges required to overcome was developing an enamel formula and the process for applying that enamel to the steel. That process would have to withstand cracking or breaking apart due to the massive vibrations and flexing of the steel resulting from the repeated discharges of the powerful 500 NE cartridge.

### **The Message of the Jaguar Rifle**

The powerful jaguar can grow to eight feet and weigh over 350 pounds. Its biting power has been measured as twice that of a lion, giving the jaguar the distinction of possessing the second strongest bite of all land-based predators. More than two-thirds of its habitat is in the Amazon basin. The extent of existing jaguar populations is speculative due to its tendencies to hide within deep jungle cover.

As is the case for many animal species, the jaguar's survival is threatened primarily by loss of habitat from deforestation, conversion of land to agricultural and domesticated animal use and other indices of human behavior. Some data predicts that 40 percent of the Brazilian rainforest, home of most of the world's jaguars, will be destroyed by the year 2050. Thus, a double destructive narrative develops. As the jaguar loses its natural food sources, they begin to devour domesticated animals and threaten human the lives. Consequently, the noble jaguar inflicts an economic cost and, more ominously, becomes a life-threatening presence for humans.

The message, or ethos, of this extraordinary Jaguar double rifle is Peter's physical testament to raise awareness of the circumstances that threaten the jaguar's survival and to influence making corrective behavior that will sustain these animals. Peter views the Jaguar rifle as a defining work of his art, in essence, his legacy. For him, the rifle's meaning goes beyond the gun and embodies an expression of his personal beliefs and fears. The goals are ambitious, but Peter Hofer likely will be successful, for he has earned his place in the constellation of the world's finest gunmakers by transforming ambition into reality. 🐾