

Lone Star State MAESTRO

BILL RUPLE USES STUNNING
CRAFTSMANSHIP IN HIS
AWARD-WINNING DESIGNS

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON

Let's turn back the hands of time a bit to the 2013 SHOT Show.

I had a chance to spend what little downtime I had, having lunch with my good friend and knifemaker Luke Swenson. While doing so, we stumbled into his friend and mentor, Bill Ruple, who was sitting at an adjacent table. It was immediately apparent that Bill was a true Texan through and through—donning a cowboy hat, beard, moustache, thick Texas accent and manners you would expect in an old Western.

My friend affectionately referred to him as Maestro whenever he addressed him. At that time, I had not been around the custom knife circuit too much, so I had no idea just who it was that I was meeting, but he had a kind and welcoming demeanor.

They were both in town for the Vegas Invitational Knifemakers Show at the Riviera Hotel and Casino, which was taking place directly after the SHOT Show. I was fortunate enough to spend time with both of them.

The Maestro

After I was introduced to Bill, he showed me one of the custom slip joints, and I was stunned at the incredible craftsmanship. With the amazing hand-selected Sambar Stag handle scales, spine file work, clean lines, smooth action, snappy detent and refined and clean pin work, I realized why Luke referred to him as Maestro.

Bill got started in the industry after watching his lifelong friend make knives for five years. In 1988, Bill finally took the plunge and had his friend teach him what he was doing. Since then, Bill has become one of the premier slip joint makers in the industry, and he now has 30 or 40 different patterns to his name.



SADDLEHORN PREPPER

BLADE LENGTH: 3.5 inches

BLADE MATERIAL: Devin Thomas Damascus

BLADE FINISH: Acid Etched

BOLSTER MATERIAL: 416 stainless steel (Engraving Joe Mason)

HANDLE MATERIAL: Mammoth Ivory

PHOTO: Sharp By Coop

TRAPPER

BLADE LENGTH: 3 inches

BLADE MATERIAL: CPM-154

FILEWORK: Bill Ruple

BLADE FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

BOLSTER MATERIAL: 416 stainless steel (Engraving Bailey Bradshaw)

HANDLE MATERIAL: Mammoth Ivory

PHOTO: Sharp By Coop



TEXAS TOOTHPICK

BLADE LENGTH: 4 inches

BLADE MATERIAL: CPM-154

BACKSPRING & SPINE ENGRAVING: Bill Ruple

BLADE FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

BOLSTER MATERIAL: 416 stainless steel (fluted and lined)

HANDLE MATERIAL: Black Lip Mother of Pearl

PHOTO: Sharp By Coop



WORDS OF ADVICE

If you plan on going to a show to purchase one of Bill's knives, then you may want to get in touch with him to pre-pay for one. Or, try to find him before the show and see if he has anything left. They are in high demand.

With so many different patterns, Bill struggles to find time to work on new patterns because people always find something they like in his current catalog, meaning he has to put a hold on customer work to spend time on a design that could be the next big hit, like his most popular design, the Double Blade Trapper.

While Bill prefers stainless steel in his multi-blade folders, he does use quite a bit of Damascus and carbon steel, too. Showing an obvious favoritism to Sambar Stag for his handle scales, Bill has also used the excruciatingly difficult-to-work-with, but oh-so-gorgeous Mother of Pearl, Jig Bone and ancient Ivory as well, although recently Bill has also done several knives utilizing carbon fiber and G10.

While most of his knives are done using stock removal, he has been known to go to a friend's shop and make some Damascus as well.

What really sets Bill apart are his embellishment techniques, such as his file

work and engraving. When you look at a Ruple knife, you feel as though you are looking at a true piece of functional artwork.

High Demand

After seeing that first piece, my appetite was aroused, so I determined that I had to stop in at the show to see what he brought with him. Since my flight wasn't until later in the day, I was able to attend the Vegas Invitational Knifemakers Show and look at some of Mr. Ruple's other knives.

I entered shortly after the show opened and went directly to Luke's table to find out where Bill was sitting. Luke and I headed right over and found an empty table ... and Bill nowhere to be found. I asked why he would be missing the show and was assured that he wasn't missing the show but probably just walking around visiting.


I then inquired why he would get a table if he wasn't going to display his knives.

This is was when I got the most surprising news of all—Bill does bring a lot of knives with him, they just rarely make it to the show, because they are bought before the doors open.

A Master

If you get a chance to meet Bill, you will probably find him as I did, very approachable and a pleasure to be around. Once his knives come out, you will suddenly feel as though you are standing in the presence of a master artisan. Handling one of Bill's knives can be a humbling experience that may set you on a lifelong quest to own one yourself.

Although he likes the freedom afforded by doing knife shows and being able to make what he wants, he does take orders. His wait time is anywhere from six months to a year. Judging by how fast his knives go at the shows, you may be better off ordering one.

To be sure, I am forever grateful I attended the 2013 SHOT Show. 

CONTACT INFORMATION

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CANOE SPLIT BACK SPRING WHITTLER

BLADE LENGTH: 2.5 inches, 1.75 inches

BLADE MATERIAL: CPM-154

CENTER SPACER ENGRAVING: Bill Ruple

BLADE FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

BOLSTER MATERIAL: 416 stainless steel (fluted and lined)

HANDLE MATERIAL: Dyed stag

PHOTO: Sharp By Coop