

# Man of Many Talents



When he's not guiding hunts, Gene Klein is crafting one-of-a-kind western gear for cowboys and collectors

By Randy Rieman

If, as the old saying goes, variety is the spice of life, then Gene Klein has more than his quota of spice in a life that is filled with variety. Not only is Klein a respected silversmith and custom bit and spur maker, but he is also a 30-year veteran North American game guide, a "master class" shooter in conventional high-power (across-the-course)

*Happy Klein client Bill D'Alonzo with his Vermejo Park Ranch bull.*



matches, and a "high-master" shooter in high-power long-range competitions.

In 1976, after receiving a forestry degree from Northern Arizona University, Klein went to work as a forester for the famous Vermejo Park Ranch in northern New Mexico. That's also when Klein's guiding career started. Although he left full-time employment at Vermejo in 1984, he maintained his guide status with the ranch and still spends four months each year guiding turkey, bison,

antelope, deer and elk hunts for both bow and rifle hunters.

(Today, Vermejo Park Ranch, owned by Ted Turner, is one of the last large tracts of the West that still resembles what the West once was. Its 588,000 acres are home to large herds of elk, deer, antelope and bison as well as their natural predators, bear and mountain lion. For more information on hunting and fishing at Vermejo, go to [www.vermejoparkranch.com](http://www.vermejoparkranch.com).)


It was here in the middle of northern New Mexico's cow country that Klein developed an appreciation for the hand-made gear held in high regard by the local cowboys. He began building a few bits and spurs in the ranch workshop, an effort he recalls as "rough, but modestly successful" and which got easier with each new order.

When Klein left the Vermejo payroll, he did what so many "sons of the western soil" do, and took work as a cowboy when he wasn't guiding hunters. It was during one of these "cowboy jobs" in Colorado that Klein met master saddle maker and silversmith Jeremiah Watt.

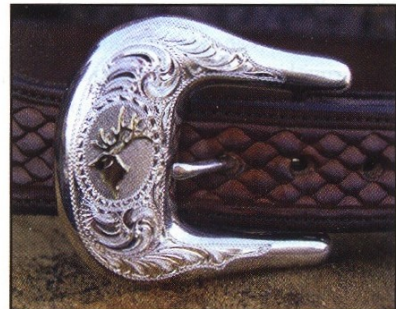
Klein was adept with tools and had "tinkered" with making bits and spurs.



But it was Watt who really encouraged Klein to seriously pursue engraving and bit and spur making. In 1988, after a brief apprenticeship with Watt, Klein established his own custom silver shop in Miami, NM, where he lives with his wife Nancy.

Klein's work is traditional or classic western in style, and has become highly prized by cowboys as well as collectors of fine western gear. Whether it's a bridle bit or bracelet, a pair of spurs or a buckle set, every piece is unique, hand-cut, hand-engraved and hand-finished by one set of hands – Gene Klein's. 

Contact information for western gear:  
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