



Advertise on NYTimes.com

CITY CRITIC

No Permit? No Touching the Pistols



Emily Berl for The New York Times

BANG! Targets in the window at John Jovino Gun Shop.

By ARIEL KAMINER
Published: January 28, 2011

You don't find a lot of retail businesses that officially turn away buyers. But when I visited the John Jovino Gun Shop, the city's oldest, the mildest inquiry elicited a swift and gruff response. Show me your police identification, I was told, or goodbye. The store does not sell to civilians.

Related

More Articles in This Series

Enlarge This Image



Emily Berl for The New York Times
ARMS AT HAND The Beretta Gallery on Madison Avenue in Manhattan is a hushed, elegant space for guns.

Among the reasons this policy is remarkable is that it isn't actually true. John Jovino does sell to civilians, as a subsequent phone call confirmed. But apparently it is not eager to do so.

To run a gun shop in this of all cities is to weather a great deal of regulatory — even hostile — scrutiny. In 1993, John Jovino in particular proved that there is such a thing as bad publicity, when a Columbia professor linked its wares to nearly 1 percent of the gun crimes in the city. Since then, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has made the tightening of the city's gun-control laws one of the proudest hallmarks of his administration. Last week, he redoubled his efforts to export them to the rest of America.

The laws on the city's books are just part of the story, however. And the several months, and several hundred

Readers' Comments

Share your thoughts.

Post a Comment »

Latest in My Network

What's This?

Irv Pavlik Jr RECOMMENDED
Bloodshed Puts Focus on Vitriol in Politics

POPULAR NOW
More Young Americans Identify as Mixed Race

POPULAR NOW
Milton Babbitt, Composer Who Gloried in Complexity, Dies at 94

POPULAR NOW
Serious in Singapore

1 Rule of a flat stomach:



Cut down a bit of stomach fat every day by using this 1 weird old tip.

Advertise on NYTimes.com

Afternoon Update

Sign up for a recap of the day's top stories and business headlines, sent weekday afternoons. See Sample
tonsilva@mac.com Sign Up

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED VIEWED

- 1. Well: How Meditation May Change the Brain
2. Practical Traveler: How to Fight Back When Your Flight Is Canceled
3. Gail Collins: Don't Know Much About History
4. Choice Tables: My Go-To Places for Regional Italian Food in San Francisco
5. Extreme New Zealand, a Thrill-Seeker's Playground
6. Diner's Journal: The Minimalist Chooses 25 of His Favorites
7. Personal Health: Long and Short of Calcium and Vitamin D
8. 36 Hours in Lisbon
9. For Land Barons, Acres by the Millions
10. For Governors, Medicaid Looks Ripe for Slashing

Go to Complete List »

dollars, that it takes to get a permit are just the beginning of the challenge for those New Yorkers seeking the added confidence — or risk — of a handgun beneath their pillow.

In the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx, Olinville Arms also caters largely to law enforcement, a clientele that, from the looks of the store, does not place a high value on décor. Big piles of gun-related paraphernalia sit next to a few hundred leather belts, running up to size 58; pink girly-girl tank tops with police logos hang above school crossing-guard patches.

The actual guns, save for a few shotguns positioned below two dusty deer heads, are kept out of sight. But not out of earshot: the store has a shooting range, separated from the shop only by the thinnest of barriers, and each discharge rings out at a disconcerting volume.

When I asked about personal protection, a salesman suggested a revolver — a Smith & Wesson, a Ruger or a Colt. “You could try it out,” he said, “and if you like it you could go for a semiautomatic.”

But he did not seem as if he cared one way or the other, especially since I did not have a permit, which meant I was not allowed to handle the merchandise. Go online, he suggested, and see what looks good.

I found it hard to imagine buying a gun based on looks, but the sales counter was lined with an advertisement for a hot pink rubber sheath for dressing up a hunting rifle, an accessory that appeals, the salesman said, to “a certain kind of person.” Then a few more powerful shots thundered out. You get used to it, he said with a shrug.

When I did finally get my hands on a gun, it wasn't in a dingy police shop; it was in the rarefied retail environment of a Madison Avenue boutique. Right next to the flashy “Sex and the City” fantasy of Jimmy Choo shoes, stands Beretta, a hushed, elegant space that seems far removed from Manhattan's bustle and slush. Its elegant double-height parlor is lined in dark wood and accessorized with cashmere sweaters and large-game trophies that peer down superciliously from their mountings.

The gun room on the third floor makes even the parlor seem cluttered and hectic. All but silent, it has the look of a private club and the feel of another century. Don't ask to see a Glock; Beretta sells hunting rifles. Some 400 of them, ranging in price from about \$1,000 to \$170,000, are arranged along the walls. Above the rifles are photographs of hunters proudly displaying their quarry: a tweedy fellow surrounded by a few hundred pheasants in concentric circles; a driveway lined with half a dozen huge bucks and a pile of 75 or so wild boar, shot at the country estate of [Nicolae Ceausescu](#).

A salesman handed me a 20-gauge semiautomatic (at the lower end of the price range), which he said would be easier for a novice. Then I raised it to my shoulder, and pointed.

Holding a top-of-the-line gun is supposed to make a person feel powerful, confident, in control. Instead, I felt ridiculous. My stance was all wrong, and in any case I would never pull the trigger — not to kill an intruder, not to kill a bird. That moment of truth reaffirmed what was already beyond doubt: I am a pacifist, or a coward, depending on your perspective. But just as important, I am a New Yorker. In a city where we all live right on top of one another, playing with guns feels as out of place as wearing prairie dresses and engaging in plural marriage.

The day I visited John Jovino Gun Shop, on Grand Street, a happy, ruddy-faced family followed me in, pushing a stroller. They were visiting from Sweden, they explained before anyone thought to ask, and they wanted to make sure to see a real live gun store.

I informed them that New York is one of the hardest places in the world to buy a gun. They seemed surprised.

In fact, I said, the whole process can take up to six months. They laughed. In Sweden,



Tough options for a family business

ALSO IN BUSINESS »

- From laid off to entrepreneur
- Defining a "lifestyle business"

nytimes.com

BUSINESS

ADVERTISEMENTS

Find your dream home with
The New York Times Real Estate



The new issue of T is here

See the news in the making.
Watch TimesCast, a daily news video.

An advertisement for TimesReader 2.0. It features the text "The New York Times TimesReader 2.0 TRY IT FREE FOR 2 WEEKS. ACT NOW" in a blue and white color scheme. The background shows a person sitting at a desk with a computer monitor displaying a news article.

they said, you can buy one on the street.

E-mail: citycritic@nytimes.com

A version of this article appeared in print on January 30, 2011, on page MB1 of the New York edition.

Get the full newspaper experience, and more, delivered to your Mac or PC. Times Reader 2.0: Try it FREE for 2 full weeks.

- [COMMENTS](#)
- [E-MAIL](#)
- [PRINT](#)
- [REPRINTS](#)

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

- Firearms
- New York City
- Shopping and Retail

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM

MAGAZINE »



Dealing With Assange and the WikiLeaks Secrets

OPINION »



Op-Chart: A Year in Iraq and Afghanistan

FASHION & STYLE »



Weddings and Celebrations

MOVIES »



A Golden Age of Foreign Films, Mostly Unseen

OPINION »

Disunion: Lincoln's Other Mother

Abraham Lincoln's stepmother, Sarah Lincoln, helped make him what he was.

N.Y. / REGION »



The Name Rings a Bell

- [Home](#)
- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [N.Y. / Region](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Style](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Back to Top](#)

- [© 2011 The New York Times Company](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Your Ad Choices](#)
- [Terms of Service](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [First Look](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Work for Us](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Site Map](#)