

How Emperor Leopaldo Achieves the Perfect Smoke

By
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(Excerpted from the Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine article by Chuck Stinyon)

Note: The editor of Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine sent a representative to Castle Pesaro to answer reader's questions on the details of how Emperor Leopaldo smokes his pipes. The following short article is based on interview and observation. We wish to thank the Emperor for sharing with us his time and observations – editor.

Emperor Leopaldo sits down at his desk in his den at Castle Pesaro. He glances at the pipes on his desk. There are several pipes sitting in full disarray on the desktop. He keeps many of his pipes in fine display cases around the room. His favorite smokers just lie on his working desk. Individual pipe stands are used for some but most of his favorite smokers just sit on the desk. He takes the large Ser Jacopo Double Maxima off the desktop. He inspects the pipe. It is a large pipe with a short 1/8 bent saddle stem. The dark vertical grain set against the dark red finish caused the long shank to appear like the striping on a zebra's back. The end of the shank disappears into the bottom of the bowl. The bottom of the bowl is a close-knit Birdseye finish with the grain rising like the flames out of a fire around the bowl until it meets the groove cut into the top of the pipe like a ring on the end of a finger. He knows that the pipe will last a good hour-and-a-half to two hours once it is filled and lit.

Although Emperor Leopaldo has several hundreds of tins of Old Earth tobacco, his favorite, when he can find it, is McClelland 5100. Recently, he purchased some large sealed bags of this fine matured Virginia tobacco. Sometimes, the tobacco can be found under the name "Red Kake". Usually he stores the bulk tobaccos in heat-sealed thick plastic bags. However, he smokes the McClelland 5100 quite often, so he stores it in self-closing plastic bags for easy dispensing. He opens the bag, and inhales the aroma of the bulk tobacco. It smells deeply like a fine wine.

He takes a pinch of the tobacco out of the bag and lets it fall into the bowl of the pipe. Holding the pipe in his left hand, he tamps it down with the long index finger of his right hand. When it felt firm, he reached into the bag and takes out another pinch. Again, he let it gravity feed into the bowl, then tamps it down with his index finger. He repeated this process another six times until the bowl was full. For the last two tamps, he used his right thumb, carefully adjusting the downward pressure so that the resistance of the tobacco felt just right. He puts the pipe stem between his teeth and tested the draw of air through the stem. It seemed right. It had taken many years of practice to be able to fill

and tamp the tobacco in his pipe just right so that he gets the maximum amount of pleasure out of his pipe smoking.

He was observed carefully pressing the bag and tobacco so that there was as little free air inside the plastic bag containing the remaining McClelland 5100. Then he sealed the bag's closure. Emperor Leopaldo believes in keeping the bulk tobacco in a large bag. When the amount of tobacco gets below a half pound, he mixes in fresher McClelland 5100. He believes that by keeping a constant mixing of older and newer tobacco mixed resulted in a more consistent tobacco yielding a superior smoke.

Emperor Leopaldo believes that the only thing that should be used to light a pipe is wooden matches. He does not like the new autoigniters, butane lighters, or fluid lighters that were once used on Old Earth. He takes a box of 30 wooden 'strike on box' matches. He places the pipe in his mouth, firmly grasping the stem between his teeth. Holding the box of matches in his left hand, he takes a match in his right hand, strikes the side of the box and lights the match. He then holds the match one to two inches above the bowl of the pipe and moves it around in a circular motion, all the while puffing. He made sure that the entire top of the tobacco was lit. Then he blew out the match, and tamps the tobacco down to a flat surface. This was the charring light. He then lights a second match. Again, he holds the match above the bowl and draws the flame down into the tobacco, directing the location through combining movement of the pipe and match together. He continues this motion until the entire surface of the tobacco is ablaze. The tobacco had risen in the center so he tamps it down flat. He is a firm believer in always trying to maintain a flat burning surface.

He knows that, until the pipe is finished, there will be two acts he continues to perform; tamping the tobacco down to a flat surface as needed, and at the first sign of moisture coming through the stem, he uses a pipe cleaner. The continual use of the tamper is to optimize the burning properties. Emperor Leopaldo is a wet smoker, so he often uses two or three pipe cleaners while he smokes a pipe. Both of these practices prevent gurgling inside the bowl, and the latter prevents unpleasant surprises coming down the stem.

Emperor Leopaldo is a holder. The term means that he normally holds the bowl of the pipe in the palm of his hands, and then places the stem in his mouth when he puffs. The opposite of a holder is a biter. A biter keeps the pipe firmly clenched between his teeth the whole time he smokes. Thus the holder has something to do with his hands while the biter develops a strong set of teeth and jaw muscles. Most people tended to do both, but spend varying amounts of time between the two ends of the spectrum.

Note: For the next hour, while smoking, Emperor Leopaldo and the interviewer chat about pipes and tobacco. The Emperor periodically tamps the surface of the tobacco, and often runs a pipe cleaner down the shank. He never empties the ash out of the pipe. He explains that the ash on top helps to keep the tobacco burning.

The burning tobacco shows signs of approaching the bottom of the bowl. He tamps the tobacco and relights the tobacco. He knows that the smoke is almost over. He only allows one relight at the bottom. If the tobacco goes out midway, he will tamp and relight immediately. If the pipe sits for a period of time or goes completely out, he is finished; he will not relight under these conditions.

The pipe is finished. Emperor Leopaldo sits the pipe down. He lets the pipe cool down and only when it is cool, he inserts the blade of a tamper-knife combination and scrapes out the bowl. The ash is emptied into an ashtray and the pipe returned to the desktop.

Note: Emperor Leopaldo informs the editor that he always waits until the pipe cools down to remove any ash and dottle. He also allows at least a twenty-four hour rest period for a pipe before smoking it again. He also told us that he cleans his pipes approximately once-a-month. He believes that pipes should be disassembled as little as possible.

Once again, the editor of Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine thanks Emperor Leopaldo for sharing this intimate view of his pipe smoking practices with our readers.