

Present manager Leon Bouten, the third generation taxidermist with Bouten Taxidermy and Supply in Venlo, Holland.



# BOUTEN

FOUR GENERATIONS OF TAXIDERMY HISTORY

BY DAN RINEHART

**F**AMILY AND BUSINESS can sometimes be a very difficult combination (as I know all too well!). The majority of family businesses do not make it into, or past, the second generation. This is primarily due to poor planning and an inability to acknowledge one's mortality. As in all areas of life, however, there are shining exceptions to the rule. The finest example of family tradition and continued heritage in taxidermy comes from a family of taxidermists from Venlo, Holland. Since 1918, the Bouten Family has managed a successful taxidermy business through four generations.

**LEO.** From 1918 to 1948, Leo Bouten founded and managed Bouten Taxidermy. At first, Leo was a saddle maker with taxidermy as a hobby. It soon became clear to Leo that he could make more money at taxidermy. At that time, the taxidermy knowledge available in Holland was very limited. Holland's eastern neighbor, Germany, however, was the center for taxidermy knowledge in Europe. To gain the knowledge needed, Leo invited a German taxidermist to come to Holland and teach his techniques. Other German taxidermists continued to visit and work with the Boutens until 1938 when it became evident that Hitler desired to conquer Europe.



From 1918 to 1948, Leo Bouten founded and managed Bouten Taxidermy. This photograph was taken in 1941 while Leo was in the military.

All German taxidermists were then required to return to Germany. It was also at this time that Leo entered the military to protect Holland, so Jac's brother, Frans Bouten, became manager and protected the family and business.

**JAC.** From 1948 to 1988, Jac Bouten managed the business, and under Jac's management, Bouten Taxidermy expanded into a taxidermy supply company. Through the efforts and travels of Jac, contact was made in the United States with Onno Van Veen, manager at the time for Jonas Brothers. Jac and Onno developed a distribution agreement and the Boutens became the European distributor for Jonas Brothers. It was also during the

management of Jac that the taxidermy industry throughout Holland was united into the Dutch Taxidermy Association and successfully worked with government officials to protect the future of taxidermy in Holland.

**LEON.** In 1988, Bouten Taxidermy and Supply made the transition to the third, and current, generation of Boutens. Today, Leon Bouten manages Bouten Taxidermy and Supply and has continued the evolution of the business. Leon has continued with his father's efforts to work with the Dutch government. In addition, Leon has expanded the supply side

of the business by establishing a European distribution with Precision Mannikins. European taxidermists have been slower to use manufactured mannikins. Nevertheless, a trend clearly shows that European taxidermist are starting to incorporate more manufactured mannikins into their work. Also, the changing of all European currency to the Euro-dollar will make transactions between countries easier than ever before. As a result, Leon is convinced that future growth will come from the distribution of supplies throughout Europe.

**MAURICE.** The fourth generation of the Bouten family is now being groomed for future leadership. In 1991, Leon's son Maurice joined with his father to learn the trade of taxidermy and position himself as the future leader of the Bouten business. Primarily learning from his father, Maurice has also traveled to Norway and worked with Perr Lynn (another young, future taxidermy leader), while expanding his knowledge and techniques. Today, Leon and Maurice work together and can be seen at the European and World taxidermy competitions. To his credit, Maurice was successful at the 1999 World Taxidermy Championships® with two second-place roe deer (on a mannikin I am honored to have sculpted).

It is very easy to see that the taxidermy history of the Bouten family runs very deep. Their success, however, has not been without incredible sacrifice. The history of the Bouten family is an excellent example of how to survive in business, mainly being flexible and willing to change as new opportunities are presented. Floods, wars, and politics have all threatened to destroy the Bouten taxidermy heritage. Through hard work, determination, and family unity, the Bouten family has overcome the most devastating obstacles nature and man can create.

In 1940, Hitler's forces launched a *blitzkrieg* attack on Holland. After Holland was overrun by German forces, Leo and Jac were *forced* to leave

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Jac Bouten, the second generation, managed the business from 1948 to 1988. It was during this time that Boutens started offering supplies in Europe, and became a distributor for supplies from Denver's Jonas Brothers. Jac's son, Leon, is currently the manager of Bouten's.



Maurice Bouten, the fourth generation taxidermist, is being groomed as the future leader of the Bouten business. Maurice and his father Leon traveled to the United States for the 1999 World Taxidermy Championships®, where Maurice captured two second place ribbons with roe deer.



A taxidermy student, Judith, perches on a Bactrian camel, the first camel Maurice Bouten ever mounted.



A tyrannosaurus rex greets customers outside the Bouten studio in Venlo, Holland.

their home and taxidermy studio and go to Germany. Having had their freedom and rights taken from them, Leo and Jac were ordered (under consequence of death) to labor for the German forces. In 1944, Jac escaped and returned to Holland, only to find his house completely destroyed by Allied bombs aimed at liberating Holland. Amazingly, the taxidermy studio remained intact!

Once Leo and Jac were united, they began rebuilding their family and taxidermy studio. Little did they know that it wouldn't be long before an equally devastating threat to their taxidermy and fur coat business would come from within their own borders. The 1970s brought about a group of narrow-minded people known as "The Greens." This group of people were against hunting or the use of animal skins in any form. They suc-

cessfully infiltrated the government of Holland and were soon helping government officials rewrite laws to end hunting and eliminate taxidermy all together. animal skins could be presented to the government, politicians would see that the "The Greens" had purposefully deceived them and laws could be rewritten that would enable trade of taxidermy to continue. The government in Holland will not listen to an individual. The only chance for the taxidermy industry to be heard by government officials was to band together and present their information. Thus, Jac united all taxidermists throughout Holland and founded the Dutch Taxidermy Federation. It was the power of this association that enabled taxidermists to be heard within the government. In 1985, Jac was able to talk with Dutch government official Mr. Bimsbergen. At first, the propaganda previously presented by the "The Greens" prevented Mr. Bimsbergen from even listening to the taxidermists, but after three years of continuous attempt at talks and invitations, Jac and the Dutch Taxidermy Association were successful in convincing Mr. Bimsbergen to attend one of their taxidermy conventions. Since that first meeting, Mr. Bimsbergen has seen the truth about hunting and the use of animal skins.

Today, the Dutch Taxidermy Association and the Dutch government work together when writing new laws and rewriting old laws. The relationship between taxidermy and government is still very fragile and must be managed carefully. An atmosphere of anti-hunting and anti-fur still exists in Holland. Nevertheless, through the leadership of the Bouten's, taxidermists have a voice in Dutch government and "The Greens" have been stopped from wholesale distributing of their propaganda without opposition.

The history of the Bouten family is a history of leadership, perseverance, flexibility, sacrifice and success. The fact that they have been able to persevere throughout a long history is a credit to their family and an indication of continued future success. I would like to personally thank the Bouten family for their hospitality and time in helping me put together this documentation of family and business success. ■

*DAN RINEHART also comes from a taxidermy family. His father, John, started the Rinehart School of Taxidermy and the Rinehart Taxidermy Supply Company in Janesville, Wisconsin. Dan is very active in the family companies and has a wholesale fish taxidermy and rug making businesses. This year, he is offering 6 different taxidermy mini-courses, August through September, then again October 20 through December 9. To book your courses or for more information, call him at (608) 755-5161.*



The Bouten studio receives a wide assortment of animals from all over the world.

cessfully infiltrated the government of Holland and were soon helping government officials rewrite laws to end hunting and eliminate taxidermy all together.

Leon Bouten could see that the new laws, which were forcing him out of business, were based on untruths presented to the government by "The Greens." Leon believed that if the truth on hunting and the use of