

# Take **PRIDE** in Your **HOLSTER**

By George E. Kontis, PE



*George E. Kontis*



"Sand" Giraffe Ph5 Belt Holster for 1911 5 inches.  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Burgundy" Crocodile Ph6 Combo Holster for 1911  
4-1/4 inches. Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Mint" Python Ph8 IWB for Glock 43.  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



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Exotic animal skins made into custom holsters? Do these magnificent animal skins do an adequate job in protecting the firearm? Are they legal? Would hunter/conservationists like me find it ethical? These and other questions were answered by Daniel Ashland of Pride Holsters ([www.prideholsters.com](http://www.prideholsters.com)), who has found his place in this unique niche market.

After a visit to his shop and a chance to see his inventory, there was no question in my mind about the quality and functionality of his products. People like Daniel have a special knack for this kind of work. Daniel can quickly visualize how to make a pattern and he builds models to validate his designs. He follows this to an assured transition into a work of art. Daniel's grandfather was an upholsterer and Daniel watched him for hours upon end, fascinated by the way his grandfather was able to fit the pieces so precisely to form the various contours of the furniture.

## PASS—ON COWHIDE

As an active left-handed shooter, Daniel became frustrated with the choices of firearms—all designed for right-handed shooters. For him, the gun was ill-fitting and the holster lost its intended functionality. Daniel decided to take matters into his own hands and began building his own left-handed holsters. His first trials were with cowhide. It worked well enough, but Daniel wasn't happy with it because it scratched so easily. This was discouraging, considering the long hours he had invested in their manufacture. That's when the use of exotic animal skins came to him as a far better alternative.

Unlike cows, animals like crocodiles and snakes spend a lot of time on their bellies, and for protection against sharp rocks and other hazards their skins have evolved to be extremely tough. As it is with all of the skin he uses, these animals lead a difficult life, fighting predators and enduring harsh elements in extreme weather conditions. Mammals like the elephant, giraffe and ostrich live in hot climates and encounter dense and thorny brush. It is not uncommon for Daniel to find skins with battle scars and other evidence of predator encounters.

"Much like our ancient Native Americans, African tribesmen make use of every animal part."



## LIFE BEHIND BARS?

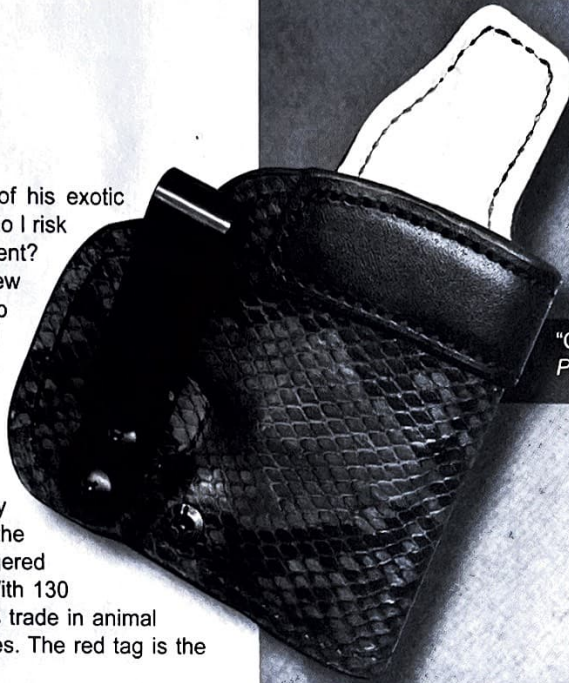
How wise would it be to buy one of his exotic holsters? Are there laws being broken here? Do I risk arrest or a fine by the Fish and Game Department? Worse still, would I end up spending a few thousand hours in community service picking up trash by the side of the road? As Daniel talked and pointed out the features of these attractive skins, I carefully caged a question around my concerns and waited for his response. Daniel laughed as he pointed to a red tag firmly affixed to one of the skins. "Not a problem," he said. "All of these skins are completely legal." Their harvest and sale is authorized by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). With 130 member nations, CITES regulates the world's trade in animal skins and sets a yearly quota for each species. The red tag is the "serial number" of the skins.

If I bought one of his exotic skin holsters, would I be contributing to the early extinction of these beautiful animals? "Hardly!" Daniel shot back. Depending on the animal, some of these skins, like ostrich, python and caiman (the crocodile/alligator relative), come from farms where they are raised for food. In Southeast Asia, python is considered a delicacy and more than half a million pythons per year end up on the dinner table. Their skins are tanned and sold for uses like belts, purses and, in this case, holsters. The hides of other animals, like elephants and giraffes, are legally obtained through natural attrition, thinning of herds or hunting by permit. CITES makes sure the quantity of skins taken each year is in no way endangering the existence of the species. Their efforts have greatly minimized poaching. Daniel says that, in many cases, CITES monitoring and regulations have actually helped to increase the wild population of these species.

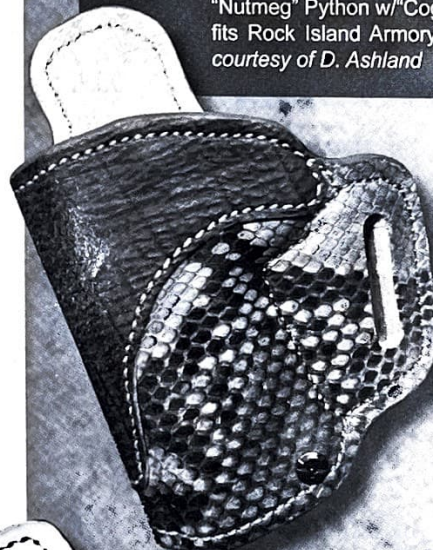
**"When their skins are purposed as holsters and other useful objects, they take on a new life."**

## THE HEREAFTER

I posed my question about ethics, and our discussion turned philosophical. Daniel embarked on a straightforward explanation to lay my fears to rest. Much like our ancient Native Americans, African tribesmen make use of every animal part. When their skins are purposed as holsters and other useful objects, they take on a new life. The grandeur and beauty of the animal lives on. Why, we agreed, should gorgeous, useful skins like these be relegated to a garbage pit? In this case, it could result in a beautiful and rugged holster designed to protect the substantial investment of a firearm owner. Suddenly, exotic animal skin holsters made a lot of sense to me. Holsters made from cow and plastic totally lost their appeal.



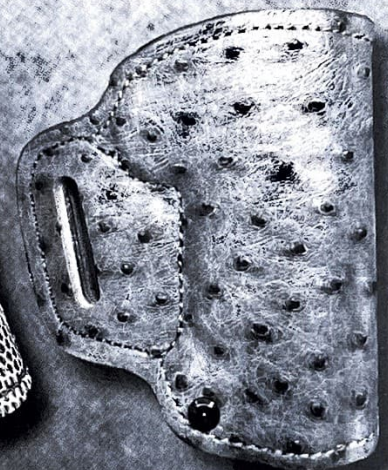
"Cranberry" Python Ph8 IWB for Glock 42  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Nutmeg" Python w/"Cognac" Shark Ph5 Belt Holster fits Rock Island Armory M1911A1 CS 9mm. Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Peanut" Ring Lizard Ph8 IWB for Glock 19. Fits with Glock 42, 43 and 22. Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Cognac" Ostrich Ph5 Holster fits Rock Island Armory M1911A CS. Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



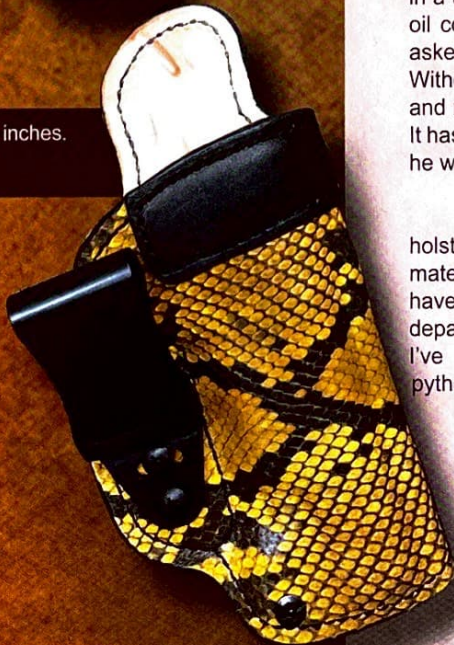
"Fuchsia" Lizard Ph8 IWB for Sig 238.  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Peanut" Ring Lizard w/"Chocolate" Crocodile  
Ph8 IWB fits Keltec P3AT 380.  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Mustard" Python Ph8 IWB for 1911 5 inches.  
Photo courtesy of D. Ashland



"Typical of any manufacturing process, there are always scrap pieces too small to do anything with."

## MANUFACTURING PROCESS

Daniel's process begins with the construction of a pattern made from cowhide. He experiments with models until he has the right design, then he begins the construction with an exotic skin. A substantial amount of gluing and sewing is required to affix the exotic skin to the cowhide interior. Steel inserts are sometimes used to keep the holster from collapsing. The molding process is next. It requires wetting of the skins followed by the use of a high-tonnage press to form the skin around a dummy gun. After molding, Daniel hand-tools the holster to accentuate certain features. The wet holster must dry naturally for several days. Since all of these animals frequent the water during their lives, Daniel says he is never troubled with water stains or spotting after the drying process. When the holster is dry, it is ready for the edge coating to seal and finish the raw edges. Often six to seven coats of the thick edge coating liquid are required to achieve a smooth and continuous appearance.

Typical of any manufacturing process, there are always scrap pieces too small to do anything with. Never one to be wasteful, Daniel has a punch he uses to stamp out an oval disc with the name of his company. The addition of a ring results in a classy keychain. He sends these to potential customers, so they can see and feel any skin they may be interested in firsthand. They sometimes change their minds after seeing the exquisite skins of sharks, ring lizards, pit vipers, elephants or giraffes.

I asked Daniel which skins are the most popular. Ostrich and black crocodile are the two top favorites. Daniel finds ostrich difficult to work with, but once it's done it results in a unique holster. Ostrich skin is always supple due to its oil content. It has the highest oil content of any leather. I asked Daniel what skin should be more popular than it is. Without question, it is giraffe. It's a beautiful, durable skin and makes a great-looking holster. My favorite is elephant. It has a great appearance and is the toughest of all the skins he works with.

Since my visit with Daniel I have re-thought the holster. Exotic animal skins should be the preferred holster material. They offer the ultimate protection for a firearm, have unequalled beauty and give a second life to the departed animal. My next pistol will be an M1911 Caspian. I've already decided on the holster—elephant with blue python trim. Oh yeah! **SAR**





Daniel explains the pattern-to-holster process. Photo courtesy of G. Kontis



Daniel explains the pattern-to-holster process. Photo courtesy of G. Kontis



Tooling after molding the holster.



Animal skins obtained legally bear a CITES serialized tag. Photo courtesy of G. Kontis



Promotional keychains from exotic skins.