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## INSIDE THE BONG SHOW

*A former "High Times" editor explores a "legally gray art form."*

By Nick Paumgarten

When David Bienenstock says, "I've been smoking weed professionally for fifteen years," he is referring to his two stints as an editor at *High Times* and the intervening years as a frequent contributor to *Vice*, where, among other things, he co-produced the pot-cooking show "Bong Appétit" and once wrote a rebuttal to the *Times*, entitled "Maureen

Dowd Freaked Out on Weed Chocolate Because She's Stupid." (Bienenstock's wife was the "Edibles Editor" at *High Times*. They both left the magazine recently.) Bienenstock is also the author of the 2016 book "How to Smoke Pot (Properly)," which is less a primer than a plea—less how than why. He considers himself to be an advocacy journalist, a member, in a way, of an abolitionist press. "Cannabis was my gateway to social justice and to the idea of the government as an oppressive, illegitimate force," he said the other day. Still, there is useful advice here and there in the book, such as a three-step plan for combating "amotivational syndrome," also known as "couch lock":

Step 1: Decide what you're going to do *after* you get stoned *before* you get stoned.

Step 2: Get stoned.

Step 3: Do whatever you decided on in Step 1.

Bienenstock came to town from Los Angeles last month, to guest-curate an exhibit, at apexart, in Tribeca, called "Outlaw Glass"—a showcase of glass pipes and bongs, handmade by master lampworkers for the purpose of smoking marijuana in various forms. Technically, this is known as artistic hard glass. There were four large vitrines, each about the size of a coffin and populated by an array of flamboyant, filigreed apparatuses, lurid plumbing in many colors and forms—dragons, skulls, krakens—which one might find either fetching or hideous, depending upon one's taste for velvet heavy-metal posters and airbrushed landscapes on vans. No question, the craftsmanship was humbling. Delicate leaves and lace, tubes within tubes, ghouls embedded inside chambers like ships in bottles. One object widely admired by the other lampworkers was a pea-green monster truck with big black tires and flames exuding from six tailpipes—every inch of it glass. *Mais oui: Ceci, c'est une pipe.* Bienenstock, who is forty-one and was reared in Rahway (he first smoked pot behind the bowling alley), invited his mother to the opening. She told him, "I can remember throwing out one of your contraptions, but it wasn't nearly as elaborate or beautiful as one of these things."



"Some of these guys probably started out selling weed," Bienenstock said, a couple of days later. A few weeks earlier, the gallery had held a "flame-off," based loosely on "Chopped," the cooking show, at Brooklyn Glass, a glass studio in Gowanus. Fifteen local contestants were each given the same materials, the same equipment, and four hours to create a pot pipe. Their finished work was on display at the back of the gallery; the winner had been selected by Bienenstock. "It seemed like something I'd want to display in my house," he said. "It doesn't look like a pipe, at first glance."

The lampworkers in the show had pseudonyms like Elbo, Banjo, Kinda, and Snic. The so-called godfather of glass is Bob Snodgrass, a seventy-one-year-old hippie who lives in Eugene, Oregon. His work filled an entire vitrine. He started out in the late seventies, selling his implements at county fairs and Kiwanis Clubs, and then, beginning in the late eighties, became a parking-lot fixture on tour with the Grateful Dead. Bienenstock said, "Deadheads knew that if you bought a Snoddy it would pay for itself, because everyone wanted to put their good weed in it." Snodgrass's innovations are legion. He conceived of the so-called sidecar design—wherein the bowl is affixed to the side of the pipe, rather than the top—while he and his wife were spending the night in a friend's waterbed. Every time they put the pipe down, it tipped over. But if you had the bowl as an outrigger—eureka!

Though none of the works at the gallery were for sale, the finer ones can go for six figures. The collectors, Bienenstock said, "are a self-selecting group of people who have money and love weed." Included in this category, apparently, are growers looking to park their unbankable cash. Bienenstock calls it a "legally gray art form." In 2003, at a time when the Department of Homeland Security had declared that the risk of a terrorist attack in the U.S. was orange in magnitude, the Justice Department devoted personnel to a sting that it called Operation Pipe Dreams. Dozens of people were arrested for selling paraphernalia. (You may recall the subsequent prison sentence of the comedian Tommy Chong.) Though there didn't seem much of a chance that anyone would raid the exhibit in Tribeca, the gallery included this statement in the brochure: "apexart does not endorse or advocate the use of illegal substances." But Bienenstock does. ♦

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Nick Paumgarten has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 2005. [Read more »](#)

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