

Your Guide to the Ultimate Home Game Room

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DOCTOR

WHO

We use our own time machine to
chronicle the creation of a
unique Williams pinball machine

Our Pinball Science Project

The ultimate lesson in physics!

A Visit to Star Worlds

A real 80's-style video arcade—in 2006?





High End Pins

It was about 10 years ago when I was first hooked on this dope called pinball restoration. In 1996, there wasn't much to find on the web about the silverball. In fact, it was impossible to find average pinball technicians unless you had an operator willing to take on additional work. But as this fast growing hobby has evolved, so has the level of pinball restoration.

For example, I categorize my own restorations into 3 categories. There are machines like the Stern *Meteor* machine featured in *Life After Death* (DVD) that are quite rough and don't have a large resell ticket but still deserve their right to function as a fine pinball playing piece. And those machines fill the market for a family that's on a tight budget for pinball or a collector that only requires fun playing machines no matter what the condition.

The next level of restoration could be summarized by machines that foundationally are complete and require very little work. On newer machines, simply adjusting switches, installing new rubber and lamps (where required) and wiping down the machine might bring it back to stellar performance.

Stepping up to full throttle restoration is simply bringing the machine back as close as possible to like new condition. To make it close to **perfect** might require a new ramp, cabinet decals or touch up, a full tear-down of the playfield, new posts and tumbled hardware, new legs, interior cabinet painting, touch-up... you get the idea. The time & process to complete this level of restoration is enormous. But very few of us that manage to perform all of this work can reach the detailed level of a "High End Pin".

What's a High End Pin? Chris Hutchins knows as his business defines the term with



Chris Hutchins of High End Pins and some of his future restoration projects

machines that make most modern new-in-box machines looked used. It's like a hyper-restoration gone extreme! And for collectors that demand this level of perfection, he's one of those select few that can perform the ultimate restoration. Perhaps one of the most friendly people in pinball, Chris cut his teeth in car restoration doing body and paint work with his last 5 years exclusively on big ticket cars. But the pinball bug bit him hard in 2000 when he started restoring his own personal machines.

Like a lot of us, he played them for a while and sold them off to get other titles. But unlike most of us, his restoration work began to develop a reputation for perfection on every level. With perfect playfields under a glassy shine, freshly brushed stainless steel, and vibrant colors, how can you not gain the attention of a hungry pinball market? As demand for his talent increased, the natural

progression from pinball hobbyist into pinball business took over. Naming his business *High-End Pins* indicates a bit of what the business is all about—don't go to High-End Pins for a simple re-rubber and wipe down! His customers are interested in having their machines transformed into *better than brand new* machines—far beyond what most of us are capable of. Just to get on the schedule will require a \$1000 deposit, and there are plenty of customers waiting to get their pinball machines into the High End production line.

Chris and his team go through more steps to restore the cabinet than most independent restorers go through on the entire game. There is no part left untouched. Beheaded cabinets have playfields removed so the inside can be stripped, sanded, and repainted. The outside of the cabinet will get a color-matched touch-up or perhaps a new set of decals. Playfields are stripped down



Painting cabs in the main workshop area



Chris in the "Rebuilding Room"

to plywood with even the T-Nuts being removed. Every one of them get a critical inspection over each square inch. Any hint of wear requires professional touch-up and repair. Even NOS playfields need some attention before they move into the paint booth for clearcoating.

Cleacoat, touch-up, cleacoat, more touch-up, leveling, clearcoat... The process continues until it's correct. Every wiring harness gets a thorough cleaning. Any hacks have to be corrected, all mechanical components like slingshots, popbumpers, and flippers have to work perfectly as they did when they were first assembled. In many cases, new coils

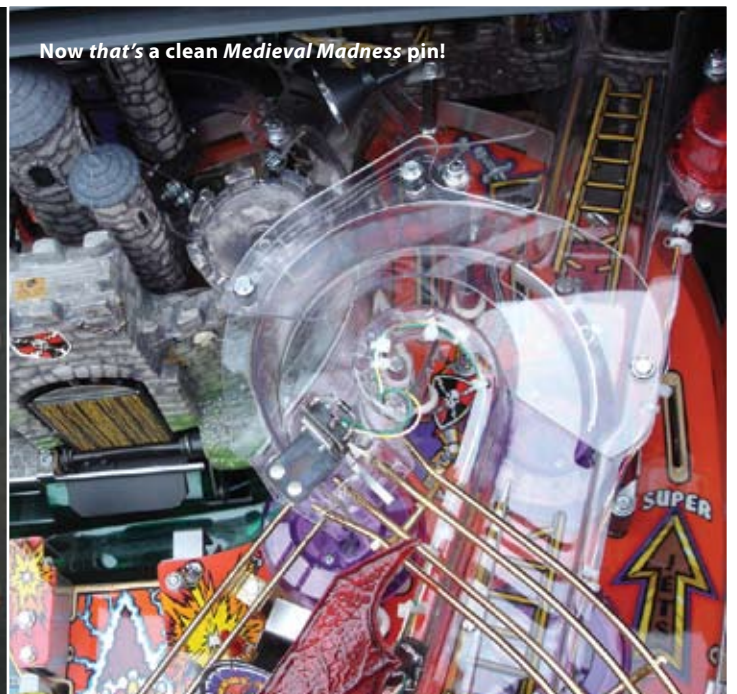
and switches are installed. Anything made of stainless steel is mirror polished and re-grained. Plastic ramps get stripped of wires and wireforms, take a bath, another hand buff, and then a flame polish if not a total replacement. Every piece of metal hardware goes through a progression of tumblers until they come out perfect. Hundreds of wires are inspected for electrical issues. Anything that looks out of place is corrected. And when complete, even all the hidden areas of the game have had the same attention to detail as the rest of the game.

In talking with Chris about the process a game will go through, he explained that re-

gardless of a machine's title, the process must stay as close to uniform as possible. Modularly, the customer's pinball machine arrives and is first disassembled completely. Then each component is cleaned, rebuilt, or replaced. Then the whole machine is rebuilt with quality control a constant throughout the process. Finally, the game is wrapped meticulously, crated in a strong shell, and shipped back to the customer. While it takes between 4 to 6 weeks for a machine to complete its transformation to high end, it joins others in their similar phases of teardown, correction, and re-manufacture. And a customer can check the status of their game periodically as



A Rare King Kong playfield being restored



Now that's a clean Medieval Madness pin!

Chris updates game specific photo galleries on each game in the shop.

It has been said that you can have a machine so clean that it doesn't require more than a simple wipe down once in a while. And from my experience with extreme pinball makeovers, I have to agree. But as a buyer of several new machines, I can attest that there is no perfect machine right out of the box. Most require adjustment, ball cleaning, even playfield cleaning to remove the mess left behind from factory playfield testers. And never have I seen a factory clearcoated playfield that shines as brilliant or is covered as thorough as these extreme restorations.

Over 90% of High End Pins' customers bring him 1990 and newer games. Some of these include prototype machines of *Scared Stiff*, *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, *Terminator 2*, and *Medieval Madness*. Even a rare Data East *King Kong* has been through the process. But Chris stands firm that each machine is treated just the same regardless of title. And your request for installed pinball modifications (such as the *Twilight Zone 3rd* magnet) can normally be met by his crew.

You might be asking yourself about the purpose of such a restoration. After all, isn't the machine designed to be played? Indeed, there is a very weighty ball flying around at serious speed smashing into things. But yet I find myself sickened over the amount of wear that even a home use game can accumulate over just a few years. Consider what an extreme restoration adds to your collection in both value and durability. A slick, clean playfield with perfectly working hardware yields a playing experience that is unmatched anywhere. These tend to look a lot better, last a lot longer, and demand a much bigger price if you decide to sell. And a warning to all: once you go this far, it's hard to settle for less.

You can learn more about Chris and his business High End Pins by looking up his website: www.highendpins.com.

Please send me your comments and topic suggestions to tots@popbumper.com. I'm always listening to what interests you in the wonderful world of pinball. **GR**



Finished pins being crated for shipment



Prototype *Scared Stiff* Playfield, Signed by the design team



Prototype *Scared Stiff* (Left)
Production *Scared Stiff* (Right)



A *Creature From the Black Lagoon* playfield being re-assembled