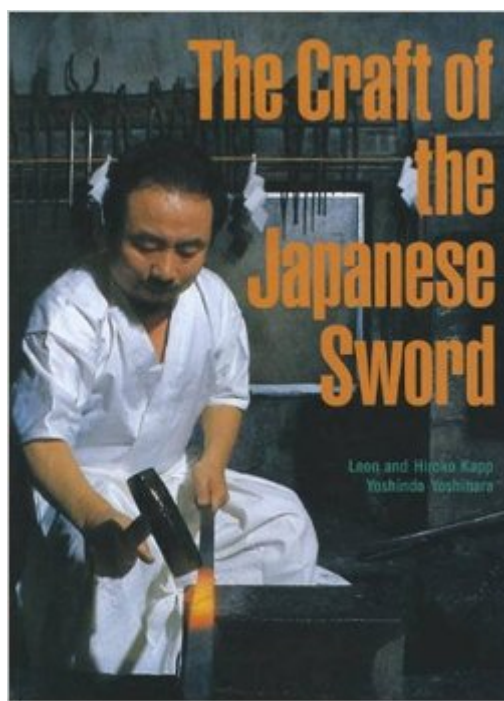


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The Craft Of The Japanese Sword



Synopsis

Well over a thousand years old, the tradition of swordmaking in Japan is one of the most highly regarded metal crafts in the world. When all sword manufacture was prohibited in Japan for seven years after World War II, the age-old techniques were in danger of being lost forever. Today, in the hands of a new generation of practitioners, the craft is making a startling comeback. Connoisseurs say that the swords being produced now are the equal of anything made in Japan in the past few hundred years. This book takes the reader into the workshops of four of Japan's leading sword craftsmen. Each craftsman has a different role in the manufacture of a blade. Yoshindo Yoshihara, the swordsmith, begins with raw steel made in a traditional charcoal-fueled smelter and refines it by folding and forging, gradually shaping it into a sword with a hardened edge. Okisato Fujishiro then sharpens and polishes the sword with fine stones to reveal the color and texture of the steel. Metalworker Hiroshi Miyajima makes the small copper-and-gold habaki collar that fits between the blade and the scabbard. Finally, Kazuyuki Takayama carves the hilt and the scabbard out of a single piece of wood. Black-and-white photographs show every stage of the manufacture, while important information on history, metallurgy, and modern-day appraisal is presented in an extensive introduction. The swords made in Japan today are not, of course, intended for actual use. But their design, the quality of their steel, and the techniques used to create them still derive from the sword's historical function as a lethal hand-held weapon. A sword must be razor sharp, light, well balanced, and strong, but not so brittle it will break. In the perfect resolution of these qualities lie the beauty of the blade and the challenge of the craft. This book demonstrates how brilliantly Japan's sword craftsmen today have met this technological challenge. The impulse of the craft now is to preserve the utilitarian object and yet create an enduring art for the modern age. While many fine books on sword appreciation exist, these deal primarily with older blades or problems of appraisal. *The Craft of the Japanese Sword* is the first book in English devoted entirely to contemporary sword manufacture, and will thus be of enormous value to metal artists everywhere, as well as to collectors and students of weaponry.

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Customer Reviews

This is probably the best book in English ever written for learning how to understand and appreciate the Japanese sword. When this book first appeared almost 20 years ago, there was little detailed information in English outside of specialist journals and similar publications on how they were made, especially the details of the hand-forging, heat-treating, and tempering methods which are still being done today just as they were thousands of years ago. By varying the carbon content and temperature of the forge, the smith can either add or remove carbon or oxygen from the steel to get the right carbon content in the finished blade (about 0.7 percent). I enjoyed reading about the tatara, or iron smelter, which wasn't invented in Japan but seems to have originated in Manchuria and then brought to Japan by way of China or Korea. It's during this phase that certain impurities such as sulphur are removed as slag and carbon is added to produce steel, although the resulting steel is still low quality as the distribution of carbon isn't uniform enough to produce a strong sword. It was also fascinating to learn about how the hamon or temper line is created and made to appear (it marks the boundary between the hard martensite edge and the softer baenite), and the rediscovery of how to create the utsuri, which was highly prized on swords of the Bizen school but was lost for hundreds of years until just recently, and involves another change in the crystalline structure of the steel between the side and the back of the blade. I also learned how to appreciate the different crystal structures (nie and nioi) and textures that make up the appearance of the blade (jintetsu) and what to look for in a good sword.

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