Japanese knives are forged out of hard carbon steel to achieve thin sharp blades. This makes these blades more delicate than Western style knives. If used and maintained properly, your Japanese knife will last you many, many years.

Using Traditional Japanese Knives

- Traditional Japanese knives are task specific, and most styles are not designed to cut through bones. Please do not attempt to cut through bones with traditional Japanese knives, unless it is a deba butchering knife.
- Never use traditional Japanese knives in a rough manner. They are not meant to be used as cleavers.
- Do not twist or force the knife when cutting.
- Traditional Japanese knives have significantly thinner and more delicate blades than Western knives. Use of honing steels or sharpening machines will result in chipping.
- We advise all customers to have a skilled sharpener prepare the knife before using the knife for the first time. By preparing the knife with the uraoshi process, the blade will be aligned and strengthened. Korin offers a complimentary uraoshi sharpening with every purchase.
- Korin offers customers a free service to realign knives purchased in house. All traditional Japanese knives will bend over time due to the heat tempering of the two different steels in the blade.
- It is important to always flatten sharpening stones with a stone fixer to keep a consistent angle when sharpening and to prevent knives from warping.
- Please always use sharpening stones to sharpen traditional Japanese knives.

Preventing Rust and Maintaining

- Carbon knives are not stain resistant. Rust and discoloration will occur after cutting acidic ingredients or if not dried completely after use.
- Carbon knives must be wiped dry after use to prevent rusting. Korin recommends wiping carbon knives with tsukabiki oil after use to keep moisture off the blade.
- The stain resistant knives offered at Korin contain a high carbon content and are not stainless. Stain resistant knives must be dried and stored properly after use. They can stain or rust if not properly maintained.

Cleaning Knives

- Never put knives in the dishwasher.
- Carefully clean knives with water and soap after use. Remove salts and acidic remnants of food from the surface to avoid staining.
- Do not use bleach, harsh chemicals, steel wool, or abrasive sponges to clean the knife.
Sharpening Japanese Knives

The knives in the Korin collection have been chosen for their exceptional quality, outstanding sharpness, and long-lasting edges. Both traditional and Western style Japanese knives must be hand sharpened on a water stone to realize their fullest potential. As you train your knife against the stone, you begin to personalize the edge to your specific needs and sharpening style. With practice and good technique, your knife should become sharper than it was in its original condition.

Japanese chefs consider sharpening as a crucial first step in preparing fine cuisine. Many sushi chefs sharpen their knives at the end of each workday. Ideally, you should sharpen your knife while it is still relatively sharp. If you do this, the knife will only need five or ten minutes against the stone to sharpen. If you put off sharpening until the knife is truly dull, then you will need to spend significantly more time. You should be prepared to sharpen Western style knives every two to three days for average professional use. If you are inexperienced with Japanese knives and water stones, we recommend that you choose a knife that is easier for you to sharpen.

Basic Knife Sharpening Steps

The basics of sharpening on a water stone are the same for traditional Japanese knives and Western style knives. See style-specific pages for instructions and tips. Illustrations and instruction represent right-handed knife sharpening.

**Step One – Prepare the stones**

A level stone surface is necessary to obtain a clean edge and to avoid damaging your blade edge. Synthetic stones and stone fixers should be soaked in water before sharpening for ten minutes. Use the stone fixer on the stone’s edge first to round the corners of the stone. Then, start to sand off the top of the stone with a back and forth motion, removing only enough material to flatten the surface of the stone. Ceramic and diamond stones should not be soaked prior to sharpening. Dip ceramic and diamond stones briefly in water before sharpening. Place the stone on a damp towel or base to stabilize the stone while sharpening.

**Step Two – Establish position of knife to stone and determine edge sharpening angle**

Hold the knife as pictured, with your index finger resting on the spine of the knife, your thumb on the flat part of the blade, and your three remaining fingers grasping the handle. Do not try to sharpen by gripping the handle as you would to cut.

Keep a firm grip on the knife, with shoulders square to the stone and upper body relaxed. With your arm and elbow in a comfortable position, place the face of the knife on the stone and note the angle of knife to stone for sharpening. A 60-70° angle is common. A wider or narrower angle is acceptable, but keeping this angle of knife to stone consistent every time you sharpen is critical to your sharpening success.

Find the angle of the blade edge at which you will sharpen. The angle at which you hold the edge to the stone will determine the edge shape and is the key to good sharpening technique. When you have determined the sharpening angle you will be ready to start sharpening!
Step Three – Sharpen

Place two or three fingers of your left hand on the blade close to the cutting edge and press the edge of the blade to the stone. You will be sharpening the area directly under your fingers, so equal pressure is needed to achieve even sharpening.

Pressing the edge to the stone with your fingers, push the knife forward along the stone. For controlled sharpening, exert pressure as you move forward and release pressure on the down stroke. Move the knife to position the next section of blade under your fingers and repeat this procedure to sharpen a bit of the edge at a time. Remember not to change the angle of the blade edge to the stone and to keep a consistent angle of knife to stone with a straight back and forth motion. As you sharpen you will feel a slight, even burr form along the entire edge.

Once you have a burr, flip over the knife to focus on the reverse side of the blade. Exert more pressure on the upward stroke to remove the burr (for traditional Japanese knives) or establish a double-sided edge. See style specifics pages for this important step.

Basic Sharpening Tips

Never sharpen the blade flat against the stone. This will scratch the surface of the knife and will result in a very weak edge. This is a common cause of chipping and breakage with Japanese knives.

Be sure to keep the stone wet during sharpening. To wet the stone during sharpening, sprinkle a few drops of water from your hand onto the stone, but do not wash away the slurry or mud (toguso) that forms on the stone while sharpening. This grainy mixture is an important aid in the sharpening process.

As you sharpen, you are making small scratches on the surface of the metal with the medium stones and then smoothing out those scratches with the finer grit finishing stones to create a sharp polished edge. It is critical to keep a consistent angle of the knife to the stone the entire time you are sharpening. This will ensure that you are always working the knife along the stone following the same lines and in the same direction, and when you switch stone grits, you will be polishing out the scratches you made with the more abrasive sharpening stones in the previous stage.
Traditional Japanese knives owe their precision and effectiveness to an ingenious single edged design. The diagram below shows the tapered edge on the front of the knife (the Blade Road or Kireha), bordered by the shinogi line. The shinogi line is where the cutting area starts to taper down to the edge. Having a properly sharpened shinogi line allows for the most precise cut, so please do not alter it when sharpening. On the back of yanagi, deba, and usuba knives there is a gentle curve called urasuki. The urasuki feature allows food to separate cleanly after it is cut and acts as suspension for the knife, absorbing pressure and protecting against chipping.

Sharpening Traditional Japanese Knives
When sharpening a traditional Japanese knife it is important to follow the shinogi line, but note that you are only sharpening the very edge, not the entire blade road. This is very important! Place your fingers very close to the blade edge and press firmly to ensure even contact with the stone. Although Western style knives can be sharpened for several strokes in one place at a time on the edge, traditional Japanese knives should only be sharpened for one or two strokes before moving to the next section of edge. When sharpening traditional Japanese knives you must continually move your fingers down the edge. This is especially crucial for the yanagi style knives. The yanagi’s thin, delicate edge will become weak if you sharpen for too many strokes in one spot.

Follow these basic sharpening techniques to sharpen the entire edge until there is a slight evenly distributed burr on the reverse side.

Uraoshi
Uraoshi is the conditioning and flattening of the back side of a traditional Japanese knife. This process will enhance the blade strength on the edge and align any unevenness on the back side of the blade. Without the uraoshi process, the knife will be brittle and cannot be sharpened properly to its fullest potential. Sharpen the backside and apply pressure to the edge only on the upstroke. Keep the blade completely flat to the stone and keep finger between the edge and the shinogi. Remove any burr that forms with a fine grit Japanese whetstone. Korin offers a complimentary uraoshi service for all traditional Japanese knives.

Sharpening the Kissaki
The kissaki is the tip of the blade edge, which curves to a point. Sharpen this area carefully to preserve the original curve of the edge. Sharpen the point more than the rest of the blade edge, adjusting the angle to allow the entire tip to touch the stone. Press the tip with your fingers and slightly lift your right elbow to apply more pressure to the tip.

The traditional Japanese knives in the Korin collection can be maintained with a medium grit (#1000) sharpening stone and a fine grit (#8000) finishing stone; however, for the best possible sharpening results, a more gradual transition using multiple grit stones is highly recommended. Experienced sharpeners are encouraged to try the following sharpening stone series:

For deba knives: #300 - #400 - #1000 - #3000 - #8000  
For all other traditional Japanese Knives:  #300 - #1000 - #3000 - (#6000*) - #8000  
(*#6000 is recommended for stain resistant Japanese knives)

Advanced Sharpening Tip
Traditional Japanese knives should be sharpened at the shinogi for optimum performance. It is vital to preserve the original shinogi line without altering it. Sharpening instruction is advised for this advanced technique. Inexperienced sharpeners can send their knives to Korin’s knife master for this sharpening service.

Sharpening the Shinogi
Flip the blade over to the front and sharpen the shinogi line by moving your fingers away from the edge and pressing just below the middle of the blade. You will be sharpening the area of the shinogi just inside the blade road, creating a small rise in the middle of the blade road. This hill between the shinogi and the edge resembles a clam shell and when shinogi sharpening is successfully performed, this ‘hamaguriba’ (clam-shaped blade) makes it possible to cleanly cut sashimi and other delicate ingredients.
ABOUT TRADITIONAL JAPANESE KNIVES

Japan is a land of long traditions, especially in the field of arts and crafts, where hundreds of years of accumulated knowledge and experience are passed down from master to apprentice, from teacher to pupil. From kimono silk dying and ikebana flower arranging to martial arts and kabuki theatre, each tradition has its own set of rules, procedures and schools of style.

Striving for excellence in their field, Japanese blacksmiths have long been producing the exceptionally fine traditional Japanese knives required by master chefs in Japan to achieve their culinary goals. Today, the razor-sharp, single-edged blades of traditional Japanese knives are prized by Japanese and non-Japanese chefs alike.

Honyaki Knives & Kasumi Knives

All the traditional Japanese knives sold at Korin are handcrafted and inspected by our resident knife master to ensure the highest quality. There are two classifications of Japanese knives based on the materials and methods used in the forging process. Each classification has its own advantages.

Kasumi Knives

Kasumi means “mist,” referring to the hazy appearance of the soft iron of the blade in contrast to the glossy carbon steel cutting edge. Carbon was a rare commodity when knives began to be produced in Japan, but iron steel was readily available and relatively inexpensive. Forgers reduced the amount of carbon steel needed to produce knives by forging two steels together. The repeated heating and pounding process helps drive out impurities from the metal while merging the two materials.

The annealing, quenching, and cooling process gives the knives their edge retention, but if not forged properly the two steels will be prone to cracking and splitting. After forging, hammering, and shaping, the carbon steel becomes the blade’s edge, and the soft iron portion becomes the body and spine of the blade. Although the addition of soft iron makes kasumi knives less brittle and easier to sharpen, their kirenaga (edge retention) is shorter than honyaki knives.

Hongasumi Knives

Hongasumi knives are high-grade kasumi knives. They are forged, tempered, and finished with great care and precision. To create these blades, high carbon steel is layered with soft iron then forged and hammered in a process similar to kasumi knives but with more detailed steps involved.

Honyaki Knives

Honyaki (“true-forged” in Japanese) knives are constructed out of one solid piece of carbon steel. Honyaki forged knives have the greatest edge retention of all traditional Japanese styles. However, because of the hardness of the material, honyaki knives are difficult to sharpen and are prone to chipping, cracking, or even breaking if used improperly. The honyaki knives require a higher level skill to make, and users must be highly experienced to use and care for them.

Comparison Between Honyaki and Kasumi Knives

[Chart from Suisin Knife System Company]

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ABOUT TRADITIONAL JAPANESE KNIVES

Japanese Steels
Japanese knife forgers have always chosen their material and corresponding techniques carefully. Japanese steel can be divided into two main categories, white steel and blue steel. Within those two categories, there are different grades that users should consider when looking for a new traditional Japanese knife.

White Carbon Steel #1 (Shiroichi-ko, Shirogami #1)
White steel #1 is the purest form of carbon, making it the closest material to tamahagane steel, which was originally used to craft Japanese swords. Forging a knife out of white steel #1 is extremely difficult and very few highly skilled craftsmen are still able to forge kitchen knives with this material, making knives made out of white steel #1 exceedingly rare. Using a knife forged out of white steel #1 also requires great skill, as these knives are brittle and difficult to maintain. However, knives forged out of this material will have the sharpest edge achievable.

White Carbon Steel #2 (Shironi-ko, Shirogami #2)
White steel #2 is the most commonly used type of white steel. This steel achieves a harmonious balance between sharpness and brittleness, making it easier to use than white steel #1.

White Carbon Steel #3 (Shirosan-ko, Yasuki-ko)
White steel #3 has a slightly lower carbon content than white steel #2. The material is therefore not as hard or pure as other white steels, but if sharpened properly it can attain a similar edge. This grade of steel was developed and manufactured in Shimane prefecture in the Western region of Japan.

Blue Carbon Steel #2 (Aoni-ko, Aogami #2)
Blue steel #2 is a mixture of chromium, tungsten, and white steel #2. The addition of chromium and tungsten to white steel gives it added hardness, making it a good compromise for those who want a carbon knife with a longer edge retention.

Ginsan-ko
Ginsan-ko is a stain resistant steel that is created by adding 13% additional chromium to white steel. By using high quality white steel to produce a stain resistant blade, this makes a great alternative to carbon steel traditional Japanese knives. High carbon stain resistant steels such as Ginsan-ko, Inox, VG-10, and 8A are becoming increasingly popular among professionals for their easy maintenance.

Tamahagane
Tamahagane is a rare and precious steel that is used to forge katanas, the traditional Japanese swords. Tamahagane steel is only produced two to four times a year due to the tremendous amount of labor and material need, as well as the excess of unusable by-products. Thirteen tons of iron sand and thirteen tons of coal must be smelted, and then constantly hammered for three days and three nights to produce a mere 2.8 tons of raw steel. Once the steel bloom is produced, less than one ton of the steel bloom is considered high enough quality to be tamahagane steel. This one ton of tamahagane steel is controlled by the Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, which is sponsored and established by the Japanese government. The tamahagane steel is sold exclusively to katana craftsmen a few times a year. However, even within the one ton of tamahagane steel only 200 kg is considered high quality A1 steel, and katana craftsmen are limited to 10 kg of this A1 steel per year.

Dentoukougeishi Craftsmen
Dentoukougeishi are traditional craftsmen acknowledged by Japanese local governments. These craftsmen are recognized for their commitment to protecting traditional Japanese art and crafting techniques. Dentoukougeishi are required to be highly skilled in their chosen craft and have generations of historical family background.
Styles and Uses of Traditional Japanese Knives

Yanagi

The yanagi is used to slice boneless fish fillets into sashimi and toppings for sushi. The graceful, long and thin blade is designed to cut slices in one drawing stroke, which applies minimal pressure on the flesh of the fish to avoid stress and cell destruction. Different cutting techniques are used with the yanagi to enhance the aesthetics and the flavors of the fish. There are several variations of fish slicers that are all used in different situations and regions, however the yanagi style is the most widely used. The kensaki yanagi, sakimaru takobiki and maguro yanagi serve similar functions, but are more elegant styles. If space allows, longer blades will produce better results. Korin recommends the 30cm length for this style, because it has the most optimal weight and length for slicing through the fish without damaging the flesh. Originated in Kansai (Osaka) region.

Takobiki

The takobiki was originally designed and crafted by the founder of Masamoto Sohonten, Minosuke Matsuzawa. It serves as the Kanto region (Tokyo) variation of the yanagi knife, and is used to slice boneless fish fillets into sashimi. There are rumors that centuries ago when chefs prepared sashimi in front of their guests, it was considered disrespectful to point the sword-like yanagi at their customers, especially nobility. For this reason older restaurants in Tokyo continue to use the takobiki instead of yanagi knives to this day. Its thin body makes cutting thin slices of fish easier than the yanagi. Takobiki means ‘octopus cutter,’ as to how the blunt tip and balanced weight works well on difficult ingredients such as octopus. Originated in Kanto (Tokyo) region.

Fugubiki

The fugubiki is a traditional Japanese style blowfish slicer. ‘Fugu’ or blowfish is traditionally served on a painted plate, and cut so thin so that the design on the plate can be seen through the sliced pieces. A common misconception about the fugubiki is that the knife slices through fish better than the yanagi because of the extremely thin construction. However, the fugubiki is a specialized knife for preparing blowfish and is not recommended to be used interchangeably with the yanagi.

Usuba

The usuba is a traditional Japanese style knife designed specifically to cut vegetables. Japanese cuisine stresses the importance and beauty of seasonal ingredients, referred to as ‘shun.’ The literal translation of usuba is ‘thin blade.’ Without this incredibly sharp and thin blade, the knife would break down the cell walls of vegetables, causing ingredients to discolor and decrease in flavor. Originated in Kanto (Tokyo) region.

Kamagata Usuba

The kamagata usuba is a traditional Japanese knife designed to work with vegetables. Unlike the Kanto version of the usuba, the kamagata usuba has a pointed tip, which allows for more delicate work and decorative carving. Originated in Kansai (Osaka) region.
The deba is used in Japanese fish markets and restaurants to butcher and fillet whole fish without damaging the flesh. Although many use this knife on meat as well, the deba is not intended for chopping large diameter bones nor should it be used by slamming down the knife like a cleaver. For the best results, please apply pressure on the spine of the knife to make clean and precise cuts. Originated in Kansai (Osaka) region.

The mioroshi deba is a specialized knife that can be used both as a deba and as a yanagi knife. This style of knife is much thinner and more brittle than the standard deba, and therefore requires more experience and skill to fully utilize.

The funayuki is a multi-purpose traditional Japanese knife. The name funayuki, 'going on a boat', comes from a tradition of fishermen, who used these knives to clean and prepare fish on the boat. The blade is extremely thin in order to slice fish and vegetables and requires great skill to successfully utilize without chipping. Traditionally only executive chefs are deemed skilled enough to handle these incredibly sharp but brittle knives.

The kiritsuke is one of the few multi-purpose traditional Japanese knives, and it may be used as a yanagi or usuba knife. This style of knife is traditionally only used by the executive chef in the Japanese kitchen.

Menkiri means 'noodle cutter' in Japanese. The features of the menkiri make it essential when working with noodles. In order to get perfect even thin strips, the knife must be extremely sharp, the blade must extend to the end of the handle to cover the width of the dough, and the blade must sit completely flat against the cutting board. If there is any space between the blade and the cutting board, it will not cut the dough completely and will thus ruin the structure of the noodle.

Sushikiri means sushi slicer in Japanese. The long symmetrically curved blade is designed to slice sushi rolls and battera sushi in one rolling slice without crushing them. These knives are popularly used in the Kansai (Osaka) regions.

Maguro knives are highly specialized knives used to cut and fillet large whole tuna fish. These knives have an extremely long blade and handle. These lengthy knives are ingeniously designed and crafted with a softer carbon steel blade than other knives, making it easier to repair minor chipping damage sustained to the blade during the strenuous job of filleting large fish. The maguro knife is commonly found in Japanese fish markets such as Tsukiji Market, where they hold tuna auctions every morning.
Crafting Traditional Japanese Knives

A single yanagi knife requires at least four skilled craftsmen and takes two weeks to craft. Even the top knife craftsmen can only produce ten to twelve pieces per day. The knife making process is divided into four stages: forging, edge crafting, handle making and assembling. A craftsman conducts the blade through many different steps then passes it to the next craftsman. The number of steps involved varies from knife to knife according to the shape, type of material, and procedure required. A top-grade knife undergoes upwards of fifty different steps.

The following images highlight some of the basic procedures of crafting traditional kasumi style knives.

Forging

1. Soft iron steel is hand hammered.
2. A high carbon steel core is attached to the soft iron steel.
3. A belt hammer shapes the red hot blade as the craftsman removes the ash with a rice straw brush.
4. A mechanical cutter trims the blade.
5. Tempering: The blade is covered with clay to protect it from rapid changes in temperature.
6. Quenching: The blade is quickly cooled in a water bath to ensure hardness.

For Honyaki knives: The spine of the blade is coated with clay, reheated, slowly cooled, and then aged. This process increases flexibility, hardens the steel, and creates a beautiful hamon pattern on the blade.
Edge Crafting

1. The craftsman uses a rough wheel to sharpen the knife.
2. Smoothes out the face of the blade.
3. Craftsman buffs the knife on a fabric covered wheel.
4. Sharpens on a water stone wheel.
5. Uses a wooden wheel to create the kasumi or 'haze' finish.
6. Finally he achieves a hand sharpened finish using natural whetstones.

Handle Making

1. Handle is hand turned on a lathe.
2. Handle is fitted to a bolster collar.
3. Magnolia wood handle with water buffalo horn collar prepared for assembly.

Assembling

1. Tang (nakago) is heated and inserted into the handle.
2. Blade is driven firmly into the handle with a mallet.
3. Company brand and insignia are engraved on the blade.
From the third through the seventh century, it was customary to bury royalty in tombs covered by large, keyhole-shaped monuments. These tombs are called kofun and are constructed of earth and stone. Around 450 A.D. the kofun of Emperor Nintoku was constructed in Sakai City. The tombs ranked in scale along the Great Pyramid of Egypt, and covered 46 hectares of land. The building project was so immense that blacksmiths from all over Japan had to be gathered to Sakai city to forge tools. They produced massive amounts of farm tools such as hoes and spades needed for the mound construction. By the time the burials were built, most of Japan’s metal craftsmen had settled in Sakai for good.

Sakai city gradually became the center of metal crafting in Japan. When tobacco was introduced in the sixteenth century from Portugal, Japan’s metal craftsmen turned to producing tools for cutting tobacco leaves. As popularity of tobacco spread throughout Japan, the demand for tools and knives to cut tobacco leaves grew. Sakai city’s prestige was solidified in 1570 when the Tokugawa shogunate recognized the superiority of Sakai tools, certifying the blacksmiths in Sakai city as the exclusive tobacco knife makers in Japan.

The popularity of tobacco made the craftsmen of Sakai city famous throughout the country. It was only natural that when these craftsmen applied their skills to cooking knives they would feature the same sharp blade and refined balance of the tobacco knives. Sakai blacksmiths have passed on these highly acclaimed forging techniques from generation to generation, and Sakai city has become known for producing the finest knives in Japan. In 1982 Sakai’s Cutlery was recognized by the Minister of International Trade and Industry. They appointed Sakai’s tools as a “Traditional Craft Product”, further cementing the reputation of Sakai knives. To this day, though their numbers are dwindling, Sakai city is home to the finest traditional Japanese knife craftsmen in Japan.

Sakai’s Knife Craftsmen Today

Interviewee: Yoshikazu Ikeda, Chairman of Dentoukougeishi
Interviewer: Tatsuya Aoki, Knife System

Yoshikazu Ikeda began pursuing his family business of knife forging when he was only 22 years old. In 1988 he was selected to be one of Sakai City’s blade-making dentoukougeishi, and in 2001 was chosen to be the first member of Sakai City’s Master Craftsman Organization. Over the past forty years, he has polished his forging techniques for both Japanese swords and kitchen knives. Today Master Ikeda forges knives for top Japanese knife companies and is the chairman of the association of dentoukougeishi, traditional craftsmen acknowledged by the Japanese local government.

What is the difference between Honyaki and Kasumi?

These knives are made out of the same carbon steel. The term ‘kasumi’ refers to how the knife is sharpened, featuring the hazy appearance of the soft iron of the blade in contrast to the glossy carbon steel cutting edge. The proper name for this style of knife is awase-mono or urauchi-mono, which refers to the process of hammering the two materials together.

It is said that honyaki knives are sharper than kasumi knives because they are forged at a lower temperature. Honyaki knives are forged at 900°C to 1000°C, while kasumi knives are forged at temperatures over 1000°C. Extremely high temperatures are used in order to meld the soft iron and carbon steel in kasumi knives, and as a result, honyaki knives have a smoother surface and ultimately are of higher quality. Even if a honyaki knife is crafted out of cheaper material (such as white steel #3), it will still be sharper than a kasumi knife.

Many chefs think that honyaki knives are more stain resistant than kasumi knives, what do you think?

Knives with high carbon content rust easily and the soft iron steel in kasumi knives prevent rusting. Because honyaki knives are crafted entirely out of carbon steel, honyaki knives cannot be more stain and rust resistant than kasumi knives. Maybe the chefs that purchase these expensive honyaki knives take better care of them than the more affordable kasumi knives. Perhaps the mirror finish also makes chefs feel as if they are more rust resistant.
**Are honyaki or kasumi knives more difficult to forge?**

Typically honyaki knives are more expensive and more difficult to craft. The forging and quenching process is critical to crafting honyaki knives. This is the most important and hardest procedure. Unless you are crafting a mizu honyaki knife out of blue steel, honyaki knives are easier to forge but it is far more difficult to craft the blade and sharpen. When you learn how to craft basic honyaki and kasumi knives, you realize that more skill is involved in making kasumi knives. For kasumi knives you must combine the two materials then stretch the steel, which is extremely difficult. It is not something you can understand by just listening to an explanation. There are many forgers that specialize in crafting kasumi style knives for this reason.

**What steel do you think is the best for traditional Japanese knives?**

There are benefits and weaknesses to both white and blue steels. I believe that making a knife suited for different users is a chance for the crafters to display their skills, and that it is Korin’s and the knife maker’s responsibility to point users towards the right knife for them. It really depends on the knife and user’s skills. For example, it is easier to use and maintain a knife with a lower carbon content. Many chefs believe that blue steel slices through delicate ingredients such as fish better, but white steel #2 and #3 are the easier to sharpen and will get sharper. Many people are also not aware that in the end, steel does not guarantee quality. There are many steps and craftsmen involved into crafting each knife. Crafting a knife is a group effort. If the blacksmith forging the steel does not have the skills to take full advantage of the quality of material being used, then the quality of material does not matter. Even if a knife is forged perfectly, the knife can still be ruined if the blade maker cannot sharpen well.

**What do you think about knives that contain a higher carbon content?**

It does not make sense to choose your tools by how much carbon is in a knife or how high quality of a material is being used. You should choose a knife based on what you enjoy using and what you can easily sharpen to do your work most efficiently and effectively.

**Do you think harder knives are better?**

Many people who make knives think the hardness of the steel is everything, and proudly exaggerate that their knives can cut through wire and chop down trees. I think it is strange that some people pursue the highest HRc knives. What good is a tool if you can’t sharpen it to its fullest potential? Hard steel material was originally not used in Japan, as it was not even considered suitable for crafting Japanese swords. The best knives are the ones that are easy to sharpen.

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**Message from Korin’s Knife Master, Chiharu Sugai:**

The information in this interview includes details about knives that knife companies do not want to reveal. Every now and then I will hear about knives that have a high HRc but are still easy to sharpen. This defies logic, but makes these special knives a tribute to the wonders of Japan’s traditional sword crafting techniques. My goal for Korin is not merely to offer luxury, but to offer our customers with the highest performing knives made by trustworthy and highly skilled craftsmen.
Parts of Traditional Japanese Knives

Diagram shows the front of a right-handed knife.

Knife Measurement
The size information in this catalog is based on actual blade length as shown below.

 Yanagi, Takobiki, Usuba and Kamagata Usuba knives are measured from the machi to the tip of the blade.

 Deba and Western style knives are measured from the blade end ago to the pointed tip of a knife.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ao-ko - ‘Blue Steel.’ High quality Japanese carbon steel created by adding chromium and tungsten to shiro-ko for increased edge retention.

Awase-bocho - ‘Joined knife.’ Refers to knives that are crafted by forging two different types of steels together, such as kasumi and hongasumi style knives.

Damascus - Layered, hammered steel used to create symmetrical 50:50 double bevel knives.

Ginsan-ko - New type of blade steel in which a stain resistant steel core is encased in a soft iron with 13% additional chromium.

Hagane - Carbon steel used in traditional Japanese knife forging to make the blade edge.

Hamaguriba - ‘Shell-shaped blade.’ Shell shape formed on traditional Japanese knives when the shinogi and edge are both sharpened.

Hamon - Pattern on the blades of traditional Japanese knives that is created when the spine of the blade is coated with clay, then reheated and slowly tempered.

Hasaki - Blade edge.

Honbazuke - ‘Putting the true edge.’ For traditional Japanese knives, this means they are hand-sharpened on water stones by an elite sharpener. For Western knives, this refers to knives with blades that are individually hand finished during the final factory production stage.

Hongasumi - Hongasumi knives are high-grade kasumi knives. They are forged, tempered, and finished with great care and precision. To create these blades, high-carbon steel is layered with soft iron then forged and hammered in a process similar to kasumi knives but with more detailed steps involved.

Ho-no-ki - ‘Ho wood.’ Japanese Magnolia, which is widely used in making Japanese knife handles and saya covers.

Honyaki - ‘True forged.’ Hand-forged from one single material then hammered and tempered into traditional Japanese styles. These knives are difficult to forge and difficult to use, however when used properly can achieve the sharpest edge.

Jigane - Soft iron that is used in traditional Japanese knife forging. Jigane is mostly used for kasumi and hongasumi knives.

Kaeri - ‘Burr.’ The rough metal edge that forms while using rough or medium stones during the sharpening process. The burr must be removed using a fine grit stone for a polished edge.

Kakumaki - Collar of traditional Japanese knives.

Kasumi - Japanese hand forging method where a piece of soft iron is joined with a block of carbon steel, then heated and hammered into a traditional Japanese knife with a carbon steel blade edge.

Katana - Japanese sword.

Kireha - Cutting edge or blade road.

Kirenaga - Edge retention.

Kissaki - Tip of knife edge, including point.

Machi - Small exposed portion of the tang near the collar of traditional Japanese knives.

Mizu-honyaki - ‘Water tempering’ method used in Japanese sword and knife making.

Saya - Japanese style knife sheath or cover, commonly made of unfinished Japanese Magnolia wood for its many beneficial properties in protecting the blade.

Shinogi - Border of edge that separates the flat body of the blade and cutting edge.


Tamahagane - High grade form of steel produced in western Japan in a tatara or high heat smelter, that is used in Japanese sword crafting. Tamahagane steel is only produced a few times a year.

Uraoshi - The initial sharpening process to strengthen and align the blade.

Urasuki - The concave surface on the back of traditional Japanese knives.

Wa-bocho - Traditional Japanese knife.

Yaki-ire - Quench hardening process in forging knives.

Yo-bocho - Western style knife.