



EPISODE #2 - JAPANESE KNIVES 101

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ABOUT THIS EPISODE: In this episode, Jon Broida, owner of Japanese Knife Imports in Beverly Hills, California, joins Nickie for a *Japanese Knives 101 deep dive* conversation that goes beyond a simple shopper's checklist with surprising insights into the real *insider* questions you should be asking before investing in a Japanese knife, what distinguishes them and the rich history of this world-renown craftsmanship. Jon's deep wealth of knowledge, training in Japan and cooking experience at highly regarded and some Michelin-starred restaurants in Los Angeles, Italy and Japan make him a cut above the rest! Please enjoy.

SHOW NOTES, RESOURCES & LINKS

TOPICS & TERMS DISCUSSED

- Jon's journey from Asian studies to cooking and eventually Japanese Knife Imports. [00:04:22]
- On creating *community* at the shop. [00:07:43]
- What makes Japanese knives unique. [00:11:48]

MAJOR KNIFE-MAKING REGIONS OF JAPAN & RELATED TERMS [00:13:27]



Photo Credit: KnivesFromJapan.co.uk

REGION: SEKI (SEKI, GIFU) [00:13:38]

Seki has a history in sword making but in a much more commercial sense. So, what they are able to do in Seki is produce in larger quantities and a little bit more effectively. In Seki they have a separation of work, where there's high specialization in certain areas. [00:13:45]

Affordable knives because of economies of scale.

Shun, Miyabi, and MAC brands are popular from this region.

REGION: SAKAI (Sakai, Osaka) [00:15:22]

- In Sakai things are produced predominantly by hand in painstaking labor-intensive processes. [00:15:36]
- **Bungyo system** is the separation and specialization of craftsmen (mostly in Sakai, but also kind of in Seki). This means that blacksmiths forge, but don't sharpen. Sharpeners sharpen, but don't forge, etc. [00:15:45]
- **Hatsuke** is the technical name for the sharpeners/grinders/polishers. For example, you can say something like hide-san was the *hatsuke* we used. He runs a *hatsuke-ya* (sharpening shop). Sharpening in this case is more about making knives than just sharpening and polishing. [00:16:06]
- **Tonya system** are the wholesalers, who, in Sakai, arrange which blacksmith, sharpener, handle maker, etc. to use when creating knives. They also wholesale and retail their knives, and are often responsible for the creation of the brands we know. [00:16:33]
- **Ashi Hamono** is the company who makes the store's *Gesshin Ginga* series. They are unique in that they do the entire making process in house, despite being in Sakai. [00:17:20]
- **Ginga Series (Gesshin Ginga series)** are the knives made by Ashi Hamono. [00:17:22]
- **Kataba knives or Kataba Bocho** are single bevel knives. [00:17:36]
- **Kaiseki** is the term for Japanese multi-course fine dining. [00:17:52]
- **Deba** is a single-bevel, fish butchery knife. [00:18:22]
- **Gyuto** is the Japanese equivalent of a chef's knife (*wa-gyuto* has a Japanese style handle... *yo-gyuto* has a western handle). [00:18:57]

REGION: SANJO (TSUBAME/SANJO, NIIGATA) [00:19:23]

- In **Sanjo**, they do a lot more handmade goods. And unlike Sakai, where there's a separation of a blacksmith and a sharpener, people do everything all in-house in one place in Sanjo. [00:19:42]
- **Tojiro** is a brand of knives that is well known as a great workhorse series. [00:20:26]
- **Tojiro DP** is the series of knives from the **Tojiro brand** that **Jon thinks make great first Japanese** knives (not something Japanese Knife Imports sells though). [00:20:44]

REGION: ECHIZEN/TAKEFU (TAKEFU, NIIGATA) [00:22:43]

- **Echizen region** fits kind of smack dab in the middle where they're producing things in higher quantities and they automate certain parts of the process. [00:22:56]
- **Rikizai** means relaminated steel. [00:23:04]

REGION: TOSA-YAMADA (TOSA, KOCHI) [00:23:28]

- **Tosa-Yamado** is an old knife-making region where they produced swords previously but have a predominant history in forestry tools, axes, hatchets, and outdoor knives. They produce things that are easy to use and relatively affordable. [00:23:44]
- **Kochi** is the name of the prefecture (State) and the main city in the area. The Tosa-Yamada area is in Kochi prefecture, just outside of Kochi city.
- *“My love of that region is all about food, by the way, because they have the most delicious stuff down there.”* [00:24:09]
- **What Jon Loves to Eat in this region** – *“There are many things I love down there to eat, but I’d probably say Katsuo no Shio Tataki (seared bonito). Its fucking great. They also have utsubo no tataki (seared moray eel).”*

OTHER TOPICS + QUOTABLE QUOTES

ON WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU’RE READY TO BUY YOUR JAPANESE KNIFE [00:24:24]

- **Shopping tips** and **top questions** to ask before you buy your knife. [00:24:41]
- **Gyuto knife** is the Japanese version of a chef’s knife. [00:29:31]

STAINLESS STEEL VS. CARBON STEEL [00:29:59]

- **Stainless steel versus carbon steel** and what distinguishes each style. [00:30:07]
- **Deciding factors** when choosing between carbon steel vs. stainless steel. [00:30:50]
- Why carbon steel knives are so popular. [00:31:30]
- Importance of considering **your environment** when deciding on a knife. [00:32:50]
- **Patina** or discoloration. [00:30:59]
 - **DEFINITION: Patina** “is a thin layer that forms on the surface of a metal over time (the blade). It is a type of corrosion that can make a knife basically rust-proof in the long term and will change the appearance of the blade. A patina can form naturally or be forced onto the metal.” (credit: <https://www.theknifehub.com/patina/>)
- **Brunoise** knife cut.
 - **DEFINITION: Brunoise** “is a dice cut of 1/8th inch cubes. For brunoise cut, items are first cut in julienne, then cut crosswise. For fine brunoise, a 1/16th inch cube, cut items first I fine julienne.” (credit: The Culinary Institute of America, *The Professional Chef*, Wiley 2011).

THE \$100 - \$250 PRICE RANGE [00:35:22]

- **What to look for** in the \$100 - \$250 price range. [00:36:38]
- *Keep it simple...people in reality, they use two knives more than anything else. Big knife, small knife.... You don't need a bunch of stuff. You always add other stuff later on. But the reality is that most people will use in their kitchen a big knife and a small knife and the big knife gets used the most.* [00:36:54]

THE \$100 - \$250 PRICE RANGE

- **Gyuto or Wa Gyuto** if it has a Japanese style handle, is the most versatile shape that you can get. [00:37:25]
- **Sengiri** is a thin *julienne* knife cut and one base technique for cutting in Japan. [00:38:57]
- On choosing a **big knife** [00:37:58]
- On choosing a **small knife** [00:41:31]
- On the importance of **lightness and balance** [00:43:23]
- **Cross-sectional geometry** of a knife, or how it tapers towards the tip and its impact on sharpness. [00:45:20]
- **Mortise and Tenon construction** relates to how Japanese handles are made. The wood piece runs the entire length of the handle, but near the top, the wood becomes narrow and there is a ring of water buffalo horn around it. See here for more on mortise and tenon: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mortise_and_tenon [00:48:03]

ON SHARPENING KNIVES, CUTTING BOARDS AND DAMAGES TO KNIVES [00:50:20]

- “As you get into more sophisticated, higher end knives, sharpening gets more and more important!” [00:50:16]
- **Cutting boards** and Jon’s top 4 choices
 - **Hi-Soft** boards [00:50:34]
DEFINITION: Hi-Soft Board are polyvinyl acetate cutting boards that are wonderful and extremely soft, but temperature sensitive.
 - **End-grain** boards [00:51:11]
 - **Rubber gum** boards [00:52:08]
 - **Cross-grain** boards [00:52:30]
- **Sharpening stones** – the essentials of whetstones (or *waterstones*) for sharpening knives. [00:52:41]
- **Top 5 things** in a sharpening set up. [00:53:15]
 - **Coarse** stone [00:53:16]
 - **Medium** stone [00:53:42]
 - **Finishing** stone [00:54:15]
 - **Stone holder** [00:56:01]
 - **Stone flattener** [00:54:59]
 - **Diamond flattening** plates [00:55:45]
DEFINITION: Diamond flattening plates are used to flatten sharpening stones, as flat stones are easier to maintain a consistent angle on when sharpening. Check out this video link from Japanese Knife Imports website - <https://www.japaneseknifeimports.com/collections/sharpening-accessories/products/diamond-flattening-plate>
- **Knife sharpening “how to” videos** [00:58:19]
- **3 Things that damage Japanes knives the most** [00:59:52]
- **Stages of damage** – elastic deformation, plastic deformation, permanent damage. [1:00:26]
- **Yanagiba** - is a type of single bevel knife used to slice boneless protein, most often raw fish, for things like sushi and sashimi. They are also used for skinning fish among other similar tasks. They are thin and long. The name translates to *willow leaf blade*, as the shape resembles a willow leaf. [1:01:16]

WHAT JON IS DRINKING [1:03:22]

- Moroccan mint tea from Urth caffe. About 10-15g of tea leaves per liter of water and 4-6 hours of time in the fridge.

WHAT'S MAKING JON HAPPY IN THE CULINARY WORLD [1:03:56]

- *"I think the thing that's most interesting to me that I'm most excited to see as we move forward are these ways that the culinary world is starting to bridge this pay gap between front and back and the ways that people are managing that."* [1:04:14]

JON'S FAVORITE GIFT TO GIVE A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE [1:07:00]

- **PART I:** *"my move now...is that I show up with like ice cream, not like a bucket of ice cream, but, you know, like ice cream truck ice cream, like the multicolored lollipops and like ice cream sandwiches and shit. Like who hates that? No one hates that..."* [1:07:22]
- **PART II:** *"...In terms of my friends, I'm more about experiences than I am about things. I would rather take someone out for a dinner or take them to a bar or do something with them than to buy them something...I love introducing people to new restaurants that are opening and the chefs and especially the cooks so that they understand more about this world that I love so much."* [1:09:45]

RESOURCES + LINKS

- **JKI Website:** <https://www.japaneseknifeimports.com/>
- **JKI Instagram:** www.instagram/jknifeimports
- **JKI Facebook:** www.facebook.com/JapaneseKnifeImports/
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- **JKI Knife skills development videos**
- **Now Serving Book Store**
 - <https://www.instagram.com/nowservingla/>
 - Far East Plaza, 727 N. Broadway, Unit 133, Los Angeles, CA 90012
- **Chef Alex Atala**
- **El Bulli Cookbook**
- **Somni Restaurant** at The Bazaar by Chef José Andrés, SLS Hotel, Beverly Hills
- **Prefectures** of Japan are governmental administrative units similar to mini-states and form the first level of jurisdiction and administrative division.
- **Grand Chef Takayuki 180mm knife** (Nickie's Japanese chef's knife)

END