



6 Fast Facts

THE JOURNEY OF MAD BULL BLADES

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON – PHOTOS BY JACOB TUINSTRA



Jacob Tuinstra's career path was carved in the Wisconsin woods as a youngster. Today, he runs Mad Bull blades. Enter his world.

1 The Path

My interest with knives started with my interest in metal work and using knives in the field. We lived in rural Wisconsin, and I spent a huge amount of my time hunting, fishing and being in the field. I am hard on things and have a tendency to push things to their limit so I broke a lot of stuff. Making things that I couldn't break started my interest in hard-use knives.

No one really made knives I was interested in, or could afford, so I started working with what was around. I learned a lot, studied a lot and was able to start making knives and other equipment that would work the way I wanted them to. Along the way, I built skills that allowed me to become better and better at my craft.

Another area that taught me a lot about

knife design and use is my many years of experience as a meat cutter and butcher. When you use knives to slaughter livestock and cut meat all day, you get a very firm understanding of what a knife that is meant to be used all day needs to be like. Just because a knife feels great at a show table doesn't mean that it will feel that way after skinning and quartering an elk.

2 Inspiration

My inspirations are Don Hanson and Todd Begg.

Hanson's tremendous hamons and eye-catching designs are a constant inspiration. Begg makes great hard-use knives with tremendous designs and execution.

3 Steels

My favorite steels are 80 CRV-2 and W-2; 52100 and O-1 and other forgeable carbon steels are also interesting. I only work with steels that I can heat-treat myself with my equipment.

I have spent a great deal of time perfecting my heat-treating processes, and they are critical to the performance of my knives. I can't trust that to anyone else. Doing my own stabilizing has given me much more latitude as far as handle materials and performance.

4 Design

I design most of my knives at the forge or grinder. I seldom draw a design; it usually just happens in the shop. Once I have a design that people want repeated, I will work as hard as I can to make the blades as similar as possible, but they are made one at a time on the forge and grinder—each blade has its own uniqueness.


5 Challenges

The hardest part is being consistently effective in marketing and keeping my knives out in front of customers, while still being able to spend time in the shop.

My customers are important, and I really enjoy connecting with them. At the same time, the work is done at the forge and grinder. Finding time-effective ways to market while still spending the quality time making knives and constantly trying to improve my craft is a constant balancing act.

6 Top Knives

Big knives, such as Bowies and large daggers, are my favorite to make. I started out making some big knives, but there wasn't a large local market for them so I started making hunters, fillet knives, etc.

When I realized that there was a large market in other areas of the country, I started making the big knives. I like what I make, and it seems my customers do, too. 

Look him up on Facebook ... Jacob A. Tuinstra.