

FINDING ZEN

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE EDITOR
AT **SHOT SHOW**, THE BIGGEST SHOW
OF THE YEAR, AND TOP 10 PRODUCTS

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON
PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SWANAGON AND COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

Böker Kwaiken Auto

As soon as I saw this knife I knew it would be the lead spread for this article. The beautiful Japanese influence in the design was striking, to say the least. Its simple elegance was not lost on me, and with the first push of the button, triggering the opening mechanism, I was sold.

PHOTO: JOSHUA SWANAGON



+ SPECS

Böker Kwaiken Auto
Blade Material: 154-CM
Blade Length: 3.50 inches
Overall Length: 8.375 inches
Handle Material: Aluminum
Handle Length: 4.875 inches
Weight: 3.35 ounces
Knife Type: Automatic
MSRP: \$229
BokerUSA.com

At times it may seem impossible, but you can find peace at SHOT Show, you just have to know where to look. Fortunately for me, I brought a couple of ringers, my son joined me and my brother flew in from Colorado to meet us.

Although my brother wound up being sick the entire time, he pushed through. We even got to enjoy a little bit of Vegas after the close of SHOT Show each day, taking in a couple of shows, walking the strip and checking out the sights. Although I am not much of a crowd person and prefer my small-town life to city life, there are a lot of things to see in Vegas, from shows to shopping—in places I could never afford, I might add. It really isn't difficult to find something to do in Vegas.

Along with family it is also great to visit with many friends that I only get to see a couple of times a year. It is always a boost for the psyche. Even though there is a bit of time that passes between shows, for many of the friends I see there, it is like we just saw each other yesterday.

Having family and friends there with me and enjoying some R&R after each day of the show was a huge boost for morale. Running from meeting to meeting all day can be an exhausting venture, so it is important to find some mental release during the show. For me it was looking at great knives. During each meeting I was presented with myriad blades, so many that I am still trying to mentally process them all.

As I took hold of each knife, I was drawn in to the intricate design and craftsmanship of each one. It was at these times that I was able to relax for a short while and let my mind get lost in the beauty and details, while pondering the use of each knife. I am a lover of art in all forms, and there really is an art to crafting a knife that tickles the imagination of the person holding it. It was at those times that the show quieted,

and I was able to focus on one thing while the hustle and bustle of more than 60,000 attendees swirled the show floor around me.

Although the show can be exhausting and a little overwhelming, it is those times that remind me that I really love what I do.

Getting to the Good Stuff

Even though the show is only four days long, by the end it feels like an eternity.

With more than 645,000 square feet of show space, to say that SHOT Show can be a little overwhelming is a bit of an understatement. With 1,660 exhibitors—2,100 if you include the new two-day Suppliers Showcase upstairs—it is virtually impossible to see everything. So, how does one go about traversing this staggering array of people and gear to see the things that need to be seen? Planning.

Over the course of the show, each day held an almost dizzying number of meetings for me. I found myself running from one meeting to the next, with little time in between to stop and look at all of the cool stuff that presented as barely a blur as I flew past. I do have to admit that there were moments here and there when I could catch my breath and look at some of the amazing new products slated for release this year, and there were some very cool products indeed.

Hot Ten

The part of my job that remains one of the most difficult at these shows is coming up with a small selection of knives that I feel deserve mention. There were so many great knives that it was almost impossible to whittle the list down to 10, so I just considered the ones that either really made me excited when I first saw them, or knives that I have not been able to get out of my head since the show, for some reason or other.

HK Hadron

With the surge in states repealing the automatic knife ban, we are starting to see an influx of everything from side-opening to out the front (OTF) models. The HK Hadron, built by Hogue Knives, is an OTF that gets it right. From the substantial snick of the mechanism bringing the blade to bear, to the solid aluminum frame and almost negligible blade play when open, the HK Hadron is a serious player in the automatic realm.

+ SPECS

HK Hadron
Blade Material: 154 CM steel
Blade Length: 3.375 inches
Overall Length: 8.0 inches
Closed Length: 4.625 inches
Thickness: 0.125 inches
Weight: 3.2 ounces
Handle Material: Aluminum
Knife Type: Automatic
MSRP: \$289.95 - \$299.95
HKKnives.com



TOPS Knives Al Mar Mini SERE Operator

From the incredible lines to the extremely comfortable ergonomics, the TOPS Knives Al Mar Mini SERE Operator is a serious field knife. Made in conjunction with Al Mar Knives, the Mini SERE Operator is modeled after the original SERE Operator by Al Mar Knives but in a smaller form, making it a perfect EDC blade.

+ SPECS

TOPS Knives Al Mar Mini SERE Operator
Blade Material: 154cm RC 58-60 cryo treated
Blade Length: 4.00 inches
Overall Length: 8.75 inches
Cutting Edge: 3.88 inches
Blade Thickness: 0.130 inches
Blade Finish: Tumble finish
Weight: 4.5 ounces
Handle Material: Black G10
MSRP: \$210
TOPSKnives.com



ESEE Medellin Folder

Modeled after its classic ESEE-3, the Medellin Folder is designed by outdoorspeople for outdoorspeople. ESEE Knives is owned and operated by the same fine folks at Randall's Adventure & Training School of Survival, so when they set out to build a field or survival knife, they are basing all decisions on extensive experience, and it shows in their Medellin Folder.

+ SPECS

ESEE Medellin Folder
Blade Material: AUS-8 steel
Blade Length: 3.5 inches
Overall Length: 8.38 inches
Closed Length: 4.8 inches
Weight: 4.1 ounces
Handle Material: Stainless steel and Zytel
Lock Type: Framelock
MSRP: \$84
ESEEKnives.com



Spyderco Native 5 Salt

Having spent some time in the Amazon jungle, you learn quickly what different climates can do to a knife, not to mention salt water. Utilizing LC200N steel, Spyderco has developed the Native 5 Salt, which is completely impervious to corrosion. It is truly a happy day for divers, rafters and anybody who lives in a rainforest or similar climate.

+ SPECS

Spyderco Native 5 Salt
Blade Material: LC200N rustproof steel
Blade Length: 2.95 inches
Overall Length: 6.95 inches
Closed Length: 4 inches
Weight: 2.5 ounces
Handle Material: Injection-molded, fiberglass-reinforced nylon (FRN)
MSRP: \$179.95
Spyderco.com



“AS I TOOK HOLD OF EACH KNIFE, I WAS DRAWN IN TO THE INTRICATE DESIGN AND CRAFTSMANSHIP.”

Ruger Knives LCK

Developed by CRKT, the Ruger line of knives had a lot of great standouts this year, and it was very difficult to decide which I liked best. However, the sleek lines and slim profile of the LCK just kept drawing me to it. I found it extremely comfortable in the hand and a perfect fit in the pocket. With its high pocket clip for deep carry, it almost disappears. Perfect for EDC at home or the boardroom.

+ SPECS

Ruger Knives LCK
Blade Material: 8Cr13MoV
Blade Length: 3.325 inches
Overall Length: 7.50 inches
Weight: 2.61 ounces
Handle Material: Glass-reinforced nylon
Handle Length: 4.125 inches
Closed Length: 4.183 inches
MSRP: \$39.99
Ruger.com



"I AM A LOVER OF ART IN ALL FORMS, AND THERE REALLY IS AN ART TO CRAFTING A KNIFE THAT TICKLES THE IMAGINATION OF THE PERSON HOLDING IT."

Hardcore Hardware MFK03-G Medium Field Knife

I like a knife that feels substantial, and the MFK03-G Medium Field Knife from Hardcore Hardware is one of those knives. When I first picked it up, I felt as though I could breach a steel door with it, and then do a little fine whittling out of the splinters that remained from the door frame. This knife is a beast to be reckoned with.

+ SPECS

Hardcore Hardware MFK03-G Medium Field Knife
Blade Material: D2
Blade Length: 4.4 inches
Overall Length: 9.3 inches
Blade Width: 1.24 inches
Thickness: 0.23 inches
Weight: 14.28 ounces
Handle Material: G10
MSRP: TBD
HardcoreHardware.com.au



knivesillustrated.com

Wicked Edge GO

If you are going to own and use knives, it is inevitable that you will need to sharpen them. The Wicked Edge GO puts the power of the Wicked Edge sharpening system into a portable roll pouch that's perfect for your pack or vehicle, if you like to keep your knives sharp in the field.

+ SPECS

Wicked Edge GO
Angle Control: Ball joint/L-bracket
Angle Range: 15-30 degrees
Angle Setting: Manual independent angle adjustment on both sides of the sharpener
Main Angle Adjustment: 1-degree increments
Clamping System: Parallel-face jaws with stainless steel inserts, manually operated with an Allen wrench
Blade Depth Regulation: Standard Wicked Edge Depth Key with two settings for height adjustment
Guide Rod Length: 8 inches
Max Clamping Width: 3/8 inch
Max blade length: 15 inches
Base: C-clamp and tool roll included
MSRP: \$199
WickedEdgeUSA.com



Benchmade Altitude

As a hunter, I am always interested in cool hunting knives. The Benchmade Altitude is a very sleek, skeletonized skinning/caping knife that has a small carbon-fiber micro-scale on each side. The thin profile of the skeletonized blade makes it very slim and easy to fit anywhere in your pack or on your person, while the micro-scale for the thumb offers just enough control for your skinning needs.

+ SPECS

Benchmade Altitude
Blade Material: CPM-S90V super premium stainless steel (59-61HRC)
Blade Length: 3.08 inches
Overall Length: 7.38 inches
Blade Thickness: 0.090 inches
Weight: 1.67 ounces
Handle Material: Carbon fiber and G-10 micro-scales
Handle Length: 4.30 inches
Handle Thickness: 0.35 inches
MSRP: \$230
Benchmade.com



knivesillustrated.com

Emerson Battle Axe

Born from his love of the Viking axe, Ernest Emerson set out to create a modern version of this iconic weapon. After handling one for a short time it was evident that this was a very well thought out axe. From a perfect balance point to a very solid heft, this axe is ready to throw or swing. You don't have to hold this axe long to understand Ernest's appreciation for this weapon.

+ SPECS

Emerson Battle Axe

Axe Material: Solid CPM-S7 Body

Overall Length: Large 12.6 inches/XL 13.8 inches

Weight: Large 32 ounces/XL 34 ounces

Finish: Combat gray Cerakote ceramic

Head Width: 5.2 inches

Head Thickness: .375 inches

Hardness: RC 57

Handle Material: Black Grip-Tite 6-10/wood

from George Washington's Mt. Vernon home

MSRP: \$469.95

EmersonKnives.com



“ALTHOUGH THE SHOW CAN BE EXHAUSTING AND A LITTLE OVERWHELMING, IT IS THOSE TIMES THAT REMIND ME THAT I REALLY LOVE WHAT I DO.”

Settling Yourself

It's not easy finding a peaceful stride when your entire week is filled with frantically running from one place to the next, often at completely different ends of the show from each other, but it can be done. If you can find something to focus on from time to time (I recommend all of the great knives), you might discover that you can settle yourself and find your Zen at SHOT Show. **KI**

THE 2018 SHOT SHOW BY THE NUMBERS

40 The number of years that SHOT Show has been taking place. Happy anniversary, SHOT Show.

1,660 The number of exhibitors at SHOT Show. But with the addition of the two-day Suppliers Showcase upstairs, that number climbs to 2,100.

60,000+ The number of attendees and industry professionals that attended the show this year.

645,000 The number of square feet of SHOT Show. It's a lot to walk.

15 The number of miles SHOT Show would fill if it were stretched out into a straight line.