



1 Matt Moran, ambassador for Global Knives. 2 Frank Shek's knives. 3 The Cut Bar & Grill.

The power of three: Japanese knives

Deba: The knife is mostly stainless steel so harder to sharpen, it is used for cutting through strong fish, beheading fish and breaking through bones.

Yanagiba: A long and very thin knife used to prepare sashimi, sushi, sliced raw fish and seafood. The steel is softer making it easier to sharpen.

Santoku: The multipurpose knife used for cutting vegetables. The blade is only sharpened on one side and is very thin and broad. The word refers to the three cutting tasks which the knife performs well: slicing, dicing, and mincing. The original Japanese Santoku is considered a well-balanced knife.

traditional samurai swords for art, the majority of swordsmiths refocused their skills to cutlery production.

Although a knife may be of high quality, it all comes down to the sharpening of it, which ideally would be done every day on a number of different stones.

"Japanese chefs don't use steel to sharpen, it's a bit of a no-no," he says.

"I can do it now in about half an hour but it used to take me two hours to sharpen one knife, even then it wasn't really done properly."

Craig says that if a mistake is made during the sharpening process, it can ruin the knife completely.

"Once you start using Japanese knives, you have to know how to sharpen them and dedicate yourself to the sharpening

techniques," he says.

Craig suggests watching YouTube videos and tutorials for a base understanding of the process and then attending a knife sharpening masterclass.

"See it done once, maybe have someone guide you and then it's just practice," he says. "I have been practicing the Japanese way for about seven to eight years and I'm

Cutting edge

A simple tool used to cut food and enhance flavour is as part of a chef as their own hand; but knives also have a story of their own, writes Anastasia Prikhodko.

There is a strong aesthetic tradition in Japan that links the appearance of food to good flavour.

So if the knife crushes through the flesh, rather than slicing through smoothly, it ultimately ruins the ingredient and flavour.

"There are little flavour and aroma molecules in food, with aroma making up 80 per cent of the taste," says Kerby Craig, head chef at Ume restaurant in Sydney's Surry Hills. "So when you chew and break them with your teeth, they are going to go into your sinuses and the food will taste better."

Opening Ume on "a hope and a prayer", Craig says the Japanese restaurant has managed to keep going, win some awards and not go bankrupt.

Craig has been cooking Japanese cuisine for six years and says that the food is all about intuition and is usually a reflection of the chef's experience with their family, grandmother or region.

"I remember when I was trying to make miso soup the same as they make it in Japan," he says. "I asked the executive chef at the time about how to make it and whether there was a recipe. He said 'no it's just how you feel'."

Craig is a "washoku" chef, meaning a chef of Japanese cuisine. When dealing with fish, Japanese chefs use up to five different knives. "There are so many different fish, and it depends whether it has big bones, small bones, the shape of the fish and which waters it came from," he says.

Craig bought his first Japanese knife in London when he was 21 years old. He says that whilst completing his apprenticeship at Tetsuya's he came across a few Japanese knives but they were very foreign.

The design of traditional Japanese knives stems from samurai swords, with each knife containing a stamp of the family making the knife, along with the region it's from.

"All my knives come from a special region in Japan called Sakai," says Craig. "It's a knife making town and there's still about three families there whose heritage is linked to making samurai swords."

Sakai has been the capital of samurai sword manufacturing since the 14 century. After the banning of samurai classes, despite the popularity of military swords and

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1 Global knife. 2 A selection of knives & sharpening stones used by Kerby Craig. 3 Chef Kerby Craig using the Santoku knife. 4 A selection of Chinese knives used by Frank Shek.



If they had to choose one knife...

Kerby Craig: "I would choose the Santoku, because if you really wanted to you could cut fish, meat, and fillet the fish."

Joe Webb: "It would have to be my chef's knife. When used correctly, a chef's knife is an amazing tool. It has great diversity and can be used for anything, as long as you look after it and keep it sharp."

Frank Shek: "Chinese cleaver hands down. I have used it to hammer nails, open tin cans, crack coconuts, Chinese chop whole ducks, peel galangal, fillet fish, slice sashimi, julienne ginger, fine dice garlic, mini lob and ping-pong-bat flotsam and jetsam from my chopping board into the bin below."

Luke Powell: "My cook's knife."

Matt Moran: "The standard French knife, I can use that for virtually anything."

only confident now that I can sharpen any kind of knife and fix someone else's knife."

Buying a knife to a chef is like "going shopping". Craig says that some do it for pleasure and others buy a new knife before starting a new job.

A change in the design of the knife Craig doesn't agree with is the inclusion of patterns.

"In my opinion they're for housewives," he says. "They are very aesthetic. It's not the kind of thing you want in a kitchen, especially a Japanese kitchen. The knife is for functionality, you're not here to show off."

Custom made Japanese knives are also gaining popularity, with the knife made fit to the chef's height, weight and hand.

Craig says that the knife can cost from \$2000 to \$3000. "When you are paying

\$300 for dinner, as a chef it's your only tool, especially for a sushi chef, they only cook rice and cut fish. So the knife is an extension of your hand."

Joseph Webb, a head chef at the Cut Bar & Grill in Sydney's CBD, had his knives custom made by a friend.

"The three knives I use most often were hand-made for me by a friend who was a chef before moving into knife making," he says. "They were hand-crafted and tailor-made to fit my hand and the way I work."

Webb uses around four different knives per day depending on the tasks with the all-purpose chef knife made from high carbon stainless steel and detailed with ferric acid; the fish knife (Deba) made from carbon steel requires a lot of care, including washing,

drying and oiling to prevent rusting and the boning knife made from Damascus steel.

Luke Powell opened LP's Quality Meats in Chippendale after working as head chef at Tetsuya's and Mary's in Newtown.

Powell also swears by Japanese knives, with Misono being his go to.

"It really is just a personal choice, I like this brand because compared to others, I find they hold an edge well, they feel really comfortable to use, are light and really strong," says Powell.

In his kitchen the knives that get the most use are the Misono cooks knife, Misono small utility knife and the Victorinox boning knife.

"The boning knife gets a pretty decent work in my kitchen but it is a great knife, it's a work horse – it's readily available,

inexpensive and can take a lot of heavy duty work," he says.

Knives are designed out of respect for the ingredient and enhance the pleasure of cooking. Celebrity chef Matt Moran, the ambassador for Global Knives, says ultimately "a knife is a knife."

"When I was really young I used to have a lot more French and German knives, which are a little bit heavier," says Moran. "But I like the weight and the range of Global Knives. They are also easy to keep sharp, as long as you use a ceramic stone."

There are three knife collections; Classic, Ni and Sai.

"What Global has done with the new range is make them a bit heavier, which is more suited to a chef," says Moran.

In Chinese cuisine the cleaver is the most identifiable knife. Frank Shek, head chef at China Doll in Sydney says that Chinese knives haven't changed at all because they have had a proven history and track record for the last two thousand years.

"They have lots of different versions of the

chopper and some curved blades for meat butchery, but the basic blade shape is still the same, a rectangle," he says.

The meat cleaver has a large broad blade, which is ideal for heavy duty chopping and slicing. It has a distal tapered meaning it gets thinner towards the end.

"The thin edge is useful for more delicate and precise cutting whereas the heft of the heel is able to chop cleanly through bones," says Shek. "The shape enables it to be used as a spade to slide under and pick up prepped ingredients for transfer to a hot wok or storage container."

The flat part of the blade is used to smash garlic and ginger. Shek says that the height of the blade allows for greater knuckle clearance from the board than conventional western style chef knives.

A unique attribute to the knife is that there is no heel bolster as found on German style cutlery, Shek says this means that the whole blade can be drawn through a block of protein.

"Apart from the obvious differences in

shape and geometry, the materials used to make the blades are also different. Western style knives are usually made from heavy Solingen and tempered steel with rust resistant properties. The knives tend to be thickish blades and can feel heavy and chunky in the hand," he says.

"Some of the industry stalwarts like Victorinox and Wusthof have actually started introducing Asian style designs and shapes like the Santoku and chopper to their line-up."

Knives to chefs are something of a guilty pleasure, Shek admits that a few years back he went on a "buying frenzy".

"I would buy a new one every few months, each slightly better and more expensive than the last," he says. "I have a good arsenal now but the truth is, I've settled on my favourites and with the proper knowhow and maintenance, they will last me a long time."

Shek says that a "sharp edge has been elemental in human life from the stone-age through to modern day. "It really can make all the difference between survival and sashimi," he says.

Chef advice for apprentices

Kerby Craig: "I would recommend buying the smaller multipurpose Santoku knife because of the softer steel."

Joseph Webb: "Knives are an integral part of a chef's job. Respect your knives, know how to clean, sharpen and maintain them. If you do that, they will look after you."

Frank Shek: "Maintenance. Learn how to sharpen your knives and how to keep them sharp. No point in spending your measly apprentice wage on a quality knife if you don't know how to look after it and maintain it."

"And for goodness sake learn how to use a sharpening steel properly! Raking your knife's edge down either side of the steel at random angles and lightning speed isn't sexy and will render your expensive acquisition worthless in no time."

Luke Powell: "I would recommend going with a base line brand for your first set of knives. The first set you have, take a bit of a beating as you learn to get comfy with them. I would also advise to learn how to sharpen your own knives with a stone, don't give them to someone to sharpen with a machine cause they will wear out really quickly."

Matt Moran: "Get something that suits you. No point having something that is too big or light. You obviously don't want cheap knives either, if you are just starting off and are serious about becoming a chef, it's important to get a good range of knives."



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