



Searching for EXCALIBUR

Jason Knight,
South Carolina's
Master Bladesmith

Photo courtesy Jason Knight



Jason Knight knew as a child he was going to need a sword of “excellent construction” to match his last name. And so his quest began to find the perfect blade. A few decades later, the Harleyville native is South Carolina’s first and only master bladesmith, of which there are only 110 in the United States.

His neighbors know him as a devoted husband and father of two who homeschools his children. But they may not know he is a multi-award winning ABS (American Bladesmith Society) master bladesmith who forges blades for collectors and hunters in his smithy by his chicken coop. Forging involves heating a knife and then hammering it into its proper shape. Once complete, Knight grinds the knife into a finished and polished blade.

“We carry lots and lots of knives, but Jason Knight’s are the best quality knife we sell,” says John Whitley, owner of Coastal Firearms in Mount Pleasant. “Everyone wants to look at them and they rarely stay on the shelf more than two weeks.”

Knight’s journey from apprentice to journeyman to master bladesmith progressed quickly. Originally a woodcarver, he started cutting and grinding blades without the forging process in 1997 and later became the blacksmith at Middleton Plantation. While working for Gerald’s Tires and Brakes, a Charleston-area tire chain, he took two weeks off in 2001 to take “Intro to Bladesmithing” at the American Bladesmith Society’s School of Bladesmithing in Washington, Arkansas. Now he teaches that same class. There he learned to build his own forge and heat-treat knives. “I tested Jason and he passed with flying colors,” recalls Jim Rodebaugh of Carpenter, Wyoming, Knight’s mentor and now colleague. “Jason has probably more raw talent than anyone I’ve ever worked with. He has a good eye for lines, flow, symmetry — it’s almost effortless for him to design a very attractive knife. He’s very highly respected for the short time he’s been making blades.”

After Knight crafted his first knives, he sold all 14 at the ABS Blade Show in Atlanta in June 2001.

Bolstered by this success, Rodebaugh directed other knife makers to look at Knight’s knives and word quickly spread in the bladesmith community that Jason Knight was the one to watch. Besides his domestic sales, he now has collectors in Taiwan, France, England, the Netherlands and Canada and often sells out his knives before blade shows.

Knight now crafts 100 knives a year inside his home-built forge, where it takes between 12-15 hours to make one. A World War I-era metal pounder called the Little Giant Hammer works like a jackhammer to shape his raw steel heated at 1,900 degrees. He uses high carbon steel, rather than stainless steel, because the knives stay sharp and they offer better edge handling. The carbon steel also can be hardened at different heat levels, essential for creating a Damascus blade. Damascus is a form of steel fashioned by taking two high carbon steels and melding them together. At the hands of Jason Knight, fine patterns and mosaics emerge from him manipulating the different steels’ textures.

What’s in a Jason Knight blade?

Gentle curves, Ferrari-like long lines and intricate work make Knight’s knives instantly recognizable. Some of his blades are upturned and sleek as shark fins. He wants his knives to be appealing at first glance, so the collector takes in the knife’s symmetry before the details within the blade and handle.

Prices range from a \$200 oyster knife to the \$4,500 Quillion dagger he forged as part of his ABS master bladesmith test. “I prayed through that knife,” he

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Photo by Alice Osborn

remarks about this dagger that once was the fashion statement of 15th Century noblemen. “I feel like God taught me to make this knife and I made it up as I went along.”

His most popular knives are the Bowie knives and Choppers, which customers either use or store in display cases. “Bowies are popular because they grasp a hold of a time when our country was a wild place,” observes Knight, a student of world history. “Like the Samurai sword for the Japanese, the Bowie knife is our culture’s edged weapon.”

Giving Back

Knight, 37, now teaches what he’s learned. In the summer of 2008, he taught knife forging in Nicaragua through Mike Deibert, an American Christian missionary from Bellevue, Ohio, who runs Christian Blacksmiths International in Los Brasiles, Nicaragua.

When he came back home, he left behind grinding belts, drill bits, bladesmithing tongs, and a brass rod for handle pins — all tools he had brought from his home shop. He also left a few dozen people empowered and committed to making their best knives. “They are using their talents and abilities to take a few steps away from the entanglement of poverty,” Deibert notes. Knight also is working on a program to donate knives to the U.S. Special Forces.

Perhaps Jason Knight will never forge his own Excalibur since he believes “the best knives have already been made,” but that doesn’t mean his customers haven’t found their own Excaliburs through his artistry and talent. ●



Photos courtesy Jason Knight

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Learn more about Jason Knight and the craft of bladesmithing at jasonknightknives.com and americanbladesmith.com.