

A custom folding knife is the central focus of the image. The handle is made of a dark material, possibly black or dark grey, and is intricately carved with silver-colored scrollwork and floral patterns. A prominent yellow-gold line runs down the center of the handle, adding a touch of color. The blade is made of polished silver metal and is partially unfolded. The background is a textured, orange-brown surface that looks like leather or parchment, with some areas appearing torn or layered.

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Andy Shinosky
Knife carver
Austintown

*Judges Award
2006 Chicago
Custom Knife Show*

Austintown man carves out a niche

by Amanda Smith-Teutsch



Andrew Shinosky

Lintricate vines spiral around leaf and floral shapes, graceful decorations that look surprisingly delicate on an otherwise solid piece of stainless steel. The elaborately carved handles of the art knives produced by 47-year-old Andy Shinosky balance art and function, and are becoming high-demand items.

"The engraving is labor intensive," said Shinosky. "It can take anywhere from 40 to 100 hours to decorate one knife."

The Austintown man, who crafts the art knives in his basement while not working his full-time job at Delphi, is one of a few craftsmen in the country who crafts and engraves knives.

"I think that is part of the appeal for my knives," he said. "Of the thousands of knife makers, and hundreds of hand engravers, you can count on both hands the number of people who make knives and hand engrave them."

His knives are rising in popularity: after winning several awards over recent years, many of his knives now retail in the \$2,000 to \$5,000 range. Collectors purchase his works through knife shows, knife dealers and Web sites.

"I can only make so many of them a year," he said, noting he works on the knives about 20 hours per week. That means that some of his higher-end models can

take more than a month to complete, and he'll be able to complete

no more than 8 to 10 in any given year. He estimates he's made more than 400 knives in his career.

But it's a labor of love. The craftsman begins with a plain piece of stainless steel. After fashioning the folding knife, he chooses the materials he will use to decorate the handles. Gold inlays, different varieties of mother of pearl, mammoth ivory and other materials are all popular adornments, he said. His favorite is mother of pearl, he said.

"It's stabile, compared to wood or ivory which can shrink and crack over time. And it's such a beautiful color," he said admiringly.

His love of the material, made from the inner linings of shells, is a fascination that dates from childhood.

"As a child, one of my neighbors had a knife with a pearl handle, and I was mesmerized by it. I fell in love with the whole idea of knives." Then he became interest-

ed in the craft nearly 20 years ago.

The hobby, Shinosky said, all started with the creation of a simple folding knife. "I wanted to make a knife for myself. It had to do with the satisfaction of knowing you made a tool you actually use," he said. He gave it to a friend that helped him keep his knifework on track. Also helping him stay committed was the appreciation by knife aficionados.

"The first show I went to was in Pennsylvania. I sold everything that I took, and that encouraged me to keep going," he said.

His workshop is in his basement, where he listens to



Beginning with a piece of raw steel Shinosky's tool and die experience was a foundation for what has become more than a hobby.



Shinosky is now a custom engraver for Brannen Brothers of Boston, a company that sells custom-made flutes made of precious metals.



Photo / knifeart.com

With few exceptions Shinosky builds and engraves his own knives. The knife on the left was built by Warren Osborne, with engraving by Shinosky.

Left: Knife built by Osborne, engraved by Shinosky.

Below: Detail of Shinosky engraving on Osborne knife.



classic rock, jazz and contemporary Christian music while he works. His wife, Lori, is more likely to complain about his choice in music than the sounds in his machine shop.

And now he's beginning to branch out a bit from knife work. He's a custom engraver for Brannen Brothers of Boston, a company that sells custom-made flutes made of precious metals. The instruments range in price from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

"These flutes are all over the world," he said, noting they are highly sought after by professional musicians and artists.

He also does all of the photography and artwork for his knives, and designed his Web site. And Shinosky's talents have not gone unnoticed.

He's won awards for "Best New Maker" in 1993 from Blade magazine, and also the Judge's award at the Chicago Custom Knife Show last February. "They liked it better than everything else in all the other categories."

He also was recognized in 2000 for making the best folding knife at the Dover, Ohio, Knife Show. "I don't go to too many shows, but when I do, it seems like I win something," he said with a laugh.

A tool and die maker by trade, Shinosky earns his living at Delphi Packard Electric. "My work at Delphi is just as intricate and challenging, but not as creative," he said.

Shinosky opted against taking the early employee buyouts that were offered at the Warren-area auto parts worker last year, deciding to stay on at the plant as long as he can.

"I have no plans to leave them any time soon," he said. But when the day finally does arrive for him to retire, Shinosky says he will be ready to expand this knife-making hobby into a full-time job. "My plan all along has been to eventually be a full-time knife maker and engraver," he said.

Shinosky and his wife Lori live in Austintown with two sons, age 9 and 21. He has twin daughters - age 26 - both of whom are expecting baby girls within a few weeks of each other; and two more daughters, ages 22 and 18.

For more information, see Shinosky's web site at www.shinosky.com.

