



Judging Guidelines for Journeyman Smith and Master Smith Candidates

During the annual judging of both Journeyman Smith and Master Smith applicant's knives, the Judging Panels will use the following guidelines in conjunction with the "Journeyman Smith Applicant" and "Master Smith Applicant" rules dated April 24, 2010 during the formal inspection to evaluate fit, finish, and symmetry of the applicant's knives.

Although the criteria are the same for Journeyman Smith and Master Smith applicants, the judging standards are much more stringent for the Master Smith rating. The overall quality for the Journeyman Smith is in the range of "very good" to "excellent". The quality for the Master Smith is "excellent" to "superlative". The Master Smith knife (European Quillion dagger) should be art quality as well as an "art knife". The applicant is cautioned that one substandard knife may result in failure. Therefore, he/she should submit only his/her best work.

DESIGN:

Design can be very subjective; however, it is the objective of the ABS and the applicant to create well-designed knives. A well-designed knife will have the proper amount of material in the blade and handle - neither too much nor too little. It is important to design and construct a knife for the intended end use. The applicant should keep in mind that form follows function.

A knife of good design will be more appealing than an equally well made knife of poor design. The objective must be to make a good knife with good design. The following guidelines should be reflected upon and taken into consideration when designing and constructing a forged knife.

BLADE CONSTRUCTION:

Flatness, bevels, and finishes are to be uniform. Blade surfaces must be free from scratches. Satin, buffed or hand rubbed finishes, are acceptable. A distal taper will provide good balance and feel to the completed knife. Damascus blades must be free of flaws (cold shuts) and pits. The finished Damascus blade should display a crisp etch and not have a "burned" or muddy appearance.

GUARD CONSTRUCTION:

The guard must be symmetrical and centered on the blade (side to side) with no visible gaps. Soldered fittings shall be clean and appealing, free from lumps, excessive solder, holes, or voids. The guard should be free from scratches and be finished uniformly.

HANDLE CONSTRUCTION:

The handle must be symmetrical and centered on the blade, with even radii on sides and end, clean fit on all matching surfaces, with no checks or splits around the pins. Pins should be in the proper location and show no evidence of re-drilling or relocation.

SHAPE/FORM:

A knife is three dimensional. Various lines and shapes show planes and light reflections to the viewer. Convex and concave areas make for exciting shapes. Realistic design should look like a natural object.

PROPORTIONS:

Proportion is the relationship of the sections, areas, spacers, or part of the knife to each other as well as to the handle and blade as a whole. Exact mathematical precision and measurement are not essential. The Knifemaker's eye for proportions, once acquired, remains the best tool for creating a successfully unified knife design.

BALANCE:

There is little trouble in achieving balance when symmetry is used. When opposite sides are close to being identical in weight, balance is achieved. The applicant should remember that aesthetic balance is as important as weight balance from a design standpoint. When a knife feels light in the hand, good balance has usually been achieved.

Greg Neely, Chairman
Board of Directors
American Bladesmith Society, Inc.
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