

# Crafting *Steel*

Germany and Japan share stellar reputations for crafting kitchen knives, each exemplifying a characteristic style. The classic German knife is thick and heavy, with a solid bolster at the base of the blade to help it muscle through bones and solid objects like winter squash. It's forged from relatively soft, easy-to-sharpen steel and its slightly curved cutting edge promotes a rocking style of chopping. Japanese knives exhibit a lighter, thinner profile, are usually bolster-free and are forged from harder steel, which keeps a razor-sharp edge longer. Traditionally, the cutting edge is relatively straight.

Zwilling J.A. Henckels and Wüsthof are cardinal German brands, and Japan's best-known knife-makers are Shun and Global. Often eclipsed by these heavy hitters are enterprises making knives of equal quality. German company F. Dick has over two

centuries of experience, and while seldom known in American home kitchens, the knives are favorites of chefs for their excellent value. Top Japanese brands include the three M's: Masamoto, Masahiro and Misono.

In recent years, a happy détente has evolved between the two traditions as manufacturers have adopted rival characteristics to create new breeds of hybrid knives, merging the nimble, maneuverable qualities of the Japanese product with the solid functionality of the German.

For the best of both worlds and major bragging rights, seek out the collaborations of Bob Kramer (pictured). Cult favorite Kramer, famous for high prices and long waiting lists, has licensed Henckels to handcraft his prestigious knives in Japan. —AK

