ABANA Conference 2002
- La Crosse, Wisconsin

The Works of Greg Eng
By Lily Rivera

On David Hayes
By Charles Boer

Blacksmithing: Process & Design
By George Dixon

Showcase
Joel Sanderson

Profile
John Drakeski

Antoni Gaudi and Historic Catalan Ironwork
By Rob Jackson

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DEAR ABANA MEMBERS,

The Board election is over and about the time you are reading this, the new members will be attending the Fall Board meeting in Kentucky. My thanks to Meagan Crowley, Will Hightower, Don Kemper, Dave Mudge, Gerald Pollard, David Smith and Chris Winternitz for their willingness to serve ABANA and blacksmithing. From their published statements, these candidates have a clear understanding of what ABANA is about and where the organization should go in the coming years. And these ideas and visions fit closely with those of the members remaining on the Board. With any of these five, the Board will continue to be productive and serve ABANA well. My best wishes for all of them, regardless if they won a spot on the Board or not. Their commitment to serve speaks well for all of them, as it does for all of the active Board members.

We as an organization have made great progress over these years, some of this in painful ways, but all was essential for clearly defining ABANA and constructing an effective platform of organization and procedure. In this clarity, the Board will move ABANA forward to serve the members and this most noble of crafts. ABANA is now set to effectively implement those responsibilities to the membership with prudent planning and clear procedures. With the workers we now have on the Board, and any of the candidates, this will be accomplished. The Board will undertake new tasks as the talent, financial support and efforts are available and not before. To paraphrase Pete Renzetti’s comments at the 2002 Conference, it is not enough to identify a need. Rather, in a volunteer organization as ABANA, the requirement is to go further and clearly identify the efforts and resources required for the execution of any new program, if indeed that program is an area of responsibility for ABANA. Progress will be made, but in a prudent, financially conservative and clearly defined way. We welcome your input and assistance in carrying out the present mandates and undertaking any new ones.

I did not run again for the Board for several reasons. But, financial support and efforts are available and not before. To paraphrase Pete Renzetti’s comments at the 2002 Conference, it is not enough to identify a need. Rather, in a volunteer organization as ABANA, the requirement is to go further and clearly identify the efforts and resources required for the execution of any new program, if indeed that program is an area of responsibility for ABANA. Progress will be made, but in a prudent, financially conservative and clearly defined way. We welcome your input and assistance in carrying out the present mandates and undertaking any new ones. I did not run again for the Board for several reasons. This was a difficult decision, as I enjoyed my tenure on the Board and leave with a good feeling that, in the three years I served - two of them as president - the Board has accomplished much for ABANA and blacksmithing. I would have liked to have been an active member in carrying through on these accomplishments. But my personal life will preclude my active participation in the immediate future. My two sons Japh and Calum need me in their lives now more than ever. My involvement in Boy Scouts is taking more and more of my time and I draw a direct benefit from that time with my sons. Now I must spend as much time with them, for some day all too soon they will be grown and gone, and with it any further chance to influence their lives. My wife Fawn, the most patient and wonderful woman I know, also needs my support (as I do hers) as my sons go through this time in our lives. When my sons are gone, time will be there again to serve ABANA in such a context. Until then, I will assist as I can and as the Board needs, but not at the level of a Board member.

President’s Message cont. on page 5
Dear Editor,

What follows is a piece that my 13-year-old son wrote for a descriptive paragraph writing assignment last year. He got an “A” on it.

— Doug Learn, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Our Garage

by Japheth A. Learn

As I enter the garage from the door of my house, there is a scene of controlled chaos. Stuff is everywhere. There is a lawn mower, a giant steel table, a one-ton power hammer, five bicycles, over 4000 pounds of miscellaneous tools, and some forgotten ten Christmas evergreens, slowly turning brown. When I walk towards the large door on the other end of the garage, other things become apparent. Just outside of the garage there is a gas forge burning merrily, sending blue flames out the open door and up and out of the exhaust vents. Three anvils are spaced evenly, close to the forge, with hammers lying on the face, or top, of each. The smallest anvil has a metal cutting tool, or hardie, in its hardie hole. There are two sticks of steel in the forge glowing orange-yellow with heat. My piece is hot and the saying with blacksmiths is “Strike while the iron is hot.” On the face of the anvil I forge a taper and begin a curl. The merry sounds of hammer blows ring throughout the garage as my father and I forge our metal into future hooks. The whispering, turbulent noise of the propane burning in the forge creates a nice, white noise appropriate for the setting. This harmonic rhythm of blows and burning gas is only interrupted by the occasional hiss of boiled water in the bucket near the forge as the heated metal is cooled.

This is where I belong!

Doug Learn

ABANA President, 2000-2002

I have made many new friends over these years, all of whom I hope to keep. Thank you for that friendship and the trust you have in me, as I do in you. To all those members who have helped ABANA, speaking for the Board in my final time, I say thanks. And to all smiths everywhere, please work to make your skills, those of your fellow smiths, and the craft of blacksmithing in general the best that it can be. As I have said before, we are at the beginning of the renaissance of blacksmithing. Please work to be part of and support this renaissance. To all of the membership of ABANA, thank you for your support, encouragement and assistance. You have made my life richer, and I hope that I did the same for you. Safe and productive forging.

Doug Learn

ABANA President, 2000-2002

ITALIAN MASTERS OF WROUGHT IRON

Ed. by G. Ciscenti, 10 x 13”, 495 pgs., over 850 color and 350 b&w photos. Italian title “I Maestri Italiani Del Ferro Battuto”. In Italian with some English. Divided into 27 chapters showing almost every type of ironwork imaginable. Includes screens, railings, interior work, sculpture, tables, chairs, beds, candle stands, lamps, animals, flowers, balconies, church work, and much more. Destined to be very popular because of the beautiful photos and wide variety of excellent items shown. B355 $139.95

ITALIAN IRON BEDS AND BEDROOM ACCESSORIES

Ed. by G. Ciscenti, 10 x 13", 240 pgs., 350 photos & 34 sketches. Italian title “Il Letto E D’Oro”. In addition to beds shows a stunning array of lamps, chairs, mirrors, bedstands, footstools, coat racks, curtain rods, and more. Includes recent projects by recognized craftsmen whose works are shown along with their biographies. B435 $74.95

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Mail continued from page 6 

tion it has become! 
— Stan Urbanski, Caballo, New Mexico

Editor Note: See Profile on page 44

DEAR EDITOR,

I’m just starting to read the latest issue of The Anvil’s Ring summer edition and have an answer for the letter written by Dick Quinnell. Although I don’t know if ANA has approached the Girls Scouts about a metalworking badge, I have. After several inquiries from our local Girl Scout leaders regarding Oak & Acorn Ancient Metalcrafts giving blacksmithing demonstrations, I decided that if the girls in our area had that much interest they would not deem it a “great success”.

Although the conference was a success, I personally say that I disagree with the “President’s Message.” If the girls in our area had that much interest they would not deem it a “great success.”

— Sincerely, Karve Unter Senior Program Developer

COPY OF REPLY FROM THE

DEAR EDITOR,

Great issue and, just as remarkable as the articles is the proliferation of new anvil and blacksmithing badge or interest project for Girl Scouts of the USA. Did you know that Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of Girl Scouts of the USA, took blacksmithing and forged a set of gates? In fact, she outgrew her dress sleeves because of the muscles she developed. And this was when the standard of beauty for women was of a more fragile and ymph-like sort. The Junior Girl Scout Badge Book was recently revised, so we would not be adding any new badges at this time. However, I will keep your proposal in file as an opportunity may arise to consider new program ideas.

— Sincerely, Daniel Crouther & Sarah Ritchie

GIRLS SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Dear Dan and Sarah,

Thank you for your interest in creating a black-smithing badge or interest project for Girl Scouts of the USA. Did you know that Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of Girl Scouts of the USA, took blacksmithing and forged a set of gates? In fact, she outgrew her dress sleeves because of the muscles she developed. And this was when the standard of beauty for women was of a more fragile and ymph-like sort. The Junior Girl Scout Badge Book was recently revised, so we would not be adding any new badges at this time. However, I will keep your proposal in file as an opportunity may arise to consider new program ideas.

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Mail continued from page 8

are even more makers of power hammers for the small or medium-sized shop.

I would dearly love to see an article comparing the new anvils to the new and describing all the new anvils with specs (sizes, dimensions, choice of steel, user’s ratings, etc.) I’m sure that someone who is interested in anvils would be glad to write in with their experiences with anvils. This would be a very useful article for prospective buyers. Follow it up with an article on the new power hammers. We’d all be in your debt.

— Andrew Morrison, Altadena, California

Editor’s Note: Are there any ABANA members who would like to take this on and write a comparative article on anvils? And if so, you wish to write us with your own anvil experiences, we would be happy to pass those on to the author of the proposed article so he or she can incorporate your stories. We’d be happy to publish the final article in either the Hammer’s Blow or The Anvil’s Ring.

DEAR EDITOR,

I enjoyed the 2002 ABANA Conference very much, representing the New York State Designer Blacksmiths, we would like to mention that we would like to see more banners from the affiliates at the next conference and maybe someone else would like to pick up the Ring Project.

— Al Butlak, Jr., Buffalo, New York

MESSAGE FROM ALBERT PALEY TO ALL OUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

This letter is in appreciation and gratitude to all the people who have extended themselves to Frances and me since the ordeal of my accident on July 26, 2002. The outpouring of concern and support was profoundly reassuring. Due to the staff and organization at my hospital, the magnitude of the response, the only way I can thank everyone right now is through this letter. I would dearly love to see editors’ positions can submit a resume anytime to: Dorothy Stiegler, 18031 Shake Ridge Road, Sutter Creek, CA 95685. 209/296-6471. E-mail: anvilart@jps.net.

ELECTION OF MEMBERS TO THE ABANA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Artist-Blacksmiths Association (ABANA) is run by a board of 15 directors elected by the membership. These elected volunteers serve as officers, committee chairpersons and members of committees. Five of the 15 directors are elected each year for a three-year term.

To run for election one is required to be an ABANA member in good standing and provide a nominating petition signed by at least 10 ABANA members. This should be submitted with a photograph and candidate statement to the ABANA Central Office, P.O. Box 816, Farmington, GA 30168 by June 15th of the election year.

See ABANA Business on page 9

CONFERENCE CD ON SALE

The CD from the Gallery and Pump House Exhibition is selling now for $10 plus $5 shipping and handling. See the ABANA Sales page (page 58, this issue) for complete information.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS BUDGET MEETING

The ABANA Board of Directors Budget Meeting will be held November 14 - 16 in Richmond, Kentucky. Any ABANA member in good standing is welcome to attend.

ABANA CONTRACTS OPEN FOR BID

The contract for the ABANA Central Office Administrator is reviewed yearly. Contact Jerry Kagele, 616 E. Rockwood Blvd., Spokane, WA 99203. 509/624-0101 or e-mail: kagele@aol.com to request an information packet.

The Anvil’s Ring contract was reviewed in November, 2001 and extends until 2004.

The Hammer’s Blow contract was reviewed in November, 2001 and extends until 2003.

See ABANA Business on page 9

Mail continued from page 8

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Table: Tip-to-Tip Length, Face Width, Height, Weight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anvil</th>
<th>Tip-to-Tip Length</th>
<th>Face Width</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gladiator</td>
<td>39&quot;</td>
<td>7&quot;</td>
<td>13&quot;</td>
<td>450 lbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centurion</td>
<td>31 1/2&quot;</td>
<td>7&quot;</td>
<td>9&quot;</td>
<td>260 lbs</td>
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<td>Titan</td>
<td>24 3/4&quot;</td>
<td>5&quot;</td>
<td>7&quot;</td>
<td>120 lbs</td>
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This letter is in appreciation and gratitude to all the people who have extended themselves to Frances and me since the ordeal of my accident on July 26, 2002. The outpouring of concern and support was profoundly reassuring. Due to the staff and organization at my hospital, the magnitude of the response, the only way I can thank everyone right now is through this letter. I apologize for this impersonal format, but it is the only way I can thank everyone right now.

Although I received burns to my mouth and throat, I was fortunate that there was no respiratory damage. The results of my injuries are skin grafts to my legs, torso, left arm and hand. All the skin grafts were successful and, through physical therapy, I am progressing toward a full recovery. During this recuperation period I am engaged in various design phases and limited studio activities. Due to the staff and organization at my studio, all work is progressing as scheduled. Thank you again for all the kindness and concern extended to us.

— Sincerely, Albert Paley, Rochester, New York
ABANA Business continued from page 10

REGISTRATION BROCHURE FOR 2004 ABANA CONFERENCE

The registration brochure will be included in the Winter 2003 issue of the Hammer’s Blow for the 2004 ABANA Conference.

CANADIAN MAILING

ABANA Canadian members are now being mailed the Hammer’s Blow and The Anvil’s Ring through the same company that has been handling our overseas mailing. This should result in better service to our Canadian members.

Please let Board member Dorothy Stiegler know whether your delivery service has improved or not. Contact her via e-mail at: anvilart@jps.net. Address: 18023 Shake Ridge Rd., Sutter Creek, CA 95685.

TWO NEW PROGRAMS OFFERED

ABANA is pleased to announce two new programs. Pertinent information is being sent to all affiliates. Inquire about these programs with your affiliate president and ask the president to discuss them with your board of directors. These documents are posted on the Affiliate Section of the ABANA web site, http://abana.org/affiliates/affiliates.html

Program to Share Successful Affiliate Activities. This program asks for participating affiliates to describe an aspect of their program that is working well. This statement is sent to Bob Fredell, then rewritten in a form consistent with other write-ups and finally sent to all affiliates. The nice thing about this program is that all affiliates may benefit from the successful experience of other affiliates. Idea sharing can be one of the most valuable services provided by ABANA.

Program to Enhance ABANA-Affiliate Communication. This program establishes a structure of two-way communication between ABANA members and the ABANA Board. Affiliates are asked to contact Bob Jacoby, via U.S. mail or e-mail (bobjacobcy@abana.org), to participate. The path of two-way communication is another valuable service provided by ABANA.

ABANA’S AFFILIATE VISITING ARTIST GRANT PROGRAM

Since its founding in 1973 ABANA has been committed to the education of its members. The purpose of ABANA’s Affiliate Visiting Artist Grant Program is to provide financial support to affiliates sponsoring visiting artists for educational purposes such as conferences and workshops.

1. Criteria for Selection and Funding.

In reviewing applications the ABANA Membership Committee will consider, but not be limited to the following items:

• Documentation of the visiting artist’s blacksmithing skills and ability to teach the skills.

• Demonstrate how the grant will allow the affiliate to achieve its educational goals such as even allowing the event to occur, decreasing the attendance fee thus allowing more people to attend, underwriting student fees or underwriting the visiting artist’s fee.

• Plans to disseminate the information from the event to the affiliate’s members and/or the community as a whole. This may include published articles, demonstrations at meetings, workshops, community events, etc.

2. Financial Assistance.

The maximum grant is $600.00.

3. Application Procedures.

Applications may be submitted at any time. They will be reviewed at the next monthly meeting of the Membership Committee. Applicants will be notified within two weeks of the committee’s decision and the money will be sent to the affiliate shortly thereafter. Mail applications to: ABANA Scholarship and Grant Committee, PO Box 816, Farmington, GA 30638-0816.

Go to www.abana.org to download the Affiliate Visiting Artist Program Application Form, or call the Abana Central office 760-310-1010.

In Loving Memory of

PERCIVAL CHARLES SUTTON

Percival Charles Sutton of Oakville, Ontario, died September 16, 2002 after an extended battle with cancer.

Charlie was an old-school blacksmith, having served an apprenticeship in a shipyard beginning at age fourteen, and served as a blacksmith in the Royal Navy during the war. As a member and president to the Ontario Artist Blacksmith Association, Charlie passed on many of his skills to students across North America, both in person at the many demonstrations he gave and via his book, “Under a Spreading Chestnut Tree.”

Thank you Charlie, for your many contributions here. We will miss you.

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Ironwood
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pick up film from summer 01
Museum of Craft and Folk Art Launches Third Annual Contemporary Craft Exhibition and Sale
Date: December 5 - 29, 2002
E-mail: dalia@mocfa.org
San Francisco's most anticipated holiday craft exhibition and sale-the third annual contemporary craft Show-case-is fast approaching at the Museum of Craft & Folk Art. Craft Show-case 3 promises to offer new and unique art works from California's celebrated craft community who work in glass, clay, metal, wood and fiber. All pieces are one of a kind and can be taken home at the time of purchase.

Admission is free for the exhibition. Hours are Sundays and Mondays, 11 am to 5 pm, Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 am to 6 pm. Saturday hours are 10 am to 6 pm.

The Museum of Craft and Folk Art promotes the understanding and appreciation of human expression, ranging from utilitarian objects to contemporary arts. This is accomplished through innovative exhibitions of craft and folk art from cultures past and present, educational programs and publications.

New England School of Metalwork Completes First Summer Workshop Season
One of the most intriguing aspects of the summer's blacksmithing and sculpture workshops was the interest and use of the welding side of New England School of Metalwork, located in Auburn, Maine. Many instructors were more than eager to take a break from the forge and give a lesson or two in TIG or TIG welding or plasma cutting. Half-day demonstrations cleared up a lot of myth and confusion for people wanting to correctly incorporate welding into their forge work. It is the unique ability of this school to be able to offer answers and alternatives for problems that arise in metalworking, whether needing to TIG weld titanium for an oil rig or plug weld forged sculptural elements together. With the technical and financial support of Maine-Oxy, the school wanted for little this summer.

This winter the school's director and instructor Derek Glaser will be teaching one workshop per month. Instructors for next year's season include: Brian Gilbert, Warren Holzman, Jeff Moltz, Charley Orlando, Peter Happny, Walter Scadlen, Doug Wilson, Rick Smith and more. Course catalogs as well as class registration will be available March 1, 2003.


International Arts Festival
Date: January 16 - February 16, 2003
Where: Perth, Australia
More information:
Go to http://www.perthfestival.com.au

Australia's oldest and largest annual international multi-arts festival will celebrate its Golden Jubilee with a dazzling four-week program of events.

The centerpiece of the event will undoubtedly be the world premiere of Antony Gormley's ('winner of Turner Prize 1994) installation of 100 cast stainless steel figures, over a 10- square mile area of Lake Ballard, a salt lake on the outskirts of Perth.

The festival will culminate in the world's first-ever outdoor staging of Richard Wagner's opera, The Twilight of the Gods, on the banks of the Swan River. The production will be realized through film, fireworks, city lighting, outdoor sculptures and an acrobatic spectacle.

Former Foundation Curator Named Colonial Williamsburg Director of Historic Trades
Jay Gaynor, former Colonial Williamsburg Foundation curator of mechanical arts, has been named director of historic trades for the foundation. A member of the Colonial Wil- liamsburg curatorial staff since 1981, Gaynor served as interim director of historic trades for nearly two years while continuing his responsibilities with the collections department.

Known worldwide as the nation's largest living history museum, Colonial Williamsburg is celebrating its 75th anniversary through a program of events.

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Hey, guys, why don’t we plan the opening ceremony for the start of the conference. The conference say that? I thought. “We could do some ‘Gee, this is cool, like the lightning bolt in ‘94, but just what did you have in mind?”

Archimedes, in reference to the principles of leverage, once said: “Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth.” For Bill Krawczeski, Dick Bateman, retired, an engineer for a steam control company, put forth a great deal of time doing the hands-on grant work. John Yost is an architect running his own architectural firm, and also has a strong interest in big-klinking. John added the structure and design to the instrument. Our instrumentalist was Susi Strothman. Susi is an architect also, and has a college background as a member of the St. Olaf College Choir. That leaves me—a self-taught artist-blacksmith for the last 12 years with a smidgen of music theory learned at the University of Minnesota. I brought my ear and a guitar tuner.

The learning curve was steep. The construction of the 3000-pound instrument took hundreds of man hours to construct. It also took hundreds of man hours of experimentation and research to get it to work. The final product was not complete until just days before the ceremony. Exactly how it would be presented in the ceremony was not decided upon until just a few weeks before the ceremony when we were finally confident that we had a playable instrument, as well as knowing what it could play and who would play it.

Celebrating a renewed patriotism within our country, we found that we had the range of notes to play “America The Beautiful,” but not the U.S. National Anthem. As a tribute to our northern neighbors, we also found that “Oh, Canada” was within the range of the chime. The chimes brought together the spirit of the old blacksmith shop in a fun, whimsical artistic sculpture, with the percussive sound of steel on steel.

Many thanks to Elizabeth Riem for agreeing to offer her inspirational words in her opening address. Many thanks to Doug Lemm for bringing the group together. Also, thanks to Rome Hutchings, Francis Whisker’s grandson, and Rome’s mother, Sheila Hutchings, for their offering of Francis’ ashes to the ceremonial fire. Thank you to Dorothy Stiegel for her expedient dash in the golf cart to retrieve the ceremonial coke, which succeeded in keeping the momentum of the ceremony going. Thanks to Bill Hansen from the Guild of Metalsmiths for his percussive expertise, and for bringing to life the ceremonial coke to officially open the conference.

On behalf of myself and the committee that put it together I would like to thank Bill, Kirsten, and the ABANA board. It was a great experience.
Thank you and good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I want to reflect on the conference theme, “Forging Traditions.” First, some definitions. We all know one definition of forging, but there are others, including “...to move forward steadily, but slowly and gradually”; and “to move forward with a sudden increase in speed and power.” And traditions also has many meanings, including … “an inherited or established way of thinking, feeling or doing, preserved or evolved from the past.”

But can one move a tradition forward? Is this an internal conflict? I think not, for smiths have done this for thousands of years. Progress demands novel and fresh ideas, a response to the human need to move civilization forward. And in response to these needs, traditions are challenged. Nothing but death is static. What one era considers fundamental processes or design are subsumed and augmented by those responding to new and different challenges and opportunities. New ideas, demands, circumstances, influences and cultures transform accepted norms to create new paradigms for new conditions. Be it fast or slow, new traditions are forged from old.

In his introduction to “The Art of Blacksmithing,” Alex Bealer wrote: “My third purpose in writing this book is to give tribute to the marvelous ingenuity of man ...... Many, if not most of the blacksmith’s techniques are notable for their ingenious concept more than their effect. Each, as it was developed, was an exercise in pure intellect brought forth from a vacuum of ignorance to fill a practical need.”

Now is our opportunity, indeed our obligation, to exercise our intellect and forge our own traditions. As artist-blacksmiths, we honor our predecessors and serve our successors in creating art and craft of high quality to be admired, studied, challenged and criticized, ultimately to be included in the work done by the smiths after us. We move forward as we retain our past, as we take each step in the wonderful evolution of art, craft and design.

My challenge to all of us is: Work for excellence, not comfort. Challenge yourself; never be satisfied in your work. Remain positive and supportive of each other’s work. Take what you learn here and everywhere and apply it, refine it, teach it, spread it. Either fast or slow, forge your own traditions.

By Doug Learn, President of ABANA

Address to the Attendees of the 2002 ABANA Conference

Forging Traditions

La Crosse, Wisconsin, June 5, 2002

Take what you learn here and everywhere and apply it, refine it, teach it, spread it. Either fast or slow, forge your own traditions.
I’d like to start by reading the last paragraph of the first chapter of Alex Bealer’s book, *The Art of Blacksmithing*. The chapter is titled ‘The Blacksmith’. One can expect to see the general blacksmith disappear entirely before the end of the 20th century. Probably he will pass unnoticed and unmourned by most. After all, during the past hundred and fifty years he was so much a part of the everyday scene that he was taken for granted by most; and while intelligent, he was usually too poorly educated and too modest to publicize his importance in a community. Yet his passing has a poignancy about it; we should not be the civilized technicians, the travelers, the warriors, the artists we are today without the individual blacksmith’s presence and infinite skill over the thousands of years of progress since the beginnings of his trade.

To paraphrase Alex Bealer 30 some years after his book was written, I want to expand and imagine what he would want us to know in the early twenty-first century–that when the general blacksmiths who were necessary to the survival of the community disappear, it is left to the artists to keep the craft alive and healthy—to continue its growth.

We are artists here. We are the Artist Blacksmith’s Association. But what is it to be an artist?

When David called and asked me to do this address, I was stunned. What an honor! What a responsibility. I felt the same fear and excitement that I felt when I was asked to demonstrate at the 1994 conference in Missouri. I remember thinking at that time, ‘What do they want to see me do? I only use basic blacksmithing techniques and very simple equipment.’ The more I thought about being asked to demonstrate, I realized that if blacksmiths were interested in my work, it was not about the technical aspect. It would be the ideas and images that make it different.

I want to talk about some things that happened at the California conference. Before the conference I had made a piece I called ‘Rust Blooms 185’. It was a bouquet of what I call tire shards—pieces of steel-belted tires I had picked up on Interstate 185 in Georgia. I collected these things because I liked the way they looked. As I was walking down 185 I looked at them in my hands and thought they looked like a bunch of black- and rust-colored foliage. So I went home and made some lily-like forms that I rusted and added to my bouquet. I hap- penly packed them up for UPS and sent them to be exhibited at the conference gallery.

Since I was working at the conference as the gallery coordinator, I arrived in San Luis Obispo earlier than anyone else. The morning before we were to start working on the exhibit I was very excited. I remember thinking how great it was going to be. I thought about all the great ironwork that we would be installing in the exhibit—all the beautiful and skillfully made pieces that had been sent to represent our craft. All of a sudden I was horrified to think that I had sent a box of road debris to be shown alongside these wonderful pieces!

‘Rust Blooms 185’ was in the exhibit and actually turned out to be a successful piece. I would see people come in the gallery and look at it. Then they would look closer, and finally touch the tire shards. The foliage would wiggle and the people would laugh. I enjoyed watching people interact with the piece.

At the California conference we had an international panel who went around the gallery and discussed the different pieces. There were German, British, American, and Japanese panelists. When they talked about ‘Rust Blooms 185’ I was amazed. They said that the piece was about our environment. One panelist said that it terrified him for the future.

When they talked about ‘Rust Blooms 185’ I was amazed. They said that the piece was about our environment. One panelist said that it terrified him for the future.
of our planet. They went on and on about how the piece spoke of the plight of our world.

Jeffrey Funk was standing next to me and asked me, “Did you say all that?” and answered, “Well, I guess I did.”

Artists are communicators—writers, dancers, and musicians communicate ideas. We blacksmiths are object makers. We communicate ideas through visual images, objects of our creation.

My rust bloom bouquet did not receive any positive or negative comments from the panel on its technical execution or craftsmanship. And truthfully, it was not one of my most well-crafted pieces. It employed few blacksmithing techniques. The panel spoke only about the concepts they felt it expressed. They were more interested in the ideas it inspired than the method or skills used in its making.

Here’s a quote from James Brown: “Like a dull knife just ain’t cuttin’, talkin’ loud and saying nothing.” You can dazzle the audience with technique but have no soul or voice in your work. I don’t mean to say that everything you make has to have a literal meaning or message. Gary Noffke says, “You never have to apologize for nothin’.” You can dazzle the audience with techniques. The panel spoke only about the concepts they felt it expressed. They were more interested in the ideas it inspired than the method or skills used in its making.

Art is a relationship between maker, object, and viewer. Art isn’t really made, art happens. Each of us has our own personal set of life experiences that forms our expression and understanding. Everyone has a particular preference for types of forms, definition of space, lines, texture and color—an inherent appeal. These preferences are the basis that start to define an individual’s recognizable style of working. There are only a few blacksmithing techniques. I have heard Frank Turley say there are only two: upsetting and drawing out. His first horseshoeing teacher, Charles Dickenson, told him that. “The challenge is to put these techniques together in different ways to produce fresh images and to keep pushing the craft to new levels through experimentation, risk taking, and play.”

I was recently watching a video from the Asheville conference of Brad Stiltsberg’s demonstration. At one point, Brad said, “So what do you do if you mess up?” A member of the audience answered, “Call it art.” My first thought was, what an ignorant response! But the response interested me. One of the past directors of the Penland School used to always say, “It’s not a mistake, it’s an opportunity.”

Don’t call it art, use it to feed your art.

Ernie Kado had a radio show in New Orleans. I once heard him say, “People think that understanding is the greatest thing in the world. But it’s not. The greatest thing in the world is paying attention. You must pay attention and then you will understand.”

Pay attention to your mistakes. Use them to expand your skills and ideas.

While we are here at the conference pay attention to the lectures, exhibits, and demonstrations. Admire the work and always learn all the techniques you can. The challenge is to process the information you gather, internalize it, and make something that no one has ever seen before.

This is from Samuel Yellin on the creative process: “The work of the old craftsmen is there to be studied for inspiration for one’s own creative faculties, and not just to encourage duplication. Good design can only be obtained by the process of evolution, and designs which are not based upon some tradition are purely inventive and not creative.”

Pay attention to your teachers and mentors. The greatest gift a student can give a teacher is to surpass their teaching and pass it on. Remember and revere Bealer’s general blacksmith who paved our way. It is most important to pay attention to your mistakes. Use them to expand your skills and ideas.

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With JIM BATSON

We caught up with Jim Batson of Madison, Alabama, at the ABANA Conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in Fall 2002. Jim is a full-time knifemaker. In 1990 he studied with master bladesmith Bill Moran. Jim obtained his own master blacksmithing rating in 1993. He is now president and chairman of the board of the American Bladesmith Society (ABS). He is a trustee at the Bill Moran School of Bladesmithing in Washington, Arkansas, and was recently inducted into the ABS Cutlery Hall of Fame. Jim’s exquisite knives are sought after by collectors all over the world.

RING: You are a past president of ABANA, aren’t you?

JIM: Yes, I was elected president at the Flagstaff ABANA Conference in 1986.

RING: Previous to that you had been a rocket scientist. For whom did you work?

JIM: When I was in college some people came to the college from the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, and said if we liked we could work on a co-op basis—that is, work for the arsenal for three months and then go to school for three months. So I joined with the rocket group which was part of the Ordnance Corps. Then they became the U.S. Army Missile Command. At the time I worked on the Pershing missile when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, better known as NASA, was formed at Redstone, Alabama. I elected not to go with NASA and instead stayed with the U.S. Army Missile Command. We made rocket systems, I started out as a systems engineer. I then went into project management. I ended up in the project office and the last four years I was in prototype engineering.

RING: When did you retire?

JIM: In 1988. I became a consultant for another ten years. Whenever they had a problem I would go over and troubleshoot at the Redstone Arsenal.

RING: You studied gunsmithing and blacksmithing at Elmer Seybold’s school in Mineral Wells, Texas.

JIM: Yes, I did. Ever since seeing horses being shod as a kid, I liked to see the fire and the iron bring work. I had been on the craft fair circuit making muzzle-loading operation. As Jim told me, he was teaching a class in old-timy gunsmithing and so in November, 1976 I decided to go to Mineral Wells to take one of his classes. He started off first showing us blacksmithing: we had to make such items as forks, spoons, shoelaces and pots. Then we forged certain gun parts, such as the gun barrel. It was a two-week course. We also spent three days making knives. Elmer made knives prior to World War II and so he was the one who taught me the basics of how to forge and heat treat in the making of a knife.

RING: Elmer also spent a lot of time training horse-shoers how to work metal, as well.

JIM: Yes, I understand he did. He had a shed on his dude ranch where he could train 30 horseshoers at a time.

RING: So then you began doing restoration work.

JIM: I started out doing restorations when I first got into blacksmithing. Constitutional Hall was created in Huntsville. It is one block long and half a block wide. They were reproducing the old ironwork for it. I was the sole blacksmith on contract to them. So I made a boot scraper for them and over 200 hinges, among other items. I was putting 200 hours into making a rifle and selling it for $400. I knew I could make $25 an hour doing blacksmithing work, so I decided to go into blacksmithing instead. I ended up getting two contracts for blacksmithing work over a period of about four years so those contracts were actually what got me started in blacksmithing. The architect didn’t want the metal to be finished off real fine; he just wanted it to be rustic like the old-fashioned ironwork.

The state of Alabama was incorporated into the Union in 1819. The ceremony re-enacting this historic event took place in an old opera house in Huntsville, in a woodworking shop that I built; I had worked with wood in high school.

RING: How long had you been a member of ABANA before you were inducted as president of the association?

JIM: I had a farm in Tennessee and I had a blacksmith shop there. A man came to visit and he told me about ABANA, and so I joined immediately. When I was doing the hardware for the Constitution Hall State Park in Alabama I would go to Tennessee and draft some young boys to help me with the work. I had two forges on my farm and taught them how to forge—the basics. My son, who was around 10 years old then, helped me quite a bit also. There were so many parts that we had to process, it was just unbelievable!

RING: What do you consider your accomplishments as president? And what transitions were happening with ABANA during that time?

JIM: At the Flagstaff conference in 1986 I arrived there two days early. I recall Will Hightower needing people to guard the site. So I was called in to stand guard duty from 2 p.m. to 7 a.m. It was a long night! Stan Strickland had been president and they had just changed editors of the magazine. As it was, we were having growing pains. Dorothy Stiegel and I were nominated and I was elected because of the many board members who were from the Southeast area of the United States. Stan said, “Jim, welcome aboard, but we’re going to run out of money by next Thursday.” So we sat down and had another meeting. I suggested that we needed some long-range plans as well as some short-range ones. And one of the short-range plans had to be that we needed some money immediately. I think the dues were around $25 then. Bill Gichner made a motion that we raise the dues by $10 instead of by $5. So we did that. The long-range plan was to get The Anvil’s Ring’s costs down. I began monitoring the treasurer and we told everyone who was getting paid that we would have to hold off payment—the librarian and others—until we got these major things out. The editor, Robert Detwiler, said that we were printing The Anvil’s Ring on very expensive paper. We elected to get Robert his own computer so he could start streamlining his operation. As it turned out, we were able to turn that around. I was only president for about a year. We weathered the financial crisis; that was the major thing during my tenure. It was rough. Ruth Cook was our treasurer. We went to another accounting system during that time span which is basically the system we still use today. My term was short and lively!

RING: Who took over after you?

JIM: Dorothy Stiegel did, as was the vice president.

RING: Well, you accomplished quite a bit in your short term, as obviously you were able to keep ABANA going during that financial crisis.

JIM: Actually it was a little more than a year that I was president because I had resigned right before the 1988 ABANA conference in Birmingham, Alabama. We were instrumental in getting the 1988 conference off the ground. Bill Manley was the chairman of it and we had a very good conference.

RING: You are a recipient of the Alex Bealer award, the most prestigious award given by ABANA for service to the blacksmithing community. When did you receive that?

JIM: I believe it was in 2000.

RING: That is quite an honor.

JIM: Yes, it is. I actually knew Alex; I spent a week with him at John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. We were in a dorm and he had a room next to me. Francis Whisken was teaching a class there.

RING: That must have been great to be with both Alex and Francis at the same time, wasn’t it?

JIM: I did have some traveling in Europe and so had already been to Manfred Bredloh’s blacksmithing shop. Manfred, as you know, recently passed on. He had this design class in which he allowed American blacksmiths to come over and study. I spent two or three days with Manfred and his son. I received the Golden Trouser Award from Manfred’s design school for the work I did at the ABANA conference in Birmingham in 1988. Actually I gave it to John Blackidge. He owns the Golden Trouser Award because he was the one who had gotten all the 11 sites for the conference and acquired all the equipment needed. He had a large van and I made three trips to Birmingham in it, carrying tools for the conference. John did the most work setting up the demonstrator sites.

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at that event, so I gave the award to him. He owns it now, even though I received it.

RING: You made your first knife in 1976 at Elmer Seybold's school, right?

JIM: Yes, Elmer made two of them, which I still have. It humbled you! I made a knife when I was 14 but the ones at Elmer's school were the first forged ones. Elmer was funny, he was a millionaire. His father had been head of the Shell oil fields. And he lived with the blacksmiths—60 of them—when he was a boy. But he was a miser. He would give us these little pieces of metal that we would have to put tongs on. Peter Marshall, a doctor from Fairbanks, Alaska, was in the class and he and I went up to a junkyard and got some steel for us to use. I had a truck spring, 2" x 1/2", and I was making a little knife. I was going to cut it out and Elmer said, 'No, pound it.' I had to forge that thing down into a little hunting knife; it took me all day! When I got through with that class I couldn't open my left hand, from holding the tongs for two weeks in that hand. We'd work until two or three o'clock in the morning. It was very intense—we were a lot younger then!

RING: So you would advocate that any beginning or even intermediate blacksmith get a copy of that book, then?

JIM: Oh, definitely! It's been around quite awhile; it's not a new book, but very worthwhile reading. I have begun writing a book on the design of a knife: what or the process that is most important? I know why I make knives—it's the process. I love to forge. I actually made some knives at Elmer's school, right?

JIM: Robert Owings once asked this question, which created a lively discussion: Is it the end product or the process that is most important? I know why I make knives—it's the process. I love to forge. People have complimented me on how my knives flow and sweep. Well, as Francis Whitaker said to me, 'Get that kink out, get that flat out.' I took two years of engraving classes and learned about art from doing engraving. I learned how to make things in proportion, for one thing. If you have any new knife makers, they should really study art to a certain extent. Otherwise, they're going to be just stuck when they reach a certain point. A lot of people proceed strictly from the working process, rather than the mental process. The mental process is what really can make your work exceptional, in whatever field you're working in.

I went to visit Francis Whitaker and what we did during my visit was put in just a plain railing for a client. So ten percent of your work may be outstanding and the other 90 percent is just mundane. Even if you're trying to be exceptional, you can only accomplish that for a certain period of time. That's been my experience. You'll be noted for your good pieces, however, if they're exceptional. So especially in blacksmithing, try to get a feel for some kind of art—negative space—and know how to accentuate your pieces. Leave space around the pieces you want to accentuate, things like that.

RING: So you think that drawing is a good prerequisite to blacksmithing?

JIM: I was forced to take six quarters of mechanical drawing to get my engineering degree. When I was in the sixth grade I could draw very well. The modern school system, in my opinion, beats that out of students. That was my experience. The right side, or the creative side, of most people's brains is developed very little. What you have to do is strive to develop that. The basic difference is when I go to get the center of a piece I say, 'That's the center.' Someone who is using the left—or logical—side of their brain will take a ruler to measure where the center is. But you've got to throw away the ruler and begin using the right side of your brain to develop the creative self. I only have about one out of ten students who have the right side of their brain developed. The school system today doesn't teach right-brain development. You might learn it in school if you take advanced art classes. The book, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, is the best way to learn about how to develop it. I was at the engraver's show in Reno, Nevada, last year. They have classes after the show and the very first thing that they did was to use that book, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, to show the reader how to actually draw, even if you don't know how. You can do that, too. You can develop the whole process that you have to go through, as well as various accepted art forms that work.

The Golden Rule is another one. A man named Fib was a 19th century mathematician. He came up with the number series: one, two. Add the two together and you come up with three. Add two and three to get five. I know a woman who has been making baskets for 20 years. She sells some of her baskets for $100. Another woman, who uses the Golden Rule along with certain numbers to get her price per basket! This unbelievable difference. It's a strong incentive to learn about those things.
and you can’t forge a high-chromium steel because it will resist you too much. Plus it’s air-hardening so every time you forge it, it gets hard and it will start cracking. So you can’t forge it. But if you’re going to make a small blade you can have it shaped and ground before you can even get the forge started. Hunting knives are highly competitive—they’re in the $200 to $300 range. But with the gains you’re making on Damascus and making a larger blade (most people believe larger is more expensive), you can do things that a stock-removal person can’t do.

The cutting edge of a good knife should be what they call apple seed, or convex shape instead of hollow ground, like a razor. That gives superior cutting when you’re chopping or whittling, for example. Even if you are whittling, if the rim of the blade is convex, so to speak, it will act as a heddle to whistle a chip off, if you can visualize that. There is a heel to any tool that is used for cutting or engraving. Back from the edge is the heel that you have to work as a lever. Actually, when you’re doing wood sometimes you’re peeling it but sometimes you’re cracking it or splitting it, too. It’s called an apple seed edge or canard—or some people call it a Bill Moran edge. Also, when you cut in, the fact that it’s rounded reduces the friction. None of the wood touches the rest of the blade, you see, because it kind of widens it out. On the other hand, a wedge will just go further and further in, then get stuck.

**RING:** Why do the stock removal people do hollow ground? Why don’t they do the same apple seed—type edge?

**JIM:** Bob Lovelace made his designs and the stock removal knife famous. And that’s the way he did it. If you hollow grind and get the round wheel and get it in the groove and learn how to do that, it’s quite fast. The rounded wheel is just cutting on a small surface. It will cut faster than a flat grind, which we do. We do a flat grind, then dull off the edge and get our apple seed edge.

**RING:** Recently, you’ve been involved in some experiments using powder. Can you describe that process to us? How did that start and who came up with that idea?

**JIM:** To the best of my knowledge, Steve Swartz was the first person to do it. He took little ball bearings and put them in a box so that they would all line up. The box was just the right size so that he could line them up evenly. He filled around them with the powder metal, then welded it in the forge.

Don Fogg was privy to the process, but it was kept a secret for awhile. Don said, ‘What if we could put powder together and make sand paintings in our steel?’ So that started me into researching powder. But the guys in Montana and in Washington State had already learned of it and had begun doing some fantastic patterns with it.

**RING:** Why do you prefer making blades to other types of blacksmithing?

**JIM:** You have to learn more skills in bladesmithing. The last 30 minutes of your knife making is what everybody sees. So I’ve tried to learn some silver smithing and various other skills to go with it to enhance the handles. But you can take a plain piece of steel and you can do things with it by manipulating the heat treatment: you can put clay on it, you can actually play with the temper lines and this is endless. Don Fogg is hooked with this particular aspect of steel. Many people say, ‘Well, I’m just going to harden the blade and draw it back and temper it to make a knife.’ But you can start playing with the edge hardening and many other aspects of the process. You can change your steels and do certain things with them, ending up with wonderful variations. You can make a knife out of very economical steel. My blades are like a spring on the back, and they’re edge-hardened.

Once you get into knife making, it will hook you—like working Damascus. I call working with Damascus a disease! Once you get that disease, you have it for life; you can’t turn back. And every time youetch it, it’s like Christmas. You don’t know exactly what you’ve got; you hope it’s done what you wanted it to do, but when you etch it, you open up that Christmas present.

**RING:** Could you tell us something about the American Blade Society’s standards?

**JIM:** To be a journeyman you need to have been forging knives for three years. Or, if you go to their school and take their Introduction to Blacksmithing class, then the requirement for forging knives is two years. At the end of the time you have to have a blade performance test. You make a blade that is roughly ten inches long and a five-inch handle. You sharpen it so that it’s razor sharp and you cut a one-inch diameter rope hanging three or four inches from the bottom with one stroke. Then you cut two 2’ x 4’s in two and still shave! I make them cut the knots out of the board. You check the edge and make sure nothing has been done to damage it. Then they’re in a vise and bent 90 degrees without it breaking.

**RING:** That must be the most difficult test.

**JIM:** This is to show you how to manipulate your heat treat and control it. You don’t have to make the knives the same way. You then take five knives to Atlanta where they are judged on quality and finish.

**RING:** Do these have to be different types of knives?

**JIM:** Yes, you should show a spectrum of knives in order to illustrate your skill. Then once you referee your journeyman’s stamp, two years later you do the same tests with a Damascus blade, over 160 layers. At the journeyman level the design of the blade doesn’t matter as much. But when you get to the master level, the design of the blade must be exquisite. And you have to make a Quilon dagger that is 10 inches long out of Damascus with two cutting edges to it. Generally the handle has a small spiral wrap on it, made out of twisted silver or gold wire inlay. Making the Quilon dagger shows the extent of your skill and that is what they are looking for in order for you to attain the master bladesmith level. Two cutting edges are twice as hard as one. It’s difficult to put two edges on a
knife and keep the median straight, along with everything else.

RING: What’s the advantage of being a master bladesmith?

JIM: The collector knows that you are a master.
The advantage is that you really learn every aspect of making knives. By doing that, you know what a good knife looks like and by virtue of that, you can sell your knives.

RING: Are most of the knives you make purchased by collectors?

JIM: Yes, just about all of them. I’ve sold knives in Europe, Japan and South America. In Germany and France they love my forged blades. My blades are not machine perfect. They look more like the older-style knives, like museum pieces. I also want the knife to age gracefully. If you make a shiny knife and it rusts or it dulls or gets a dull color on it, it diminishes in value. I particularly want my knives to age well and actually get better with age.

RING: How do they age and get better?

JIM: By using Damascus just does. You have to know what tarnishes various metals. You do have to do some upkeep on a knife, but you do want them to age gracefully instead of one day looking at it and saying, ‘Oh, my goodness, what has happened to this knife?’

RING: Are you talking about rust?

JIM: Tarnishing—all the things that could occur. I did have one occasion where I had every high-dollar knife on my table bought by one collector. $16,000 worth in one shot. That was a great day! I charged him another $400 to have a light box made to display them in.

RING: How far out are you with your knife orders at this time?

JIM: Seven to ten years. I’m going to stop taking orders shortly. There are other master bladesmiths who are even more in demand.

RING: I noticed in the roster of the American Bladesmith Society that the proportion of master bladesmiths is quite small as compared to journeymen.

JIM: I think there are around 80 master bladesmiths now. We just had our judging not long ago. We had five applicants and only two passed.

RING: Why is the number of master bladesmiths so low as compared to journeymen?

JIM: Well, it was the fact that they didn’t do their job. To get around this, the master smith tests you. He is supposed to be like your big brother and look at your blades. In most cases these people did not bring their blades for the master to look at. If they had he could have told them that they wouldn’t have passed. But we’ve learned that if you stick with it and listen to the masters when they tell you what is wrong with your knives, then the next year you will come back and most likely pass. From there on out, you will only put out blades that are of superior quality—that is a fact.

If there is a flaw in it, you are going to be downgraded. The flaw can be a blemish—there can be a crack, for example—it could be that the blade is not straight with the handle, some angle is off, or something about the grind is off.

RING: You are also an expert on the Bowie knife and you have just published a book titled James Bowie and the Sand Bar Fight. Have you published other books?

JIM: I have a book on the hydraulic press that Norm Larson, who owns The BookSmith, is selling.

RING: That’s on how to make your own hydraulic press?

JIM: Yes. I’m in the third printing on that one, going on number four shortly. Regarding my book, James Bowie and the Sand Bar Fight, I’ve held Bowie symposiums at various knife shows in Atlanta and in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where we give scholarly dissertations on various aspects of Bowie knives and on Bowie’s life. People get to bring in their original Bowie knives so that the group can actually handle them and see them. These are old knives.

Bowie knives came into vogue around 1818. It was a defensive weapon. Then in 1836 when Sam Colt made everybody equal with the six-shooter, a defensive weapon wasn’t needed all that much. But along came the Mexican War, the Gold Rush and the Spanish-American War. Due to each one of those wars the Bowie knife came back into use.

Bowie knives were also carried in the recent Desert Storm war in the Middle East, as well, by some groups of soldiers.

RING: The Bowie knife is essentially a large-blade knife used by Jim Bowie in the historic fight you describe in your book, which took place in Natchez, Mississippi.

JIM: Yes. Jim Bowie became a martyr of sorts when he was killed at the Alamo, and the legend of the Bowie knife grew even stronger.

RING: But nowadays the classification of the Bowie knife covers a wide range of styles, doesn’t it?

JIM: Yes, it does. I’ve done some studying on this subject and have found that most of the Bowie knife blades were about seven inches long. But there were some as long as 17 inches.

RING: How do you see the future of blacksmithing in America in comparison with that of the future of European blacksmithing?

JIM: We don’t have the formal training setup in blacksmithing that the Europeans do and yet we still put out superior items. I think it just boils down to desire. When the Europeans get to working in the blacksmith shop, it’s work. When we get out there working, to us it’s fun, because it’s more of a hobby to many of us. And so I think that’s the difference in outlook. There is more of a passion for it in the U.S. The skill level has gone up tremendously in blacksmithing in this country. The technical information published by the ABANA publications and the ABANA affiliates in their various newsletters is very, very good stuff. If I’d had that information 25 years ago, it would have made life back then a lot easier. There is a free exchange of information here, whereas in Europe there isn’t quite as much of that sharing.

There are people all over the world who want to have things that others don’t have. I was teaching classes attending my class was a sculptor. He sculpted beautiful items that showed the natural rock and its form. His pieces were superior and exquisite, and they couldn’t be found anywhere else except from him. There are many people who don’t want to have things that are available to everyone—they want unique items and are more than willing to pay for them. They really do appreciate good art work and there are artist-blacksmiths who can make those pieces for them.

The only problem is that the demand is stronger than what can be supplied by the craftsmen. You can only do so much work. If the demand gets too heavy then you have to have more blacksmiths to handle the jobs. I do think you can be a blacksmith today and actually make a living, and some are doing just that. At the other end of the spectrum, if a blacksmith doesn’t mind doing production work, he can find plenty of forge work to do within the industry.

RING: So you think the future of blacksmithing is bright at the present time, then.

JIM: I think it’s the brightest it’s ever been.

RING: We appreciate your taking the time to talk to us.
The bird grill is forged steel for a window opening of 29" x 29".

Greg and wife Brenda at the anvil.

**GREG ENG, METALSMITH**

by Lily Riviera

It took years of exploring other art mediums—ceramics, glass, painting, stained glass, sculpture and jewelry—before Greg decided it was time for a serious profession. He joined the U.S. Navy for nine years and studied electronics, about which he states, "I couldn’t make a living at electronics to save my life!" He does, however, credit the navy for instilling in him the lifelong discipline needed to perfect and master the art of blacksmithing. Intrigued by viewing a PBS special on blacksmithing, Greg began perusing library books for more information, which eventually led to volunteering at the Old Town Blacksmith Shop in San Diego, California. A friend invited Greg to attend the California Blacksmiths Association’s Annual Meeting where he met Richard Schrader. From Richard he began to learn the business side or "high-end" market of blacksmithing. A year later, Greg apprenticed in a shop with another blacksmith, Rick Cianfella, in San Marcos, California. Allowed to experiment, he made his first candelabras and sculptures, eventually helping with commissioned pieces of architectural work. In addition, Greg’s skills progressed to a point where he felt comfortable teaching classes in blacksmithing with another blacksmith, Rick Ciardella, in San Marcos, California. Allowed to experiment, he made his first candelabras and sculptures, eventually helping with commissioned pieces of architectural work. In addition, Greg’s skills progressed to a point where he felt comfortable teaching classes in blacksmithing with another blacksmith, Rick Ciardella, in San Marcos, California. Greg progressively received commissions for more custom work. Business building techniques were honed throughポ sistem ae brochures, visiting job sites, and by word of mouth. Ten years later his business is stable, busy and successful. Today he is able to design 85 percent of his work and feels fortunate to be able to do this for his designers and clients. Greg’s biggest challenge is to infuse as much of the blacksmith craft into the work while keeping within budget constraints. Greg and his wife Brenda feel that they have only begun to scratch the surface with mundane fabricating and small side jobs until he was commissioned to do front door handles and window grilles for an estate in the upscale community of Rancho Santa Fe, California.

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Greg Eng, Metalsmith, first began working on a $65 million private estate located in La Jolla, California, as a result of simultaneous referrals from a friend and a local woodworking business, McAvoy Studios. The designer then contacted Greg to have him create several projects to be done for the estate; one of them was the Children’s Garden Tower. Ideas were sent back and forth to establish the design and then he was commissioned to do the work. The project was a challenge because of the size of the building. It was built for small children. The building is about 21 feet high from the floor to the top of the bell tower. The door, window openings and stairs are all in miniature scale. There are three levels to this building: the main floor, the mid-floor and the upper-level floor. The ironwork on this building was all hand forged. The bell tower frame is 5’ x 8 1/2’ with four support posts, eight decorative brackets and three guardrails 36” h x 14’. There is one curved inner guardrail and a 36” x 48”-long straight guardrail. There are seven window grilles of solid round pierced bar. Total time spent on project was 835 hours.

Greg and Brenda moved into their own shop behind their home in Vista, California. That first year consisted of mundane fabricating and small side jobs until he was commissioned to do front door handles and window grilles for an estate in the upscale community of Rancho Santa Fe, California. The work they do now primarily consists of commissions from local designers and builders. Greg and Brenda have an unending stream of commissions from neighbors and friends who are building new homes in the area.

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The Works of David Hayes

Quotes taken from "A Note on David Hayes." Gallery, Jorgensen Auditorium, University of Connecticut.

by Charles Boer, Assistant Professor of English, The University of Connecticut.

* "...there is a look of the "classic" in his work, there is even a sense of antiquity— that these are figures out of another time, even a millennium previous, when the world was a more convinced, and convincing, place..."

* "...Hayes is able to produce in all these dark and heavy contours a sense of finality, a remarkable sense of certainty—as if nothing here could be budged or moved."

* "But these are not figures from any other time, or any other world. They are our own, and there is even something frightening, stark, in them, that we cannot honestly project away from us, as somehow not part of our own rather terrifying earth."

* "...Hayes is able to produce in all these dark and heavy contours a sense of finality, a remarkable sense of certainty— as if nothing here could be budged or moved."

* "...there is a look of the "classic" in his work, there is even a sense of antiquity— that these are figures out of another time, even a millennium previous, when the world was a more convinced, and convincing, place..."

* "...Hayes is able to produce in all these dark and heavy contours a sense of finality, a remarkable sense of certainty— as if nothing here could be budged or moved."

* "These colors always come in grand, immutable globs or chunks, often in design quite similar to the steel sculptures, whose firmness and solidity they immediately share. And their solidity too is in their surfaces, in the brief recesses and hollows that rise, it would appear, from some forceful instability to flow unsmoothly into each other."
Blacksmithing is defined by the processes and by the tools employed, rather than by the designs and motifs which are produced. Punching or chisel-cutting into hot metal are not part of a ‘period’ any more than applying oil paints with a brush is tied to a single time frame. In fact, design has a closer relationship to time periods than process does.

A gothic style candle fixture, which is either forged or fabricated, is not “gothic” because of the shapes and details of its design. In that same sense, the most contemporary ironwork, hot chiseled or forged to shape, is ‘blacksmithing’ due to the process it springs from, regardless of the design. Either style of work, gothic or contemporary, can be made with forged or fabricated approaches. So the look does not delineate what is “blacksmithing,” the process does.

There are two definitions to ‘contemporary’ ironwork. One relates to design, as in ‘modern-looking’ ironwork. The other, more encompassing definition was expressed by Michael Bondi at ‘Forging on the River’ last winter in Memphis. Michael said that “Contemporary ironwork is the ironworking being done today.”

The work of Tom Latane’, Peter Ross, Fred Crist or Tom Joyce is ‘contemporary’ by virtue of the standard of “ironworking being made today”. But their design vocabulary ranges from the Middle Ages through American Colonial to cutting-edge modern designs of sculpture and hardware. All of these artists work with blacksmith processes which some would call ‘traditional’. However, they are not so much ‘traditional’ as they are ‘definitional’ processes. The same forms and designs could be fabricated, machined or cast. While any of these may achieve the design’s look, they are not blacksmithing processes.

Work being done today, of either modern or period design, can be made with blacksmith techniques or with other metal-working techniques (laser cutting, welding, machining and so on). All of these are equally valid approaches to design realization and in many cases a combination of blacksmith processes and fabrication processes are combined for excellent results. But if the ‘look’ that is desired is that of work produced by a blacksmith, it is far easier to apply blacksmith processes to achieve a ‘modern’ or a ‘period’ design, than it is to try to create the illusion of forged work with other metalworking techniques, regardless of period.

In a practical sense, learning blacksmithing requires accurate definitions and descriptions of the processes involved. Upsetting, hot punching, drawing-out, hot cutting, forge welding and hammer welding, forging and hot forming do not change when the design or time frame shifts. However, design and process are linked. Either the designer has the range of options and limitations of process in mind while designing the work, or the design and the processes selected to achieve it can conflict. It is far easier to draw an optical illusion than it is to forge one.

Whether you like modern or period designs, if it is a blacksmith that you want to be, learn the processes and then design with those blacksmith processes in mind.

Slitting and splitting, drawing out and upsetting, hot punching, drifting, tenon joining, twisting and scrolling hot bars are part of the generic blacksmith ‘process inventory’ that is available. The place to determine which will be used is at the drawing table during the design phase. Where these process choices are made, in the drawing room or on the shop floor, will have a direct impact on how frantic the work will be as well as how lucrative.

The bottom line is that choice of processes and their relationship to the design greatly affects any project’s bot-
This resource offers a fresh approach to the tradition of blacksmithing. Rather than concentrate on the developments of the craft over the last century, the author, Peter Parkinson, a British blacksmith, designer, and teacher, reminds readers how blacksmiths of the tenth century used nearly the same tools and techniques as blacksmiths today. While their products have changed with the demands of consumerism, the processes to create such products, from candleholders to furniture, rails, and gates, remains essentially the same.

The 160-page, hardcover 8½” x 11” book, complete with a glossary and index, serves as an introduction to blacksmithing. It includes sections on materials, processes and techniques, design applications, and examples of the work of today’s artist-blacksmiths.

Parkinson’s light British humor colors the text. For example, when he offers helpful suggestions for setting up your first workshop, the subject of chapter one, he stresses the importance of high ceilings: “It is remarkably easy to remove lights with a careless swing of a hammer, even when you thought you knew where they were.”

For those of you who can never get enough on shop and basic equipment layout, Parkinson offers practical advice. He’s got something to say about buying the right equipment for your needs as well. “When choosing an anvil, it is worth remembering that you can make small pieces of work on a large anvil, but you can’t easily make large pieces of work on a small anvil.”
Diagrams illustrate the effects of hitting different materials with different types of hammers at varying angles. Such detail is repeated in chapters on bending, upsetting and spreading, hot cutting, punching, twisting, joining, and working with a striker.

Once readers have gone over different methods for creating different effects, the chapter on design helps put the methods into perspective. Parkinson explains the importance of considering size, proportions and materials, and the effects of symmetry, consistency, and repetition when planning a design.

Experienced metalsmiths may find Chapter 14 particularly interesting, where Parkinson reveals the blacksmith’s resourceful use of templates in creating consistent and complex shapes. What’s a good way to avoid damaging work pieces when removing them from a jig? Incorporate loose pieces as part of the jig so that the actual work can be removed without warping. This chapter also covers how to handle forge tools with particular attention paid to tempering and hardening.

The book fittingly ends with information on assembly and finishing. Parkinson reminds readers that even the most careful measuring and planning does not always ensure an exact fit: “The act of making the joint can, in itself, have some effect on the geometry of the structure.”

Basics of Style for the Artist-Blacksmith
By Max Metzger, Director, State Trade Training School, Lubeck, Germany
Translated and published by R.A. Ruholf
770 Watson-Spruce Corner Road, Ashfield, MA 01330.
150 pages, 248 illustrations.
Price: $36. + $4 S&H

Style is the reflection of who we are: how we live, what we believe. So there have been many, many styles that developed over the last three thousand years of history, but very few—half a dozen—were unique enough to have their own character, be admired enough to be widely accepted and survived long enough to have had a lasting impact. Metzger, in this book, presents a history of these significant styles that will:

1. help the artist-blacksmith to recognize the style, learn something of its cultural origin and its historical period.
2. teach us to identify the unique characteristics of each style, and
3. enable an artist-blacksmith to design works compatible with historical style.

The earlier styles were architectural and were symbols of religious belief. The pyramids, the sphinx, the tombs of Egypt were symbols of a pagan religion, which dictated every detail of life. The wonderful temples of Greece and Rome were also religious symbols. While an important part of our heritage of style, Metzger makes clear that these were reflections of a very different existence.

He traces art history from its earliest beginnings, in ornament and decoration, and in typical Metzger style, details leaf and flower shapes, and the proper angle of an eagle’s wing. Each major style period is discussed (and dated!). Ironwork is a craft for the ironwork of the Renaissance and Baroque is seen in the illustrations—there are 248 drawings and plates, more than 30 full-page drawings.

The book finishes with a stern warning: form and function must be compatible or your work will be without style!

Italian wrought iron beds and bedroom accessories
Works by the Italian masters of wrought iron
(Il letto e dintorni)
Phone: 212/253-9599
Also available from: Norm Larson, The BookSmith, 805/735-2095
English and Italian

Assembled by Giuseppe Cicciato, known to Mediterranean artisans as “the chronicler of Italian masters of wrought iron,” this is a detailed and passionate visual survey dedicated to the theme of wrought iron beds and inlay almost two thousand years. His enthusiasm for the ironwork of the Renaissance and Baroque is seen in the illustrations—there are 248 drawings and plates, more than 30 full-page drawings.

The book finishes with a stern warning: form and function must be compatible or your work will be without style!
bedroom furnishings. The book is not just a panoramic overview of hand-crafted Italian wrought iron beds, but a veritable treasure trove of hundreds of photos of functional and beautiful bedroom accessories. From the simple and elegant to the fabulously ornate, this book features a stunning array of lamps, chairs, mirrors, beds, stands, footstools, coat racks, and curtain rods, as well as adventurous and highly skilled forays into metal sculpture. A collection like no other, it will undoubtedly serve as an inspiration to virtually any blacksmith.

In the introduction, author/editor Giuseppe Ciscato writes: “I have been pursuing the idea of creating a work dedicated exclusively to the theme of wrought iron beds and other bedroom furnishings for years. This may seem an ephemeral matter to some people, but for lovers of wrought iron it is an enthralling and important subject. And so after my many travels around the world of wrought iron in Italy, I finally felt that the time had come to offer the readers the best of Italian craftsmanship in this field.”

The editor has placed classical works alongside modern ones. He has united masters from all over Italy with their different ways of working. As if that were not enough, he asked the masters to undertake new works alongside modern ones. He has placed classical and modern works alongside one another. The editor has placed classical works alongside modern ones. He has united masters from all over Italy with their different ways of working. As if that were not enough, he asked the masters to undertake new works alongside modern ones. He has placed classical and modern works alongside one another. The editor has placed classical works alongside modern ones. He has united masters from all over Italy with their different ways of working. As if that were not enough, he asked the masters to undertake new works alongside modern ones. He has placed classical and modern works alongside one another. The editor has placed classical works alongside modern ones. 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In the summer of 1994 I decided that I wanted to explore the craft of blacksmithing.

Having thrown an old iron hinge in the fire, watching it match the color of the coals, and then running to find a hammer, pilers, and a flat rock I knew that I had found something "really cool". It was true at the time and quite exciting. During the rest of my summer I built and later acquired successively more efficient and practical forges. Neighbors and friends were very helpful and soon I had an outdoor "shop" of my own. In the following year I joined the Bredivij Guild of Metalsmiths (now the Northern Minnesota Guild of Metalsmiths) and also received from the local arts council a grant of money to pay for lessons from the guild president, Keith Johnson.

Between other summer activities and school I made time to practice blacksmithing. Even throughout college while pursuing a degree in physics I made time for forging, made more expedient by taking work-study jobs in the welding and machine shops. To what end do I continue to practice this craft? Mainly to keep my mind and hands occupied with creative endeavors and puzzles to solve, to complement further study in physics; blacksmithing is a hobby I intend to maintain.

That night with the iron hinge was eight years ago and still my exploration has only begun. I am writing this account from the top floor of an apartment complex in Trebon, a small town in the Czech Republic about 150 km south of Prague, where I am visiting blacksmith Daniel Cerny. My purpose in writing for ABANA is to increase awareness of the international blacksmithing community by sharing stories of my experiences as I travel for one year through parts of Europe, South Africa, and Japan. In these areas I will visit blacksmiths both to learn more about smithing and to gain a better understanding of what it is to be a contemporary blacksmith.

This opportunity is a dream I have had for over two years; during my sophomore year in college I became aware of the Thomas J. Watson Foundation and the fellowship they have provided annually since 1968 to roughly 60 graduates from 50 U.S. educational institutions. It helps these students pursue their dreams (generally not directly linked to their major field of study) and enrich their view of the world during one year abroad from the United States. A variety of projects and journeys have been undertaken since the inception of this grant and after a friend suggested that I apply for it, I intended to make my dream of exploring blacksmithing around the world a reality as well.

Last fall I submitted my application and after a long process of interviews and revisions I was notified in March 2002 that I had been accepted. Of all the goals toward which I have worked in my life, I have given the most effort to this one; I had one chance and decided to take it.

Currently my plan is to spend three months traveling through Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, then three months in the UK and Republic of Ireland, three months in Cape Town, South Africa, and three months in Japan before returning to the U.S. Plans can change, however, and so far I have been flying by the seat of my pants roughly one-third of the time. But there are many accommodating people here and my experiences have been for the better. In every country that I plan to visit there is at least one blacksmith who has invited me to spend some time visiting and working, whether for a day or several weeks, and along the way I intend to meet many more. Generally I have places to live and food to eat, similar to the traditional journeyman, though I do not wholly depend on such kind hospitality. So far everyone I have visited has been quite accommodating and friendly, and I have worked hard to repay them.

One of the most valuable things I have done in preparation was to attend the 2002 ABANA conference in La Crosse, Wisconsin. There I spent much time getting to know some of the European and Japanese demonstrators, and this has been quite helpful because there are now several familiar faces in the areas in which I am travelling. I also learned to speak a bit of German during the summer, and this has helped immensely.

I began my year on July 30, 2002 by flying to Munich, Germany, and a few hours later arrived in Kolbermoor, a small Bavarian town south of Munich, for the August 2-4 biannual blacksmith conference. Many of the Europeans from the ABANA conference were there and I quickly felt right at home. Held in a square near the center of the town, the conference was open to the public to observe the work going on at eight forging stations. The ice-cream parlor, beer stand, and meeting new people. Unfortunately the forging stations were bordered by a wall and on the other side by high bleachers, limiting visibility to the forging stations in operation, but there were other things to do and see as well (also, beer was 14 Czech crowns, a bit less than 50 cents per half liter).

I met some of the people I will be visiting later on and signed up for a tool making course with Alfred Habermann, held from August 2-12. Following this I will go to Berlin to work in the atelier of Achim Kuhn for several weeks, then on to a small town of Panchow (between Dresden and Poland) to visit Michael Kaczmar. I look forward to the variety of forging styles and ideas I will encounter along this journey. More on my travels in later issues. ★
STAN URBANSKI
Caballo, New Mexico

Stan Urbanski was born in 1950 in Los Angeles, California, to Russian immigrants. “I owe my initial interest in metal to my father’s love of shotguns. Spending a lot of my childhood in gunsmith shops exposed me to many aspects of metal work, and set my palate for what I wanted to do the rest of my life.”

At 13 Stan bought a Victor 100 torch, a set of Lindy Q’s, and a Miller buzz box. “I took welding my freshman year in high school. I’m lucky I’m still alive after making acetylene bombs out of welding coupons. I built a tube frame, coilover suspension 27T roadster my senior year. In 1974 Stan and his wife Charlotte bought property in New Mexico. Stan joined the Millwrights, local 1607, where he completed a four-year apprenticeship.

“I worked on a lot of kinetic steel there (bowling aisles to nukes),” says Stan. “I joined ABANA in 1986 and have been fortunate to attend the ABANA conferences at Alfred, New York, Birmingham, Alabama, San Luis Obispo, California, and Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2000. I salute ABANA, its chapters and all the volunteers that make these conferences happen! I also enjoy the fellowship of the South West Artist Blacksmith Association.

“In 1988 I took Frank Turley’s course, learned the anvil dance and other forging skills that have served me well, developing my own style and methods. I also met Robb Gunter at a Rocky Mountain Smiths workshop and thanks to Robb’s patience and how-to knowledge I built a Sandia forge at that class.”

In 1991 Stan and Char moved to their present home on 58 acres on Animas Creek in Caballo, New Mexico. Stan joined the Millwrights, local 1607, where he completed a four-year apprenticeship.

“I worked on a lot of kinetic steel there (bowling aisles to nukes),” says Stan. “I joined ABANA in 1986 and have been fortunate to attend the ABANA conferences at Alfred, New York, Birmingham, Alabama, San Luis Obispo, California, and Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2000. I salute ABANA, its chapters and all the volunteers that make these conferences happen! I also enjoy the fellowship of the South West Artist Blacksmith Association.

“In 1988 I took Frank Turley’s course, learned the anvil dance and other forging skills that have served me well, developing my own style and methods. I also met Robb Gunter at a Rocky Mountain Smiths workshop and thanks to Robb’s patience and how-to knowledge I built a Sandia forge at that class.”

In 1991 Stan and Char moved to their present home on 58 acres on Animas Creek in Caballo, New Mexico. They built a 9300 square-foot shop out of recycled White Sands missile range metal, and established their business, ARTthatWORKS.

“I hope to spend the rest of our life protecting 500 year-old sycamore trees, developing skills, organizing collections. I would like to give back to other up-and-coming smiths some of the inspiration that I’ve been given.”

Says Stan, “Junk and technology are our only growing resources. Materials and tools place us at a Gold Age. Blacksmiths have always been inventors, doers and magicians. I feel it is our destiny not only to preserve the past, but to invent the future.”
NEW WORKS

Harry Foster, Rusty Dog Forge, Pontiac, Quebec, Canada
Box with fall leaves. 11 1/2" l. x 5 3/4" w. x 14" high.

Alison Finn, Marble, Colorado
Steel, bronze and wood chair. Chair was made as part of the collaborative conference at Emma Lake, Saskatoon, SK, Canada in 2001. Mike Hosak of Saskatoon made the wood seat. 40" high at back.

Harry Burdett, Bloomfield Hills, MI
"Lady Bug." Mild steel, 12" in diameter

Brent Bailey, Orland, California
Letter openers, Mokume and nickel and mild steel Damascus

Mark Krause, Fayetteville, Arkansas
"The Old Traditional Ball and Chain." Forged mild steel and wrought iron. Ball is about 4" in diameter, links are 3" x 7 1/2" forge-welded. All other joinery is traditional.

Harry Foster, Rusty Dog Forge, Pontiac, Quebec, Canada
Hand vise. Forge mild steel. 8" long, 5" wide

Mark Krause, Fayetteville, Arkansas
Hand vise. Forge mild steel. 8" long, 5" wide

Alison Finn, Marble, Colorado
Steel, bronze and wood chair. Chair was made as part of the collaborative conference at Emma Lake, Saskatoon, SK, Canada in 2001. Mike Hosak of Saskatoon made the wood seat. 40" high at back.

Mark Krause, Fayetteville, Arkansas
1. Hand vise. Forge mild steel. 8" long, 5" wide
2. Small heavy gate. Forge and fabricated mild steel. 36" x 42". Starting with 2" round stock
3. "The Old Traditional Ball and Chain." Forge mild steel and wrought iron. Ball is about 4" in diameter, links are 3" x 7 1/2" forge-welded. All other joinery is traditional.

If room, use next one, below:

Susan Madacsi, Norwich, Connecticut
1. Folding screen. Forged and fabricated steel with mica panels. 7' tall by 6' wide
2. Detail
Barcelona, Spain, in the heart of Catalunya, embraces a rich heritage of ironwork. From as early as the thirteenth century, Catalan blacksmiths were among the finest in Europe and remained so over the next 500 years. Today, one can still find a wealth of ironwork in the heart of Barcelona. Ironwork can be found throughout Barcelona ranging from gates and grilles at prestigious palaces to hinges and lamps at the most innocuous small shop, and from the historic to the present (Fundació Antonio Tàpies exhibits a 1980s rooftop sculpture of over 9000 feet of wire and tubing), decorative and functional ironwork still maintains a strong presence.

CATALUNYA

From an historical perspective Catalunya, with Barcelona as its center, was a major European center for iron for several centuries. From a lack of indigenous precious metals, Barcelona never excelled in precious metalworkers, silversmiths and goldsmiths to the extent that other European cities did. However, because of a wealth of iron in the adjacent Pyrenees and the location of its Mediterranean port, iron became a leading industry. Iron flourished and Barcelona embraced its many smiths. As the Catalan smiths demonstrated a masterful control of the material, they also developed stylistically, drawing from a background of cultural influences including Roman, Visigoth and Arab. Blacksmithing excelled and, in fact, the smiths were so respected that from the end of the 13th century and for the next 450 years, master smiths held seats in the Council of 100, the governing body of Barcelona. Catalunya also had the first guild of ironworkers 200 years before anywhere else in all of Europe. St. Eloi was their patron saint of metalworkers that watched over their many smiths, and from the fourteenth through the nineteenth century, Catalan blacksmiths were regarded as the finest artisans of forged ironwork in Europe.
Two of the finest collections of Catalan wrought iron in all of Europe owe their collections to two Catalan artists. The Museu Frederic Marès in Barcelona contains over 1400 examples of wrought iron from the seventh through 20th century. Marès (1893 - 1991) was a sculptor who collected artworks and objects of everyday life from extensive trips into the Pyrenees. The collection includes iron pieces ranging from delicately forged filigree grilles and lanterns to massive hinges, intricate locks, tools, weapons and nails. Marès’ collection of iron is but three rooms of the 17-room “Collector’s Cabinet,” documenting his obsessive and extrahordinary collection. Other rooms include a Smoker’s Room, Timepiece Room, Photography Room, Gentleman’s Room and a Ladies’ Quarter, with collections ranging from such items as intricately carved pipes and canes to decks of cards.

SITGES

Less than an hour from Barcelona, the seaside town of Sitges is home to the small but impressive Museu Cau Ferrat. Cau Ferrat was the residence and studio of the Modernista painter and writer Santiago Rusiñol (1861 - 1931). Born in Barcelona, Rusiñol moved to Sitges after living in Paris for seven years. He transformed two fishermen’s houses into his studio and residence and called it Cau Ferrat. (“Cau” meaning hideout and “Ferrat” for his collection of iron). Interestingly, Rusiñol, a two-dimensional artist, collected iron house hold items of his “fence linearity” and what he referred to as “drawing in space.” Rusiñol also was drawn to the intensity and focus of the art of blacksmithing itself with what he referred to as “an art without aesthetic rules or absurd restrictions, an art free as smoke, born from fire and wrought in iron.” The Museu Cau Ferrat houses two Room of Catalan wrought iron with objects ranging from bedstands to door knockers, candelabras, keys, locks, and iron objects of everyday life. Cau Ferrat is the only residence at Sitges that is open to the public. On the rooftop terrace, one can see why Gaudí was a favorite among the surrealists. Combining function and sculpture, these fantastic chimneys and ventilators of concrete, ceramic tile and glass rise over 20 feet high amidst a maze of steps leading to various levels surrounded by the undulating exterior edge and open center of the building. Cau Ferrat is also attributed to Josep Maria Jujol (1879 -1949). Jujol worked closely with Gaudí on most of his later projects and is known mostly for his tilework, especially the tiled serpentine benches at Park Güell. One apartment in the building is open to the public and is preserved and furnished as it was in 1931.

ANTONI GAUDÍ

When speaking of Catalan iron, one cannot overlook the importance of Antoni Gaudí. During the late 19th century and early 20th century Barcelona was a flourishing cosmopolitan center and wholeheartedly embraced the art nouveau movement. Art nouveau architecture flourished and along with glass and ceramic tile, iron was one of its important design materials, and Antoni Gaudí was one of its most important architects. Antoni Gaudí led a fairly private life. Despite his recognition as an architectural genius, not much is known about his skills as a blacksmith. Born in 1852, Antoni Gaudí i Cornet was the youngest son of a blacksmith. In fact, Gaudí’s lineage stems from metalsmiths on both sides of his family. Gaudí’s paternal grandfather, Francisco Gaudí Salvelay, was a coopersmith. His son, Francisco Gaudí Serra, Gaudí’s father, also was a coopersmith who married Antonia Cornet Bertran from a family of coopersmiths and brassworkers. Gaudi attributed much importance to this background, and he referred to his ability to visualize space as “copper kettlery.”

Although there is much information to be found on Gaudí’s architecture, there is unfortunately little that focuses on his ironwork. This is perhaps because his ironwork is harder to classify. His buildings expressed the essence of art nouveau with the organic forms of mushrooms and bones, and incorporated wildly inventive arches and columns that pushed the technical limitations of the time. However, the ironwork spans many classifications. Combining forged and cast iron, Gaudí lavished baroque excess with art nouveau organic lines and architectural grids with intricate patterning. One thing is for certain Gaudí was an accomplished blacksmith, and although he certainly cannot lay claim to all the ironwork his buildings exhibit, he did design and fabricate many of the originals. More importantly, Gaudí’s knowledge of iron and metalsmithing led him to design iron as an essential element of the architecture and is as least partially responsible for a resurgence of iron in Barcelona during this time.

GÀUDÍ’S MAJOR WORKS

One of Gaudí’s earliest works of note in iron is the Dragon Gate at the Güell Pavilions in Barcelona. Approximately 15 feet in width, the gate was designed by Gaudi and executed by the Barcelona workshop of Vallet i Pipat in 1885. This works exemplifies many of the components to be found in later works. Perching atop an architectural grid, the dragon form successfully combines iron mesh with cast, forged and fabricated iron elements into a swooping, sculptural form. It is a masterpiece of line and form, expression and function. The hinge for the gate incorporates a spiraling post that originally animated the dragon as the gate opened, adding to the expressive nature of the beast. Although this animated feature no longer functions, the gate itself still functions as the entrance to this residence.

Another major work at this time is the residence Casa Vicens (1881 - 1888). Casa Vicens was Gaudí’s first important work of architecture and again demonstrates the artists’ sensibility of combining geometric patterning with organic linear elements and sculptural forms. The exterior of the dwelling utilizes forged iron window grates, lamps and iron balconies as essential elements of the architecture. The facade of geometric mosaic ceramic tiles is set off by the looser linear and organic qualities of the forged iron. Perhaps most notable is the palm frond fence that surrounds the residence. A lover of nature, Gaudí, reportedly upset at having to cut down a palm tree at the site of the project, used the actual palm fronds to cast the essential elements for the fence.

CASA MILÀ

Casa Milà (1906 - 1912), also known as La Pedrera (The Stone Quarry), is known partly for its sculptural chimneys, but it is also important for its abundance of ironwork, and it is one of the Gaudí buildings open to the public. On the rooftop terrace, one can see why Gaudí was a favorite among the surrealists. Combining function and sculpture, these fantastic chimneys and ventilators of concrete, ceramic tile and glass rise over 20 feet high amidst a maze of steps leading to various levels surrounded by the undulating exterior edge and open center of the building. Casa Milà also exhibits a range of ironwork. The baroque cast iron balconies are a major component of the facade of the building. With the facade of the building often being compared to scallops or underwater grottoes, the ironwork on the balconies can be thought of as masses of tangled seaweed. What little information exists on the ironwork is unclear. Although the original design was thought to be created and cast by Gaudi, they are also attributed to Josep Maria Jujol (1879 -1949). Jujol worked closely with Gaudí on most of his later projects and is known mostly for his tilework, especially the tiled serpentine benches at Park Güell. One apartment in the building is open to the public and is preserved and furnished as it was in 1940.

TWO OF THE FINEST COLLECTIONS OF CATALAN WROUGHT IRON IN ALL OF EUROPE OWE THEIR COLLECTIONS TO TWO CATALAN ARTISTS. THE MUSEU FREDERIC MARÉS IN BARCELONA CONTAINS OVER 1400 EXAMPLES OF WROUGHT IRON FROM THE SEVENTH THROUGH 20TH CENTURY.
the early 20th century. In addition to its glimpse into life embracing the modern times of electricity, there are several items of metalwork of interest, including a simple but elegant speaker grille. The large spindly iron and glass entryway to the building is Gaudí at his most art nouveau.

BARCELONA

Other works in Barcelona include two street lamps in Plaça Reial, Gaudí’s first public work of art. The Güell Palace (1886 - 1888) exhibits a pair of gates housed in the two massive arched entryways. These simple but striking patterns of alternating twisted and scalloped iron bars lead into a freeform filigree of scrolls at the top. Casa Calvet ([1898 -1900), noted for its ladybug doorknocker, Casa Battlò ([1904 - 1907), also known as the Bone House from its bone-like exterior, Bellesguard ([1900 - 1909], Tassies College ([1888 - 1890), Park Güell ([1900 -1907), also known as the Bone House from its bone-like exterior, Bellesguard ([1900 - 1909), The work of a group of individuals known for their architectural-scale ironwork through a selection of images. At the other end of the spectrum is jewelry to hollowware. This exhibit explores that transition from large to small scale, and in some cases, from steel to precious metals.

References:

Gaudi, César Martínez, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1975
Barcelona, Robert Hughes, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1992
Gaudí, Lourdes and Victoria Civil, Gráfiques Ibèria, Barcelona, 2001

at the time, the only information available was a children’s introduction to the collection written in Catalan. However, as always, these impressive collections are best viewed in person. ★

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An elder with a ceremonial gong at Batcham.

The handle of a two-toned gong is wrapped with plant fiber.

Before World War II, black and red iron ore were smelted in Western Cameroon. After that time, scrap metal from vehicles, machines, and metal drums was readily available, so labor-intensive smelting was discontinued. Today in Western Cameroon blacksmiths transform scrap metal and manufactured sheet metal into knives, rattles, shovels, and gongs, while car springs are used to forge house and farm tools, carving tools, knives, and axes.

The highlands of Western Cameroon are located near the equator, but their 4500-foot elevation allows for an average air temperature of around 55 degrees at night and 75 degrees during the day, so blacksmiths work outside, under a shade-producing cover.

We observed artisans at work in two different “blacksmith-making” villages. The day that we visited the village of Legang most of the blacksmiths had left town to sell their wares at a regional market. We did, however, meet three young smiths who were working outside in the shade. The youngest two were crafting crude knives from scrap metal obtained from a wrecked car body. (Vehicles remain at the site of the accident and slowly disappear as parts are removed and recycled.) One of the young boys showed us how he cut out the blank on the bottom of a piece of railroad track with a chisel and hammer, while the other folded the handle and thinned the blade with a hammer. The metal was not heated for any of the processes. The same materials and techniques are also used to make rattles.

Another smith was forging a banana transplanting tool...
The village of Babungo is famous for its double gongs. In the past, gong makers cut out the blanks with hammers and chisels from the tops and bottoms of old 50-gallon drums. Today they buy blanks from someone who cuts them out of sheet metal. The local name of the double gong is “kuifo.”

From a car spring, he forged the metal hot; the end of the piece was heated by placing it in charcoal embers while hand bellows pumped air into the fire. This type of double bellows follows an ancient design—the bottom is carved from wood and the top is made of animal skin. A metal or ceramic tube channels the air and protects the bellows from the fire.

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After the side and bottom edges have been folded over, the gong handle is heated until it is cherry red. Metal tongs are used to handle the hot metal. An assistant vigorously pumps the bellows to heat the charcoal fire. The handle is forged with an iron “hammer” on a granite anvil. Pairs are matched up, then the bottoms are clamped together to keep them from moving during the next step.

To connect the sides, one side of the gong is heated in the fire until it is white hot, then it is forge-welded. The same procedure is repeated on the other side. Next, the handles are heated in the fire as an assistant pumps the bellows. The handles are then forge-welded together and drawn out. The mouth is heated, opened with a chisel, then the opening of the hot gong is widened with tapered pieces of wood. The edge of the rounded form is refined against a small metal anvil.

The handle is reheated, then it is curved. Two gongs are then forge-welded together, the shape of the handle is refined and is finally quenched in water. The last step involves covering the iron handle with a piece of dry banana stalk, then wrapping it with half-oval reed. To tune the double gong to two different tones, the lip of the mouth of one of the gongs is hammered inward. The double gong is a symbol of authority. It is produced in many sizes, but traditionally only a chief or an elder was allowed to use the double gong. Today other people are allowed to “play” the double gong as a musical instrument; it can be heard locally and around the world.

Editor’s Note: Andrzej Gutek was a 2000-2001 Fulbright Scholar in Cameroon. He and his wife, Carol Ventura, researched Cameroonian crafts in December of 2000. Carol's web page at <http://plato.ess.tntech.edu/cventura> features craftspeople from around the world. Currently Andrzej teaches math and Carol teaches art history at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. For further reading, an excellent and informative book about West Cameroonian blacksmithing is Sculpture and Symbolism, Crafts and Technologies: Some Traditional Craftsmen of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon, by Hans Knepfl, Basel Mission, Switzerland, 1990.
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