

FRONT COVER

A HISTORY OF FIRE, STEEL AND SKILLED HANDS
The Berti family: master cutlers in Scarperia since 1895

BACK COVER

This book is dedicated to the craftsmen, workers and all those who since 1895 through their determination and hard work have contributed to the growth and success of Coltellerie Berti. Thank you.

Coltellerie Berti
Tradition begins here

A HISTORY OF FIRE, STEEL AND SKILLED HANDS
The Berti family: master cutlers in Scarperia since 1895

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INSIDE FRONT COVER

Berti
master cutlers in Scarperia since 1895.

Stop a while and think. Try and imagine what it feels like to be the last in a long line of a family that has for more than a hundred years been producing knives. Knives which are entirely made by man from beginning to end, each one unique. Exclusively hand made by artist-artisans. People who make knives from natural materials such as ox-horn and wood using pre-industrial techniques making it impossible for any one knife to be the same. Those same knives which in the 1970's nobody wanted. Out dated by industry and by their impracticality. Full of flaws and imperfections cracks and rust which forms easily on carbon steel. Genuine horn handles which can not sustain a prolonged contact with water. Knives which were initially made as weapons to cause harm and injury and regarded suspiciously as objects, only suspect individuals could desire. Uneconomical given the time required to produce them. Time which was once expendable yet which today....

INSIDE BACK COVER

is more precious and costly than the materials themselves. So can you imagine how you would feel and what you would do if you were in Andrea Berti's shoes? This book tells his story from when he took over Coltellerie Berti back in 1985 and regenerated his tradition. He was laughed at for being a dreamer when he took his 'new' but completely traditional Italian Regional Knife Collection to trade fairs and then ever so slowly, as it always happens, people started taking notice. His ideas were accepted, respected and valued by people outside the knife making industry. Those people understood that Berti's knives in all their simplicity complete with their imperfections were profoundly pure and sincere in being what they are and nothing more: a testimony to the work of plain and simple people. All of this should be sufficient enough to thank the Berti family and all their workers. But there is one more reason: the day we forget what it means to be Italian and belong to this land, Berti's knives will be here to remind us, with their distant but ever present voices.

Page. 1

THE HANDS OF THE FATHER

Page. 2

Severino Berti: circa 1965

Page. 3

A SIMPLE GESTURE

repeated over the centuries by generations of men, perfected by time, having one clear aim, has to be regarded....

A SACRED ACT.



Page. 4

The Berti family: December 1959

Page. 5

AN OBJECT OF CULTURE

by the very fact it has existed for centuries, is a testimony to its time.

Page. 6

Severino and Valentina Berti: circa 1950

Page. 7

SACRED ACTS.

Repeated over the centuries, gives a sense of history before us and a future after us.

Page. 8

The Berti family: wedding.

Page. 9

FROM FATHER TO SON.

Remaining faithful to our fathers' work.

Page. 10

Valentina Berti.

Page. 11

BECOMING A LINK.

A link in the generation chain.

Page. 12

Valentina and Severino Berti

Page. 13

PASSING ON A CULTURE.

A gift from our fathers

Page. 14

Alvaro Berti.

Page. 15

SO WE ASKED

our fathers how to carry on the Tradition.

And we revived the Memory.

Page. 16

xxxxxx

Page. 17

REVIVING A TRADITION

a production that nobody wanted.

Page. 18

Edoardo Alberto Falvo: Palazzo del Vignola Montepulciano.

Page. 19

MANY DID UNDERSTAND.

And support us, buying our products.

Page. 20

Xxxxxxx



Page. 21

BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH.

maintaining a tradition the right tools and materials is not enough.

Page. 22

Architect Marco Parenti.

Page. 23

TRADITION NEEDS

to be part of our lives, and those sacred gestures need to be repeated constantly.

Page. 24

XXXXXX

Page. 25

AND IT IS DIFFICULT

We don't have the time, concentration or memory.

Page. 26

XXXXXXXX

Page. 27

LEARNING AGAIN.

Is what this book is about.

Page. 28

Severino Berti writing out invoices, circa 1960.

Page. 29

"I think that there's never been so much change in the World than since I was a lad until now."

Alvaro Berti

Interview with Severino and Alvaro Berti, father and son master cutlers, born 29th. January 1902 and 14th. December 1927 respectively.

Page. 30

The following interview took place in Scarperia the 19th. March 1988 with Giovanni Contini and Luciano Ardiccioni. Transcript by Alessandra Minerbi and Silvia Salvatici. Final edit by Luciano Ardiccioni. The piece is taken from the work "Vivere di Coltelli" (Living with knives) by Luciano Ardiccioni and Giovanni Contini published by Centro Editoriale Toscano realised in collaboration with il Centro di Ricerca e Documentazione sull' Artigianato dei Ferri Taglienti (The research and document centre for the trade guild of master cutlers) in Scarperia.

D=Contini, D1=Ardiccioni, R=Severino Berti, R1=Alvaro Berti.

Page. 31

A family of cutlers.**D.** *Well now Severino shall we begin with the past? Let's begin with your grandfather.* **R.** Nicola, that was his name- me dad's dad. He was bird keeper fo' t' Tolomei brothers. When he won't working fo' them he'd be makin' knives, but he really worked fo' t' Tolomei. an' they sold out to t' Borghese, princes like. Then the' were me dad who made knives and two uncles aswell, all on 'em made knives. **D.** *And when was your dad born?* **R.** In 1872. **D.** *Was your dad a well known cutler?* **R.** Aye he was good. Quiet like, din't talk much. He'd ate quickly an' he'd be off down to t' workshop wi' half a cigar in his mouth. **D.** *What type of knives did he make?* **R.** Well, he made lots o' them maremmano knives like. It was a Neapolitan wi' marks on t' handle....**D.** *And how many people were there working in the workshop with him?* **R.** Well he was t' gaffer (owner). Then the' were me uncle Pallello and me uncle Donato. **R1.** Who'd be t' Cannon. **R.** Aye, Cannon. 'Cos they all had nicknames in them days. **D.** *Did your dad have a nickname?* **R.** Aye, he was Cocker, 'cos he was a bit cocky like. **D.** *And did you have a nickname?* **R.** Mine was Blackie. I was really dark an' all t' village 'd call me Blackie. **D.** *How did you start, who taught you to*

make knives? **R.** Me dad. I'd go to school and it was in front o' t' workshop. In them days we'd go to school fo' two hours in t' mornin' and two hours in t' afternoon. After school I'd stop off to wait fo' me dad until eight o' clock.

Page. 32

He made me a little wooden stool to sit on like so as I could wait for 'im. An' I used to help 'im. In them days we'd trim an' rub knives down bi' hand, wi' a bit o' coal and an old cap. Then he'd clock off about eight and I'd tag on (follow him home). We'd have som'ert to eat, he'd smoke half a cigar then off to bed sharp like. He was already up at five o'clock and off down to t' workshop. Me dad was a serious bloke like. The' were five on us at home and when we were at t' table the' was trouble fo' any on us who'd say som'ert out o' place like. Never hit us mind but he'd tell us off proper like. He'd say "There'll be trouble if tha' says that again!". **D.** *Was he serious, did he frighten you?* **R.** Right serious, he din't say much. The' was one time I'll always remember about me dad. The' was this club, "Amaro Fatis" they called it. All t' cutlers used to go down there, about twenty on 'em. And one day me dad was in bed wi' a bad throat. An' me mother, she was a Savi, a rum un' like, she says to me "Off to bed Severo. I'm going down to t' club wi' Macche-Macche, a friend o' mine, Dino Bartolini's dad, for a dance", An' I says "be careful he dun't wake up our mam...". Then he wakes up dun't he. I was in bed an' I shouts "err... our mam?" I din't know what to say like. He got dressed and was off like a shot down to t' "Amaro Fatis", he brought her home an... pà pà! he gave her two right slaps! an' says "tha goes dancin' wi' me o' tha dun't go at all"...that'd be around 1900.. I was a young lad..about seventy odd years ago. **D.** *When was your mother born?* **R.** Our mam wo' born before me dad. She was a bit older like. She was a Savi. **D.** *Were they cutlers too.* **R.** O' bloody hell aye, they we' good an' all. **D.** *So did your dad learn more from your grandfather or the Savis?* **R.** No, from his dad. **D.** *Were the Savis better than your dad?* **R.** Aye the' were. Me grandad Savi was right calm like 'cos he had other interests. He loved huntin' he did.

Page. 33

He'd go wi' t' Tolomei up to t' Giogo, and when they'd shot a hundred pelts o' more they'd go to t' top o' village and make a big bonfire like.

The apprentice and the workshop. **D.** *What were the first jobs you had to do in the workshop?* **R.** The first jobs I did were smoothin' t' knives down. They'd give us a scrapin' tool an' we'd make an' hole in t' workbench to smooth knives down. We'd make our own scrapin' tools mind. Then we'd swap to a right fine sand paper. Then the' were this hole in t' workbench, and wi' a piece o' coal and old cap we'd rub 'em down. **D.** *Didn't you use brushes to polish the knives?* **R.** The' weren't any. Me dad were t' first in Scarperia to use an electric machine. **D.** *What did he use that for? To sharpen the knives?* **R.** Does tha' know how me dad used to sharpen' t' knives? Old 'uns used to come to us. The' were this big wheel wi' a rope tied round and this rope ran to a millstone hooked up to an old "sputafocchetto" (spitfire). Three on 'em worked shifts, one on 'em went at four in t' morning to start sharpenin' otherwise they can't o' managed, me dad went at eleven, then me uncle after midday. **D.** *So they were continually sharpening the knives?...R.* Aye all t' time. An' all t' millstones were from Cavallico, an' me dad fetched his wi' a mule. **D.** *Once the stones were consumed they were called "core wheels" isn't that correct? And some people actually used those stones?* **R.** Only in t' city. They'd come looking fo' them nice an' used like.me dad put 'is on the wheel and made the hole 'imself, then he'd try it on a post an' if it din't go down well enough, the way he wanted like, he'd cut stone again wi' an hammer, bang! and he'd break it and have to make another. He din't have much patience mind. **D.** *Was he angry when it broke?* **R.** No..! he'd say "this in't good enough to do t' shoppin never mind t' work I've got to do" and he chuck it away.

Page. 34

In a cutler's spare time **D.** *What did your dad do to relax, did he have any hobbies?* **R.** Me dad's hobby was a jar o' two (drinking) on Sunday and Monday night an' that's all. **R1.** The' was som'ert else an' all, 'is bicycle. **R.** Oh aye his bike. I remember me first bike which cost 'im ninety bob (lira).....ninety cents! It was a German bike, a Dullotter [?] for ninety cents. It din't have brakes on t' handlebars so you had to back pedal to brake. **D.** *Did he drink too much on Sunday and Monday?* **R.** Aye, he drank all right. **D.** *And what did he do when he was drunk?* **R.** Oh no, he wo' never drunk, never. After supper in t' winter, we had this open fire like, so we'd all sit round it an' he'd take oil off t' wine and sit an' have a couple o' glasses in front o' t' fire. **D.** *Did he drink the wine*

flask all on his own? **R.** He din't drink the 'ole flask just a couple o' glasses like. **D.** *Did he allow his children to drink?* **R.** No !

D. *Who else lived in your house apart from your mum, dad, brothers and sisters?* **R.** Just us. **D.** *Did he let you drink when you were older?* **R.** No. Me first night out was when I'd finished conscription before then I'd be straight to bed. We'd eat and sit there in t' kitchen and chat a bit wi' him, when he was in t' mood like, then straight off to bed! **D.** *And what did your mother say?* **R.** Oh me mother was a rum 'un. she'd make us laugh when she took 'im off (did impressions of him) and when he talked all serious like she'd call him moody man. She'd like a laugh but she was very intelligent like. She had her wits about her.

Page. 35

D. *Had she studied?* **R.** No! just elementary school. **D.** *And your father, had he studied?* **R.** 'im neither just elementary school. **R.** *You were talking about the club before.....***D.** "Amaro Fatis". It was a working man's club.....**D.** *Was it a political club?* **R.** Oh no, they din't talk politics. Every month one o' t' member's missuses (wives) took it in turns to clean t' club and bottle up t' wine. I'd always go an' help me mother to bottle up. **Family life, the local and wholesalers.** **D.** *How was your family regarded in Scarperia, rich or poor?* **R.** Among t' best...me dad was a grafter (hard worker) and he looked after us well like. He bought everything wholesale. The' were all sorts to eat, chicken, rabbit an' loads o' salamis. An' he din't half love tripe! He was mates wi' t' Ghiaccini and t' Conti [butchers in Scarperia] So we had lard which we'd put in bladders and me mother'd cook potatoes and polenta [maize porridge]. **D.** *Did you eat vegetables?* **R.** Not much. **D.** *And fruit?* **R.** And fruit. **D.** *And how did the other cutlers live?* **R.** Other cutlers were....I don't want to say too much mind, but they were a bit slack like. At home an' all. They'd make knives then off they went to *** wi' half a dozen knives so as they could buy eat a loaf wi' beans, an' they'd ate it along street like then they'd stop off fo' a couple o' jars. It'd be t' same day after. At home things 'd be pretty tight like.

Page. 36

D. *Is it true that many of the cutlers worked for the bigger outfits, for example the Tonerini?* **R.** Fo' t' Tonerini, fo' t' Savi and fo' t' workers cooperative, which they pulled down and me dad lost out again there 'cos he had to gi' em money back after.....bha!... **D.** *You were saying before that your dad was more generous with his family than the other cutlers?* **R.** Aye, that's right a family man he was. **D.** *And what did the others do?* **R.** They were all out fo' themselves. The' wer' *** who'd make half a dozen or a dozen o' so knives and then he'd be off to *** or to *** for som'ert to eat, all fo' imself mind! **D.** *What did they eat?* **R.** Beans, loads on' 'em!..an' half a loaf. Then off up to t' local above t' church, where the' were t' ***, for a couple o' jars an' that were 'im done. **D.** *And at home?* **R.** At home they'd make do. they'd have to go out into t' fields like lookin' fo' potatoes and beans.... **D.** *And did this happen often in Scarperia?* **R.** Often, among cutlers the' were a good chance it happened. **D.** *They were a little selfish.* **R.** Selfish. Illiterate all on 'em. **D.** *Illiterate?* **R.** All on 'em. **D.** *Did your dad know how to read and write?* **R.** Oh aye, o' course he did. **D.** *Your mother too?* **R.** An' me mother too, right well. **D.** *And did you all go to school?* **R.** All on' us, all us brothers and sisters went to t' school that the' were in them days mind.

Translators note: The original interview was recorded in the local dialect and was translated using a Sheffield dialect, chosen for its links to the British steel industry.

Page. 37

Left: Dino Bartolini, Giuseppe Cartacci, Gino Cartacci, Umberto Milani and Severino Berti.

Page. 38

CONTENTS

The Italians. writing desk series and pocket knives.	page. 41
The Italian Regional Knife Collection	page. 49
The Regional showcases	page. 97
The Severini Collection	page. 103
The Magnum series	page. 107
The cigar cutters	page. 113
The Cut and the Taste. Kitchen knife collection	page. 117
Forged knives	page. 121

The complete kitchen	page. 181
Il Pontormo	page. 207
The Valentina Collection	page. 215
The Art of Carving. The service knives	Page. 231
The carving sets	Page. 245
The cheese knives	Page. 261
At the table. Table knives and cutlery collections.	Page. 329
Convivio Nuovo	Page. 335
Valdichiana	Page. 359

Page 39

Plenum	Page. 363
Intero	Page. 369
The table collection	Page. 375
Napkin rings	Page. 399

Berti : the name, the surname, the secret.

Page. 403

Tradition has a name: Scarperia.	Page. 404
Tradition has a surname: Berti.	Page. 416
Tradition has a secret: Craftsmanship	Page. 422

The cut and the taste. Art, craft and tradition in Italian knives.

Page. 435

Horn, Bone and Box-wood. Everything there is to know.....	Page. 457
Steel. The heart and soul.	Page. 483
Precautions. Handling and caring for our knives.	Page. 531
Questions and Answers. Everything you wanted to know.....	Page. 537
Where to buy our knives. Official Coltellerie Berti outlets.	Page. 543
Where to sharpen our knives. Recommended cutlers.	Page. 553
After thought.	Page. 556
Bibliography.	Page. 558

Page 40

Alberto Falvo, Classica, Montepulciano.

Page 41

The Italians.
writing desk series and pocket knives.

Page 42

Palmerino.

Page 43

Fiorentino.

Page 44

Magnum series: Prussian knife.

Page 45

Cigar cutter and Love knife

Page 46

Magnum series: Maremmano.

Page 47

Palmerino.

Page 48

Xxxxxxx

Page 49

The Italian Regional Knife Collection.

Page 50

Take hold of these knives and feel the passing seasons of time, the murmur of the workers, a distant voice telling you the of a history of fire steel and able hands.

Andrea Berti

Page 51

1895 David Berti "Mozzetta" with ox-horn handle

1995 Andrea Berti "Mozzetta a Fusetto" with ox-horn handle

Page 52

The knives from the Italian Regional Collection were originally intended for shepherds, hunters, farm-workers and anyone in the country who while working needed a sharp tool on hand. Knives in the past were indispensable, a sort of faithful companion which accompanied its owner everywhere. The relationship established was so strong that the knife through wear and tear was unrecognisable by the end. The knife, received as a 'coming of age' gift from a father, was jealously guarded a life time. Nowadays life in the town or country does not call for the use of a pocket-knife, but those who actually possess one wouldn't be without it for anything in the world. The Italian Regional Knife Collection will let you rediscover the long forgotten pleasure of using a handcrafted knife: from opening the post to using it at the table in a restaurant or at home. Revive this old tradition by using an object which is not only limited to cutting, but which reveals a history of fire steel and able hands

Page 53

Xxxxxxx

Page 54

Traditions must be respected but few are able to do so.

Coltellerie Berti's Regional Knife Collection represents the most complete collection of Italian regional knives. A range of this size of editions and designs is only possible when one has been producing knives for more than a century. After the Unification of Italy production in the individual regions around the country was almost extinct. Since then, Scarperia, a centre famous for the production of "blades" since the fourteenth century, has become a stronghold for the tradition. There is also another reason why: the production of knives in Scarperia has never changed, it has remained in many respects exclusively artisan. This is why today after a time when the knives produced in Scarperia seemed to have been surpassed by new industrial technologies, they now form a unique patrimony for the knife industry in Italy. Only those who have continued to produce knives in the same way in Scarperia can call themselves the true guardians of tradition, something Coltellerie Berti most certainly can.

Page 55

Traditions must be respected.

If you have received one of the knives from the Italian Regional knife Collection as a gift then do not forget to repay it with a coin. According to the tradition, the friendship will flourish. And this knife will accompany you every day, a faithful companion always on hand.

Traditions

must be respected and guaranteed.

We make it and we guarantee this knife has been made completely by hand. We guarantee the quality of the materials used, we guarantee that its crafting is exclusive to an age old tradition, the tradition of the Berti family.

One by one.

Everyone of our knives is different to the next. The result of rigorous craftsmanship. And we guarantee the quality of each and every one... by one.



Page 56

Mozzetti

Simple handle with or without spring (four editions)

The term "mozzetti" indicates all knives without a point at the blade end. The idea was to create a knife intended only for cutting. One that could be carried freely, quite different from the usual pointed knife of the period. In the early 1900s, when the laws regarding knives were becoming more and more restrictive and the Mozzetta was the solution. There is also a variation of this knife with a concave blade (razor like) particularly indicated for delicate cuts.

No.6 Rasolino, ox- horn handle

page 57

Mozzetti

No.7 Mozzetta
ox-horn handle

45 Rasolino cigar cutter
ox-horn handle

52 Mozzetta David
ox-horn handle

Page 58

Fiorentini

Simple handle and simple spring (four editions)

The "scimitar" or "French" blade, already in production by the early part of the 20th. century was in production until the mid 1950's. The great success of this particular model, produced in Scarperia and famous all over Italy, is due to the fact that apart from being extremely light and elegant it is very robust and has a very keen cutting edge. It is characterized by the band at the top of the handle and the metal button at the heel of the handle.

No.1 Fiorentino
ox-horn handle

Page. 59

Fiorentini

No.8 Fiorentino
stag-horn handle

No.10 Fiorentino
ox-horn handle

No. 68 Fiorentino
ox-horn handle

Page. 60

Bersaglieri

Simple handle and simple spring (one edition)

A variation of the Florentine knife it retains all the principal characteristics of the original knife. Its name comes from the Italian Bersaglieri (Army Rifle Regiments) who used the knife because it could be extracted very quickly when needed "on the run" due to the absence of the broad band guard on the Fiorentino.

No.33 Bersagliere
ox-horn handle

Page. 61

Senesi
Simple handle and simple spring (two editions)

From the Fiorentino family, without the band or button on the handle. Also known as the scimitar knife and appreciated by farm workers, particularly Tuscans because of its sturdy shape similar to the more elegant Fiorentino. It was also cheaper to produce and so cost less.

No.11 Senese
box-wood handle
no.59 Senese
ox-horn handle

Page. 62

Zuave
Metal handle and simple spring (thirteen editions)

Certainly the strongest knife in the Scarperia production. Similar in shape to the Fiorentino, it differs in having a metal encasing inside the handle and solid metal heads making it indestructible. Faithful companion of the farm worker it was used for both eating and working. Its name recalls the old French military corps the Zuavi, probably because of the type of blade often referred to as "French style" blade.

No.3 Zuava
ox-horn handle

No.17 Zuava
engraved brass handle

Page. 63

Zuave

No.19 Zuava
box-wood handle

No.20 Zuava
bone handle

No.34 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

Page. 64

Zuave

No.35 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

No.36 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

No.37 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

Page. 65

No.38 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

No.39 Zuava engraved
ox-horn handle

No.56 Zuava
ox-horn handle

Page. 66

Zuave

No.57 Zuava
bone handle

No.58 Zuava
amourette handle

Page. 67

Maremmani

Simple handle and simple spring (seven editions)

Traditionally black, the Maremmano knife is one of the oldest in the Scarperia production. It was certainly in production at the beginning of 1800's and went out of production after the last war. Its name indicates its origins in the Maremma, the swampy coastal land that extends from southern Tuscany to Civitavecchia in Lazio. One can be found among the knives (now conserved in the museum of criminology in Rome) which were handed over by rioters to Cardinal Franco Pentini in 1848, who was called to put down a rebellion which broke out in the penitentiary in Civitavecchia.

No.2 Maremmano
leaf ox-horn handle

Page. 68

Maremmani

No.14 Maremmano
ox-horn handle

No.21 Maremmano
ox-horn handle

No.40 Maremmano engraved
ox-horn handle

Page. 69

Maremmani

No.54 Maremmano
buffalo-horn handle

No.55 Maremmano
box-wood handle

No.67 Maremmano
leaf ox-horn handle

Page. 70

Abruzzesi & Gobbi

Simple or metal handle and simple spring (ten editions)

It is derived from a knife typical of Loreto Aprutino and is characterized by a straight blade and a curved handle. In fact the knife is commonly referred to as "Gobbo" meaning hunchback. Many variations of this shape can be found in the Scarperia production. Destined for agricultural use, a

faithful companion to farm workers in the central and southern parts of Italy. Its pointed sharp blade and shape made it an excellent defensive tool.

No.4 Gobbo
ox-horn handle

Page. 71

Abruzzesi & Gobbi

No.13 Abruzzese
box-wood handle

No.18 Gobbo
engraved brass handle

No.22 Gobbo
box-wood handle

Page. 72

Abruzzesi & Gobbi

No.23 Gobbo
ox-horn handle

No.24 Gobbo
bone handle

No.25 Gobbo
ox-horn handle

Page. 73

Abruzzesi & Gobbo

No.50 Clemente
aluminium handle

No.51 Cherubino
aluminium handle

No.53 Abruzzese
ox-horn handle

Page. 74

Vernantini

Simple handle with spring (four editions)

This knife is from Vernante, a town in the province of Cuneo. The rather wide and pointed blade has a small button which blocks the opening movement ensuring the blade does not close inadvertently during use. Used for agricultural and domestic work.

No.16 Vernante
ox-horn handle

Page. 75

Vernantini

No.60 Vernante
box-wood handle

No.61 Vernante
ox-horn handle

No.62 Vernante
ox-horn handle

Page. 76

Tre Pianelle
Simple handle and simple spring (three editions)

Typical Scarperia knife which gets its name from the three distinct planes on the blade. Used only for defensive purposes and produced in ancient times with two cutting edges. It went out of production in early part of the 20th century due to laws prohibiting its production and use. Current laws allow the blade to be produced but with only one cutting edge.

No.28 Tre Pianelle
ox-horn handle

Page. 77

Tre Pianelle

No.31 Tre Pianelle
buffalo-horn handle

No.32 Tre Pianelle
ox-horn handle

Page. 78

Napoletani
Simple handle and simple spring (three editions)

Among the knives in production in Scarperia around the second half of the 1800's. It is not clear whether this particular knife derived from a model originally produced in Naples. It is certain however that it belongs to the group of knives used of the point of the blade as well as for cutting. This knife was particularly appreciated in southern Italy. It was produced in Scarperia, sold in Naples and all around the Campania region.

No.5 Napoletano
ox-horn handle

Page. 79

Napoletani

No.12 Napoletano
buffalo-horn handle

No.63 Napoletano
ox-horn handle

Page. 80

Calabrese
Simple knife handle and simple spring (one edition)

Despite its name, this knife has nothing to do with the famous knives made in Calabria. It is suitable for point use as well as cutting. It was produced in large quantities in Scarperia back in the 1800's and then exported to Calabria.

No.29 Calabrese
ox-horn handle

Page. 81

Roncole

Knife handle with metallic structure and simple spring (one edition)

The Roncolo is not exactly a knife, but it has a similar structure and in some cases the same function. It comes from the "roncola", a fixed blade tool of antique origin, suitable for cutting branches and wood. Light and easy to use it can be carried comfortably in a pocket. It has always been a worthy reserve knife for farm workers. Ideal for fruit picking, collecting vegetables and gardening.

No.15 Roncola
ox-horn handle

Page. 82

The Palmerini

Simple knife handle without spring, with one or two blades (four editions)

These pen knives, destined for office use, are the descendants of antique desk accessories which were fitted with small blades to sharpen the point of goose quills, or to scrape ink off parchment. Later they were used for sharpening pencils and cutting paper before disappearing from writing desks indefinitely. Faithful companions to anyone who ever worked at a desk.

No.9 Palmerini with two blades,
buffalo-horn handle

Page. 83

No.26 Palmerino with two blades,
ox-horn handle

No.27 Palmerino with one blade,
ox-horn handle

No.30 Palmerino with one blade,
buffalo-horn handle

Page. 84

Castrini

Simple knife handle without spring (two editions)

This knife has a specific use: to castrate animals and to perform small surgical operations. Used by veterinary surgeons and farm workers. It was never carried around in the pocket but jealously guarded to assure its perfect working condition when needed.

No.65 The Castrino knife
With two edges and ox-horn handle

No.66 The Castrino knife
ox-horn handle

Page. 85

Convivio

A knife of contemporary design, created to revive an old Italian tradition; that of having a personal knife at the table either at home or in a restaurant. It derives from the "Coltellina" of Scarperia, small knives which at the beginning of the 1900's adorned many of the tables in Tuscany.

No.64 Convivio knife
with ox-horn handle

Page. 86

Pontormo

Fixed blade knife with buffalo-horn handle(one edition)

It is the reproduction of a knife that appears in a painting by Pontormo (Cena in Emmaus), on exhibition at the Uffizi gallery in Florence. Its shape distinguishes it as a multifunctional knife used for hunting, defence, work, an inseparable companion, which can even be used at the table.

No.49 Pontormo

buffalo-horn handle

Page. 87

Coltelli d'Amore (The Love knives)

Simple handle spring with a lock

There is a symbolic significance twofold attached to the love knife made originally to be exchanged between the betrothed couple. When given to the man, it was meant to inspire courage and virility, or prevail over the social order. When given to the woman she was to defend her honour to the death.

For both it had an archaic ritual meaning, to sanction the marriage contract.

The handle, usually of black buffalo horn, is adorned with the classic "occhi di dado" which transform the knife into an amulet against the evil eye. After the wedding, these knives were usually hung on the wall above the bed.

No.41 Love knife engraved

with stag-horn handle

No.42 Love knife engraved

with buffalo-horn handle

Page. 88

Front loading gun knife

Simple handle with simple spring (one edition)

A knife of ancient origins and an indispensable accessory for front loading guns. It has a robust blade and encased in its handle a pin useful for cleaning gun wicks and a screwdriver for tightening gunstock screws.

No.43 Front loading gun knife

with buffalo horn handle

Page. 89

San Potito

Simple handle, spring with lock (one edition)

A knife with a particular shape and construction designed for personal defence. It gets its name from a town called "San Potito di Romagna" where it was produced for a long time. It is noted for having been an inseparable companion of the brigand "Passatore", natives of Romagna, famous at the end of 1800s.

No.44 The San Potito

with ox-horn handle

Page. 90

Pattada

Simple handle without spring (one edition)

Pattada is a town situated in the province of Sassari, Sardinia, which vants an antique tradition of craftsmanship in the production of knives. It is one of the rare cases where knives are still produced in their place of origin. It is probably the most famous Italian regional knife with an

elegant shape that distinguishes it immediately as being a perfect tool for the farm worker. It served also as a means of defence for shepherds living alone in isolated pastures.

No.48 The Pattada
Ram-horn handle

Page. 91

Arburesi
Simple handle without spring (two editions)

Arbus is a town in western Sardinia in the province of Oristano, where this famous knife gets its name. Originally destined for pastoral use as the Pattada, it is essentially different in shape and finishing. Less elegant, but equally strong and sharp. There are two existing editions: one with a wide blade for skinning and one with a pointed blade. Examples of this knife can be seen in exhibition at the Museum in Cagliari which has been put together from various important 19th century exhibitions, demonstrating the notoriety of this knife of more than over a century ago.

No.46 Abrurese
ram-horn handle

No.47 Abrurese
ram-horn handle

Page. 92

The Regional knives box sets.

Our knives are sold in an attractive box, on the back of which can be found the number and name of the knife. The box can be easily stored.

The box contains

- a leather sheath for storing the knife
- a cloth for cleaning the knife
- a catalogue illustrating the complete range of the Regional Knife Collection
- a booklet explaining the correct use of the knife and the precautions to take
- a coin: to remind you of a widespread and deeply rooted tradition. Sharp and pointed objects are usually excluded from gift lists as they are considered bearers of bad luck so it is customary to repay such a gift with a coin to ward off any ill omens.

Page. 93

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 94

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 95

The Italian Regional Knives box set.

- 1 the box set closed
- 2 leather sheath for the knife
- 3 cloth for cleaning the knife
- 4 catalogue of the regional knives collection
- 5 booklet which explains how to use the knife and precautions to take
- 6 the box set open

Page. 96

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 97

The Regional knife display cases.
Tradition on show.

Page. 98

A Space dedicated to tradition.

A simple wooden display case. Handmade. Complete with imperfections rendering each one unique. Testimony and homage to craftsmanship. Tradition, custom, history. Italy. Maybe this is the reason why it can be found in 400 of the best restaurants in Italy and Europe and in 50 of the most renowned "coltellerie" in Italy. All of them know the time has come to dedicate a unique space to tradition.

Page. 99

No.155 Display case for one knife

The display case no.155 can hold any of the knives from the Italian Regional Knife Collection.

Page. 100

No.156 Display case for six knives

The display case no.156 can hold any group of six knives from the Italian Regional Knife Collection.

Page. 101

No.157 Display case for seven knives

The display case no.157 can hold any group of seven knives from the Italian Regional Knife Collection.

Page 102

xxxxxxx

Page 103

THE SEVERINI COLLECTION.

With you always,
like in the old days.

Page 104

The Severini collection.

With you always, like in the old days.

With you always, like in the old days. The faithful pocket companion is once again with you. A favourite of Severino Berti who never left his house without it. The knife ready for anything from opening bank letters, cutting parcel strings and trimming rope ends. A robust knife set on a brass plate according to the tradition. In use in Scarperia around the beginning of the 20th. Century. Reviving a past tradition, distant yet still present.

The Severini presentation (No. 170 – 171)

Page 105

No. 170 Zuave alla bersagliera ox-horn handle

No. 171 'Gobbo' alla bersagliera ox-horn handle

Page 106

Xxxxxxxx

Page 107

Magnum.
the writing desk series.

page 108

Magnum.
the writing desk series.

All cutlers at some point in their career feel the need to show the skills they have acquired over the years of experience. Extra large versions of knives for everyday use are turned into something quite extraordinary. Minute details are enlarged to proportion and perfected to the millimetre. Days and days of hard work and loving care are needed to create these extra large knives. Berti has selected six from the Italian Regional Knives Collection for magnification. The final test is under the magnifying glass and that's how one becomes a master cutler: and the reason why the Magnum series was created.

Page 109

No. 180 Fiorentino with ox-horn handle

No. 182 Maremmano with olive leaf blade, ox-horn handle

NO. 183 Maremmano with flat blade, ox-horn handle

Page 110

No. 184 Gobbo with ox-horn handle

No. 186 Prussian Knife with ox-horn handle

No. 188 Razor blade cigar cutter with ox-horn handle

Page 111

The Magnum series box set (no. 180-188)

Page 112

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page 113

Cigar cutters.

The act and pleasure of smoking

Page 114

Dedicated to David

cigar cutter for the table

In honour of the founder of the family business David Berti, Coltellerie Berti have dedicated their tabletop cigar cutter to smokers of Toscani cigars everywhere. In David's time, the second half of the 19th. Century, cutting a Toscano cigar in half was more a question of necessity than taste. Those who could afford to go to the tobacconists' were forced to buy just half a cigar: which the tobacconist cut there and then with a cigar cutter kept on the counter. Unable to afford a half David Berti, like many other of the cutlers in Scarperia, resorted to more drastic measures. He lit the end of a remnant of a horn shaving which had been used to make a knife handle, held it between his lips and inhaled the bitter taste. Today, in these less frugal times, we have dedicated the tabletop cigar cutter to David Berti and the scorched edges of the right side of his mouth.

Page 115

No. 195 Tabletop cigar cutter, with elm base and ox-horn handle.

Page 116

At the "Symposium Quattro Stagioni" Restaurant, Cartocerto, Pesaro.

Page 117

The Cut and the taste.

The kitchen knife collection.

Page 118

Lucio Pompili

"Symposium Quattro Stagioni" Restaurant, Cartocerto, Pesaro.

Page 119

December the 28th. 2001 we were out to lunch with chef Lucio Pompili, proprietor of the "Symposium Quattro Stagioni" restaurant in Cartocerto (Pesaro). The idea was that by putting a large assorted collection of our knives at Lucio and his staff's disposal; which they were to use

freely and however they pleased , we would be able to determine the unlimited uses of the Berti kitchen knife collection. Putting our knives in the expert hands of the professionals, we believed was the most natural and realistic way to determine what traditional knives can really do. Today.

Page 120

The last team of ox of Giuseppe Martini (maternal grandfather of Andrea Berti)

Page 121

Forged knives.
The kitchen collection.

Good cooking requires careful precise gestures. Flavour, taste, cooking time and the end results depend on details both great and small. The correct cut is decisive: those who believe in the quality of their work place great importance on the tools they work with. The finest forged steels, the most functional forms and precise attention to detail have gone into the knives created by Coltellerie Berti, for those who love cooking.

Page 122

Two words you need to know:

Forged. Forged steel is stronger, therefore a knife whose blade has been forged is more resistant and in the final analysis has a superior cut. The increased strength and resistance are obtained through chemical reactions by adding vanadium, molybdenum, as well as other substances. Another reason for using forged steel is to obtain blades with “bolsters” , in other words the shoulder which separates the blade from the handle. An altogether fascinating process, forging places an ulterior value on the knife.

Tang. Referring to a specific part of the knife with a fixed blade. There are two main styles of fixed blade knives. These styles relate to the way the handle is secured to the end of the knife, to the part called the tang. It is basically an extension of the blade and can be visible or hidden. When it is a full tang it can be seen sandwiched between the two side plates of the handle called scales. Hidden tangs are inserted into the handle and can not be seen. This type of handle is a whole piece and has a more rounded and solid feel in the hand and therefore adapt for heavy duty use.

Page 123

Forged knife
Half tang with whole handle bolster tang whole handle

Forged knife
Full tang with scale handle rivets scale bolster tang

Page 124

Xxxxxxxx

Page 125

Carvers and slicers.
Bread, Roasts, Hams and Salmon.

Page 126

Bread knife: a serrated blade is ideal for all oven baked pastries and breads.

Page 127

Cutting focaccia with the help of a carving fork:....

Page 128

...not altogether orthodox....

Page 129

...though elegant and above all practical.

Page 130

No.202 Bread knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.232 Bread knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 131

No.262 Bread knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.292 Bread Knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 132

No. 201 Carving knife with whole ox-horn handle
No. 231 Carving knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 133

No. 261 Carving knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No. 291 Carving knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 134

Even though its name indicates Parma ham....

Page 135

...this knife also ideal for many different cuts of cold meats.

Page 136

But not for all: since the more seasoned and solid forms of salami....

Page 137

...need to be cut with a less flexible blade, as Lucio shows here with his choice of the boning knife.

Page 138

No.200 Parma ham knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.230 Parma ham knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 139

No.260 Parma ham knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.290 Parma ham knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 140

No.203 Salmon knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.233 Salmon knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 141

No.263 Salmon knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.293 Salmon knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 142

Xxxxxxxx

Page 143

The hard work knives.
Chopping, boning, paring and filleting.

Page 144

The versatile chefs knife can take on various jobs in the kitchen

Page 145

Xxxxxxxx

Page 146

Xxxxxxxx

Page 147

...even the trickiest of pineapples.

Page 148

No.205 Chef's knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.235 Chef's knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 149

No.265 Chef's knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.295 Chef's knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 150

No.206 Meat knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.236 Meat knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 151

No.266 Meat knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.296 Meat knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 152

No.207 Vegetable knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.237 Vegetable knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 153

No.267 Vegetable knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.297 Vegetable knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 154

No.208 Boning knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.238 Boning knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 155

No.268 Boning knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.298 Boning knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 156

No.209 Pesto knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.239 Pesto knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 157

No.269 Pesto knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.299 Pesto knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 158

No.225 Fish filleting knife with whole ox-horn handle
No.255 Fish filleting knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 159

No.285 Fish filleting knife with full tang ox-horn handle
No.315 Fish filleting knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 160

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Page 161

Paring
The edges.

Page 162

Peeling and preparing fruit with just a knife and fork....

Page 163

... not just any knife, the right knife and... the right amount of skill.

Page 164

The curved paring knife tackles most fruit and vegetables

Page 165

...its curved blade is ideal for cleaning, scraping and peeling.

Page 166

No.215 Straight edged paring knife with whole ox-horn handle

No.245 Straight edged paring knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 167

No.275 Straight edged paring knife with full tang ox-horn handle

No.305 Straight edged paring knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 168

No.216 Curve edged paring knife with whole ox-horn handle

No.246 Curve edged paring knife with whole box-wood handle

Page 169

No.276 Curve edged paring knife with full tang ox-horn handle

No.306 Curve edged paring knife with full tang box-wood handle

Page 170

Xxxxxxxx

Page 171

Sharpening Steels and Carving Forks
essential accomplices

Page 172

The blade has to be toned up frequently.

Page 173

As every good chef knows.

Page 174

No.220 Carving fork with whole ox-horn handle

No.250 Carving fork with whole box-wood handle

Page 175

No.280 Carving fork with full tang ox-horn handle

No.310 Carving fork with full tang box-wood handle

Page 176

No.221 Sharpener with whole ox-horn handle

No.251 Sharpener with whole box-wood handle

Page 177

No.281 Sharpener with full tang ox-horn handle

No.311 Sharpener with full tang box-wood handle

Page 178

'I Forgiati' presentation set

Forged kitchen knife with whole handle (no.200-225)

Page 179

'I Forgiati' presentation set
Forged kitchen knife with full tang handle
(no.260-315)

page 180

XXXXXXXXX

Page 181

The complete kitchen
Box sets and blocks

Page 182

No.320 Box set of four kitchen knives with whole ox-horn handles
No.330 Box set of four kitchen knives with whole box-wood handles

Page 183

No.340 Box set of four kitchen knives with full tang ox-horn handles
No.350 Box set of four kitchen knives with full tang box-wood handles

Page 184

No.325 Set of five kitchen knives with whole ox-horn handles and pair stainless steel scissors.

Page 185

No.335 Set of five kitchen knives with whole box-wood handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 186

No.345 Set of five kitchen knives with full tang ox-horn handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 187

No.355 Set of five kitchen knives with full tang box-wood handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 188

No.326 Set of eight kitchen knives with whole ox-horn handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 189

No.336 Set of eight kitchen knives with whole box-wood handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 190

No.346 Set of eight kitchen knives with full tang ox-horn handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 191

No.356 Set of eight kitchen knives with full tang box-wood handles and pair of stainless steel scissors.

Page 192

No.321 Selected set of chef's blades. Seven forged kitchen knives with whole ox-horn handles.

Page 193

No.331 Selected box set of chef's blades. Seven forged kitchen knives with whole box-wood handles.

Page 194

No.341 Selected box set of chef's blades. Seven forged kitchen knives with full tang ox-horn handles.

Page 195

No.351 Selected box set of chef's blades. Seven forged kitchen knives with full tang box-wood handles.

Page 196

No.322 Selected box set of service blades. Seven forged kitchen knives with whole ox-horn handles.

Page 197

No.332 Selected box set of service blades. Seven forged knives with whole box-wood handles.

Page 198

No.342 Selected box set of service blades. Seven forged knives with full tang ox-horn handles.

Page 199

No.352 Selected box set of service blades. Seven forged knives with full tang box-wood handles.

Page 200

I Forgiati.

Complete box set

"Nature urges man to perform religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, which not only serve as testimonies to a culture but also to man's spiritual observance of god ". Preparing our food daily, whether for ourselves or for family and friends, is a simple gesture full of ancient acts with profound meaning. The result of centuries of civilisation that we are losing today. Coltellerie Berti have dedicated this complete collection of knives for every rite and ritual in the kitchen and ceremony at the table. The name "I Trinciante" is taken from the work by Vincenzo Cervio, dedicated to the culture of knives.

Page 201

I Forgiati.

Complete box set of fourteen forged knives.

Page 202

No.323 The complete Forgiati.

Fourteen forged knife set with whole ox-horn handles.

Page 203

No.333 The complete Forgiati.

Fourteen forged knife set with whole box-wood handles.

Page 204

No.343 The complete Forgiati.

Fourteen forged knife set with full tang ox-horn handles.

Page 205

No. 353 The complete Forgiati.

Fourteen forged knife set with full tang box-wood handles.

Page 206

Xxxxxxxx

Page 207

Il Pontormo.

From the scene "Cena in Emmaus" onto our table.

Page 208

Il Pontormo is a 'universal' knife, ideal for those who prefer to operate in the kitchen with just one knife.



Page 209

Just one of the operations possible with a Pontormo and naturally with the right amount of skill.

Page 210

Il Pontormo

From the scene "Cena in Emmaus"
onto our table.

In the painting "Cena in Emmaus" by Pontormo at the Uffizi Gallery, there is a knife on the table. The knife is being used at a banquet. During Pontormo's time, the high Renaissance, it was common practice to use one's own knife at the table. The knife was a faithful companion: used in self defence, on the hunt or while travelling. We have faithfully reproduced the strong subtle lines of the knife in the banquet scene. It can be used to cut cheeses, fruit and meat. Reviving an ancient tradition.

Page 211

No.360 Pontormo with ox-horn handle and knife block.

No.361 Pontormo with buffalo horn handle and knife block.

No.362 Pontormo with box-wood handle and knife block.

Page 212

Pontormo with knife block

Page 213

The Pontormo box set with knife block (No.360-362)

Page 214

Xxxxxxxx

Page 215

The Valentina Collection.

Scissors, half moons & poultry shears.

Page 216

Lifting a whole chicken without tearing it by using a carving fork and knife.

Page 217

Poultry shears.

Page 218

Xxxxxxxx

Page 219

The Valentina Collection.

Tradition in the kitchen.

In the kitchens of Scarperia all the women had to be economical in the kitchen. Food was a precious gift, not to be wasted. All meals were prepared sparingly and the kitchenware, usually always wedding gifts, had to last a life time. Daily rituals and acts in the kitchen are what determined "home sweet home" for many. This collection is dedicated to Valentina, daughter of a scissors maker and wife of Severino Berti, and all the other cooks in Scarperia.

Page 220

No.370 Poultry shears with ox-horn handles

No.371 Poultry shears with buffalo horn handles

No.372 Poultry shears with box-wood handles

Page 221

Poultry shears box set (No.370-372)

Page 222

No.380 Stainless steel kitchen scissors

Page 223

Kitchen scissors box set (No.380)

Page 224

The half moon: in three dimensions, depending on the size of the job at hand.

Page 225

Xxxxxxxx

Page 226

No.390 Half moon with ox-horn handle, 15cm. blade

No.391 Half moon with ox-horn handle, 20cm. blade

Page 227

No.395 Half moon with "bubinga" wood handle, 15cm. blade

No.396 Half moon with "bubinga" wood handle, 20cm. blade

No.397 Half moon with "bubinga" wood handle, 23cm. blade

Page 228

The half moon box set (No.390-397)

Page 229

XXXXXXX

Page. 230

"Symposium. Quattro Stagioni" restaurant, Cartoceto, Pesaro.

Page. 231

The art of carving.

The service knives.

Page. 232

Carving roast pheasant.

Service knives: 1 Boning knife, 1 Carving fork.

Place pheasant on a cutting board holding the joint with fork remove legs.

Holding firmly with fork at the base of the joint and cut, not too deeply, along the breastbone.

Page. 233

In this way juices formed under the skin while cooking will penetrate and soften the rest of the meat.

Using the fork separate the two parts of the breast from the carcass.

Place on a warm plate. Both parts are sufficient for one portion.

Page. 234

Carving roast chicken.

Service knives: 1 Carving knife, 1 Carving fork.

Place chicken on a cutting board and remove wings.

Holding the breast with the fork cut round the leg neatly with carving knife to remove from carcass without tearing or pulling on the meat. Always use the tip of the knife to remove meat from the bone.

Page. 235

Using the same technique remove both legs.

Holding the base of the joint firmly with carving fork separate the “parson’s nose” from the carcass, without taking off the skin.

Four portions of breast meat can be cut from one part of the breast; two by carving along the wing section and another two using the breastbone as a guide for the remaining meat.

Page. 236

Carving roast leg of lamb.

Service knives: 1 Carving knife, 1 Boning knife, 1 Carving fork.

To help carving wrap a napkin around the leg bone and place joint on a cutting board. Begin with the carver and slightly inclining the knife carve slices of approximately 3mm. thick until reaching the bone knuckle. These first slices are not attached to the bone so use a single action cut.

Continue carving the fleshy part of the joint on the right side just above the bone knuckle, Remember to turn the joint while carving so that meat from all parts of the joint are served, to appreciate fully the various flavours.

Page. 237

Carve until reaching the bone and when the required number of slices have been carved, using the boning knife separate the meat from the bone by passing it along the bone. Continue carving the joint in this way until reaching the collar of the joint.

The “collar” is the part of the leg of lamb near the knee and can not be carved. Using the boning knife cut around the bone and then slice contrary to the grain of the meat. In order to appreciate the full flavour of the meat it is usual practice to serve each guest with slices meat from all parts of the joint including the “collar”.

Page. 238

Carving a rack of lamb.

Service knives: 1 Meat knife, 1 Carving fork.

Using the flat of large meat knife holding the joint firmly near the last two bones with the carving fork transfer rack of lamb to a cutting board.

Begin carving by separating the rib bones and sectioning the rack-joint.

Page. 239

The best cut is to use the tip of the knife and push downwards along the whole length of the blade. This same cut can also be used for racks of pork and veal.

Page. 240

Carving roast veal.

Service knives: 1 Smooth edged knife (prosciutto or meat carver), 1 Carving fork.

Roast veal should be presented at the table before carving. Place on a cutting board using the flat of the carver and fork remove the string. Hold the joint firmly with the fork without actually piercing the meat and begin carving by holding the tip of knife in a slightly downward position. Using virtually the whole length of the blade slice the joint.

Once the knife touches the cutting board lift and place it another 3mm. along the joint and cut another slice. Continuing this way slices are fine and uniform.

Page. 241

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 242

Carving roast turkey and capon.

Service knives: Carving knife, Meat knife, Carving fork

Holding the turkey firmly with the carving fork, with the tip of the meat knife cut the skin away around the leg to uncover the leg joint and separate from the carcass. Then still using the tip of the knife divide the turkey leg into two parts by separating the thigh from the lower part.

Remove the thigh bone and carve the boneless meat into slices of around 5/7 mm.

Page. 243

After removing and carving both legs remove the wings with the meat knife by cutting above the wing joint and across the carcass up to the wishbone.

Now the turkey can be carved into slices perpendicularly to the previous incision. Continue cutting until the breastbone first on one side and then the other.

Page. 244

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 245

The Carving Sets

Page. 246

Carving a rack of lamb under the watchful eyes of the guests.

Page. 247

Religiously performed by Lucio Pompili with the "Symposium" carving set.

Page. 248

No.550 Carving set with whole ox-horn handles

Page. 249

No.551 Carving set with whole box-wood handles

Page. 250

No.555 Carving set with full tang ox-horn handles

Page. 251

No.556 Carving set with full tang box-wood handles

Page. 252

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 253

Symposium.
Cartoceto.

Page. 254

Using Symposium on boiled beef

Page. 255

Its form makes carving an altogether enjoyable experience.

Page. 256

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 257

Xxxxxxxx

Page. 258

Symposium
Cartoceto.

If there were such a knife...beautiful, that felt good to hold, but above all was practical and versatile in the kitchen. Not only the ideal companion for a great chef but a knife for everyday use in any kitchen.... Well there is and it is with great pleasure we dedicate it to our friend and Chef, Lucio Pompili, the first to appreciate and use it in his restaurant "Symposium" in Cartoceto.

No.560 Symposium- carving set with buffalo-horn handles

Page. 259

The Symposium box set (No.560)

Page. 260

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 261

The Italians.

A complete guide to cutting more than four hundred and fifty Italian cheeses (and as many foreign cheeses) correctly.

Page. 262

Italiani.

For Italian cheeses. And all the others.....

Taken from a letter by the architect Marco Parenti

Dear Andrea,

You have asked me to illustrate and explain the characteristics of a set of blades adapt for Italian cheeses to help you create a line called "The Italians". What a great idea! It is no surprise that the best carvers, who gratified and delighted the Renaissance Courts with their art of carving, were actually Italians.

However you must be careful, because if we are to devise and make a set of knives for Italian cheeses, they should also be adapt for every type of cheese on earth!

Our cheeses are 'unique and many', as our friends on the other side of the Alps would say, we have more than four hundred types of cheese, each one different in consistency, flavour and preparation. They, on the other hand, would like to think of their cheeses as being numerous because they change the shape or refine the taste with various saucy concoctions but there really are very few cheeses that are truly different.

Page. 263

The idea then should be to keep in mind not only the principal differences in cheeses but also the needs of consumers, gourmets or epicurean connoisseurs who seek the pleasure of savouring the finer things in life, food.

I am sending you some of my thoughts, take a look and let me know. In the meantime, I send you my most savoury cheese-like regards!

Architect Marco Parenti

Page. 264

Why it is so important to cut cheese correctly.

It is universally accepted that the perfect cut is an indispensable prerequisite to fully appreciating any food. Imagine how important this is for someone like myself, who was born and raised in a family that has passed down the art of knife making for more than one hundred years. However the idea that cutting cheese could become the object of such passion to others, like Marco Parenti, surprised and even touched me. When you discover there is someone who feels strongly enough to write a book dedicated to the art of cutting cheese then all efforts made to carry on the almost outdated tradition of making knives, are fully justified and probably, just probably, increasing all the time.

It is not only in the name aesthetics or indeed good taste, but good manners require the appropriate cut for cheeses. As we all know meats require a smooth slicing cut with a sharp non-serrated knife in order not to lose the juices and fluids conserved in the joint.

Page 265

Cheese too, needs to be cut according to a proper criteria in order to savour it fully.

The reason is clear and simple enough although not widely known. Most cheeses present variations in flavour according to the part of the cheese tasted. In other words, the taste of cheese is different in the centre to for example another part of the cheese, particularly near the crust.

Therefore savouring a cheese properly means it should be cut only when fully aware of the entire range of tastes in the various parts.

In order to do this, specific tools for the job are required: knives that tradition has perfected over the course of time; shaping them according to consistency and the various shapes and sizes of the innumerable cheeses which have always been produced in Italy.

This is mainly the reason why and how this set of knives came about: to consent the perfect cut as a sort of tribute to this humble yet noble food.

Andrea Berti

Page.266

Cutting cheese

architect Marco Parenti reveals the secrets

Cutting cheese properly means distributing the same properties, aromas, scents and consistencies to each cut of the cheese; liberating all the wonders that this nectar can bestow, making our taste buds come alive! It's important to know the cheese well, since not all cheeses have the same shape and not all cheeses have a uniform taste. Dairy cheeses for example have thick non-edible crusts while others have only thin veils of penicilliums developed during maturation. The outer layer of the cheese should only be eaten with the body of the cheese itself as observed by the connoisseur Pierre Androuet.

Furthermore, there are cheeses which are actually tastier near the crust due to maturation and some connoisseurs prefer this part of the cheese to that of the centre.

Page. 267

This is why then every cheese and form of cheese needs a particular method of cutting.

The starting point for choosing the correct type of cut is the shape of the cheese itself.

When working on segments or slices of cheese geometric notions are no longer necessary, it is probably better to address the simpler discussion

Page. 268

of proportion, not forgetting of course the cheese type since portioning should enhance its unique flavours and tastes. In fact I have noted that the parts near the crust in Fontina, Tome Stravecchie and Panerone cheeses are rather tasty and depriving a guest of such a pleasure just in order to serve equal portions of the crust is not really in the name of 'good taste'. So when sizing up a great piece of cheese geometrically it is essential to take into consideration the different tastes since the quality of the cheese is most definitely enhanced when cut accordingly.

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Page. 270

The cut and the texture of cheese

The cut is a clean separation of the body of the cheese made without chipping or tearing the walls. The clean cut is when the resistance offered by the texture of the cheese is inferior to that of the cutting force of the blade, which in turn has to be thin enough not to create cracking or separation. This is why particular blades are chosen according to the texture of the cheese. It is also important to remember that cheese fibres are different to those of meat and they do not cause "friction", which happens when slicing meat or salami. Cutting cheese entails only one smooth downward cut.

Page. 271

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Page. 272

Every cheese has a knife

Every cheese needs a precise cutting ritual and presentation at the table. Shape, texture and size determine the specific cut for each type of cheese and therefore the correct knife or blade needed.

1. the bow
2. the compact knife
3. the spatula knife
4. the trapezium knife
5. the soft cheese knife
6. the hard cheese knife
7. the semi-hard cheese knife

Page. 273

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 274

The hard-cheese knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: matured Asiago, hard Bra, Bitto, Provolone, Toma Stravecchio, Montasio, Calcagno and all cheeses with similar characteristics. How to use this knife: cutting hard cheeses requires a certain force in order to overcome the resistance due to the hard texture of the cheese. A suitable knife must have a thin blade but it must be wide and strong enough to support the force of the cut and cleanly separate the cheese.

Page. 275

The force must be concentrated on the handle and only in cases of extreme resistance should the other hand be used, by pressing on the back of the blade. Be careful! In order to avoid fraying of the cheese, the cut must be clean and precise without any sliding movement. The knife must penetrate the cheese perpendicular to the resting plane and must cut from top to bottom with a uniform pressure. The cut must be well balanced and the knife must penetrate perfectly horizontal, to avoid breaking the cheese at the end of the cut.

No. 460 Hard cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page. 276

The semi-hard cheese knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Fontina, Raschera, fresh Toma, Swiss Emmenthal, young Asiago, Sicialian Canistrato and all similar cheeses. How to use this knife: the semi-hard texture of these

cheeses requires a light, easy to handle knife, shaped to cut without causing chipping or tearing which occurs when the blade is too wide and thick.

Page. 277

The blade must be sharp enough to cut the crust which is generally more consistent than the internal part of the cheese. This is why the knife is slightly curved at the centre, almost like a wedge. This knife can be transformed into a type of saw with a short oblique movement when the crust is very resistant. This allows the person cutting to use a uniform pressure thereby avoiding any chipping of the underlying parts. The pressure applied must be modest and perpendicular to the resting plane, to avoid any inopportune flexion.

No.461 Semi hard cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page. 278

The soft cheese knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Gorgonzola, Mozzarella, Robiole, the Quartiolo cheeses of the Val Camonica, Murianego, Panerone and all similar types of cheese. How to use this knife: the blade for soft cheeses must cut cleanly without sticking, or causing chipping or cracking.

Page. 279

The person cutting must cut decisively with an initial movement inclined towards the resting plane, creating a fulcrum on the end of the knife, moving the rest of the blade perpendicular to the resting plane, in a rotating or circular sense. When a cheese is extremely soft, one wishes to avoid it sticking to the blade, thus horribly disfiguring the cheese. I will let you in on a little secret: moisten the blade with damp cloth. This reduces friction and facilitates the sliding of the blade through a soft cheese.

No.462 Soft cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page.280

The Compact knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: this knife is generally used for cheeses which are very deep and round in form for example Parmigiano, mature Pecorino, Fiore Sardo, Sicilian Canestrato, mature Castelmagno, Gavoi and other cheeses of the same characteristics. How to use this knife: this knife could substitute

Page. 281

excellently those knives with wedged, hooked or clawed blades, generally used for cutting and opening hard compact, grainy or chalky textures. The point needs to be placed uniformly and strongly onto the crust, pressing down on the blade the cheese falls away easily.

No.463 Compact knife with box-wood handle

Page. 282

The Trapezium knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Swiss Emmenthal, Provolone, Canestrato from Puglia, Fossa cheese from Sogliano soft Pecorino and other types of hard and semi-hard cheese with the same characteristics. How to use this knife: this substitutes bell, spade and horn shaped knives and is used for Swiss cheeses.

Page.283

It cuts hard and semi-hard cheeses, relatively high and large in diameter.

It is also used to cut pieces with solid forms. The pressure applied by the person cutting is concentrated on the handle and in a vertical direction in respect to the resting plane. This will cleanly cut the cheese, perfectly perpendicular to the crust according to Monsieur Jean Francois Guillontin's theory!

No.464 Trapezium knife with box-wood handle

Page. 284

The Spatula knife

Cheeses to cut with this knife: all cheeses soft enough to spread. How to use this knife: The spatula with a steel blade, although less refined than antique knives with a bone or ivory blade, is softer and more flexible and functions better when spreading very soft dairy cheeses. It is thin enough cut any type of cheese without chipping even though it doesn't have a distinct cutting edge.

No. 465 Spatula knife with box-wood handle

Page. 285

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Page. 286

The bow

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Stracchino, Robiola, soft Taleggio, Bossolasco, fresh goat's cheeses, Crescenza, Roman Ricotta, Piacentina, Seiras, fresh Tomini and all types of cheese with similar characteristics. How to use this knife: not very long ago, in the poorer farm kitchens of southern Italy, polenta was the main meal. A piece of string, hemp or intestine, was fixed to two small wooden pegs, and it was generally used to slice food. This tool was also used during large feasts to cut butter, fresh tometta or sieras cheese to add more flavour to a modest dish. Later on instead of using a simple string,

Page. 287

a more sophisticated device was invented by a creative shepherd. A bow made with a flexible wood of either willow, hazel, plum or rush which was held taut by a string. The results were that it allowed a more sophisticated cut, adding a certain style to a humble dish. I had the idea of proposing this in its original form (unknown to many) to pay homage to old farming traditions. It is widely used by many people who are convinced that cutting a fresh tometta or a warm ricotta with this simple but ingenious device, other than being an ancient and almost sacrificial ritual, requires care and attention when cutting which releases a more intense flavour and so one can savour the cheese fully.

No.466 Bow with bulrush structure

Page. 288

No.460 Hard cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page. 289

No.461 Semi-hard cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page. 290

No.462 Soft cheese knife with box-wood handle

Page. 291

No.464 Trapezium knife with box-wood handle

Page. 292

No.465 Spatula knife with box-wood handle

Page. 293

No.466 Bow with bulrush structure

Page. 294

No.463 Compact knife with 9cm. blade and box-wood handle

Page. 295

No.470 Compact knife with 10cm. blade and box-wood handle

Page. 296

No.475 Compact knife with 9cm. blade and ox-horn handle

Page. 297

No.476 Compact knife with 10cm. blade and ox-horn handle

Page. 298

Italiani

Every cheese has a knife

Every cheese needs a precise cutting ritual and presentation at the table. Shape, texture and size determine the specific cut for each type of cheese and therefore the correct knife or blade needed.

Page. 299

No. 450 Italiani.

Complete set of seven cheese knives with box-wood handles.

Page. 300

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 301

Piccoli Italiani.

A complete guide to serving more than four hundred and fifty Italian cheeses (and as many foreign cheeses) correctly.

Page. 302

Piccoli Italiani.

Every cheese has a knife.

Every cheese needs a precise cutting ritual and presentation at the table. Shape, texture and size determine the specific cut for each type of cheese and therefore the correct knife or blade needed.

Page. 303

No.500 Piccoli Italiani

Box set of five cheese knives with bubinga-wood handles.

Page. 304

Heart-shaped knife.

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Parmigiano, Grana, Matured Pecorino and all cheese of the same grainy, chalky characteristics. How to use this knife: cut into the cheese with the point of the knife just deep enough to release a small slither of cheese then rotate the knife edge in a downward position to release a larger chunk.

Page. 305

No.515 Heart-shaped knife with ox-horn handle

No.505 Heart-shaped knife with bubinga-wood knife

Page. 306

Small cheese fork

As you have probably well imagined this is used for actually serving the small cuts of cheese without damaging them, excepting of course those soft cheeses which have to be served directly with the spatula.

Page. 307

No. 516 Cheese fork with ox-horn handle
No. 506 Cheese fork with bubinga-wood handle

Page. 308

The bell-shaped cheese knife
Cheeses to cut with this knife: Emmanthal, Provolone, soft Pecorino, and all cheeses with the same characteristics of texture. How to use this knife: as in the case of soft cheeses the cut has to be one decisive downward movement.

Page. 309

No. 517 Bell-shaped cheese knife with ox-horn handle
No. 507 Bell-shaped cheese knife with bubinga-wood handle

Page. 310

The soft cheese knife
Cheeses to cut with this knife: Gorgonzola, Mozzarella, Robiola and all cheeses of the same soft texture. How to use this knife: place the blade flat on top of the cheese and apply pressure downwards with one decisive movement until the portion separates from the body.

Page. 311

No. 518 Soft cheese knife with ox-horn handle
No. 508 Soft cheese knife with bubinga-wood handle

Page. 312

The spatula cheese knife
Cheeses to cut with this knife: all cheeses which are soft enough to spread in texture. How to use this knife: place the blade flat on top of the cheese and pushing down flick wrist outwards which helps to separate the portion from the body.

Page. 313

No. 519 Spatula cheese knife with ox-horn handle
No. 509 Spatula cheese knife with bubinga wood handle

Page. 314

Box set of one of the knives from the Piccoli Italiani collection, with ox-horn handle

Page. 315

Box set of one of the knives from the Piccoli Italiani collection, with bubinga-wood handle

Page. 316

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Page. 317

A King's duo.

The fork and heart-shaped knife essential for serving the King of Cheeses at the table correctly.

Page.318

From a letter by the architect Marco Parenti.

Dear Andrea, Parmigiano (Parmesan) is the king of cheeses. For more than seven centuries it has been served at the most refined tables and is the ambassador par excellence of all Italian food. The first documents mentioning this gastronomic delight date back to the 1300's and all the oldest texts written about European cuisine refer to it as the essential ingredient for a royal lunch. Its fame is owed to an antique and laborious preparation of cow's milk produced in a well-defined area of the Padana valley in Northern Italy. The cheese is subject to endless quality controls until reaching perfection. It is a pale golden yellow colour and has a very fine grainy uniform texture with tiny crystals of tyrosine and minute air pockets almost invisible to the naked eye. It must have a round flavour, be tasty but not spicy with a fragrant aroma and delicate base. The aroma must be intense, pleasant, slightly fizzy and fresh.

Page. 319

It is precisely due to its full-bodied consistency and structure that Parmigiano cannot be cut but "opened" and then "chiselled at" to flake off chips of cheese using the appropriate knives. The art of cutting parmesan is the geometric eloquence of chiselling off parts while maintaining the shape so that every part has the same ratio of rind, pulp and heart. When a whole slab is opened at first it is necessary to use a hook shaped knife which splits the rind then with an almond or heart shaped blade, penetrate the body of the cheese and finally with a scalpel-type knife the slab is split in two,

Page. 320

then into four, eight and sixteen pieces progressively. Then when you have a piece of Parmigiano cheese at the table obtained in this manner it is precisely at this moment the "King's Duo" comes into play, with its heart-shaped knife and solid strong wood handle, flake off a few parts by penetrating the cheese with the tip of the knife and using the handle as a lever, chip off flakes. Finally using the two pronged fork offer the pieces around the table so the guests may fully savour enjoy the King of Cheeses. Using this method the body of the cheese is not compressed and the granular nature of the cheese remains intact and the tyrosine crystals (indication of a perfect maturation and the correct percentage of fat)

Page. 321

are not squashed and are therefore tasted on the palate. The pressure applied to the heart-shaped blade must be light, not heavy in order to avoid wedging the knife too far down into the cheese body therefore pressing unnecessarily onto the grainy texture. Chipping off the pieces must be done quickly and decisively so that the flakes separate and fall onto cheese board without sticking to the blade of the cheese knife, which must always be cleaned afterwards. The flakes on the board or plate should be picked up by the fork which is very important to avoid spoiling the aroma and the full flavour of the cheese. The best way to enjoy of the King of Cheeses is to allow it to unleash its spectacular properties in a flurry of fragrance and flavour.

Savoury cheese-like regards!
Architetto Marco Parenti

Page 322

The importance of serving the 'King of Cheeses' correctly.
Introduction by Andrea Berti.

Every single type of cheese requires a precise method of cutting and serving and Parmigiano, the King of Cheeses is certainly no exception. First of all, it's easy to imagine why it's our duty to keep alive those gestures and arts deeply rooted in antique traditions, tested and refined over the centuries and handed down from generation to generation. However wonderful it all would seem to us, it would not prove enough to convince sceptics and cynics; insensitive to deep-rooted values, to the point of being incapable of recognising them. So let's remind them that there are precise technical reasons which must be taken into consideration when cutting and serving the King of Cheeses correctly. Just for the sake of principle food should always be sliced or cut gently. Not ripped or torn at. And not merely for aesthetic reasons. A filet mignon, artfully grilled, retains its juices

Page. 323

which give it a juicy flavour delicately created by an expert chef and cannot be brusquely cut into with a serrated-edged blade! It must be cut with a straight, very sharp-edged blade to ensure the soft and tidy separation of the meat fibres. This same rule applies to Parmigiano. The tyrosine crystals present in the cheese must remain whole and intact. Effectively it is these crystals which make Parmigiano the King of Cheeses.

If you treat the King in this very royal manner, you will have the best from him. And maybe, just maybe, somewhere up there the great and ancient Masters of the Art of Cheese making will thankfully bless you.

Amen.

Andrea Berti.

Page. 324

Every cheese
has a knife

Every cheese needs a precise cutting ritual and presentation at the table. Shape, texture and size determine the specific cut for each type of cheese and therefore the correct knife or blade needed.

Page. 325

Heart-shaped knife.

Cheeses to cut with this knife: Parmigiano, Grana Padana.

How to use this knife: let the tip of the blade penetrate the cheese to obtain a small flake of cheese and then rotate the wrist in a forward position. The pressure applied to the blade must be light, not heavy in order to avoid wedging the knife too far down into the cheese body therefore pressing unnecessarily onto the grainy texture. Chipping off the pieces must be done quickly and decisively so that the flakes separate and fall onto cheese board without sticking to the blade of the cheese knife,

which must always be cleaned afterwards. The flakes on the board or plate should be picked up by the fork which is very important to avoid spoiling the aroma and the full flavour of the cheese.

Page. 326

The small cheese fork.

As you have well imagined, the small two pronged fork is used to delicately transfer the small chipped pieces from the board to the plate without damaging or spoiling the aroma and full flavour of the Parmigiano . The small fork and heart-shaped knife are the perfect pair to use when offering the King of Cheeses to your guests.

Page. 327

No. 525 King's Duo.

Box set of two knives with olive-wood handles.

Page. 328

"Symposium. Quattro Stagioni" restaurant, Cartoceto, Pesaro.

Page. 329

At the table.

Table knives and cutlery collections.

Page. 330

The Convivio folding knife: the old tradition of taking one's personal knife to the table is once again becoming popular.

Page. 331

Cutlery with stag-horn handles.

Page. 332

The Valdichiana steak knife.

Page. 333

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Page. 334

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Page. 335

Convivio Nuovo.

Tradition revived.

An Italian tradition that cuts so fine.

Page. 336

Convivio Nuovo.
Tradition revived.
An Italian tradition that cuts so fine.

Experts and enthusiasts eagerly awaited the arrival of the award winning Convivio Nuovo and this simple yet extraordinary knife has been an overwhelming success. A knife must be able to satisfy various needs: it must be practical and easy to maintain, but also have prestigious qualities and elegance. This is why the Convivio Nuovo is available in four different versions: four different handle types which are all four maintained differently and of course all four are used differently.

Page. 337

Tradition has an new name and an old spirit.
It is in the tradition of the old "Scarperia Knife", with its pleasing lines and simple shape. And at the beginning of the XX century it could be found at every table in this old Tuscan village.

Tradition is Italian.
That of the Berti family, master cutlers who without fail have been producing knives in the traditional Scarperian style since 1895.

Tradition that cuts so fine.
Each cut is precise and fine in order not ruin the full flavour of the food, as with a serrated edged knife that tears and dries out the meat.

Knives born to last.
There is no need to throw these knives away when the blades become blunt as with a serrated edged knife which can not be sharpened. When your Convivio Nuovo eventually does need sharpening after a prolonged use any reputable cutlery shop can sharpen and restore the fine cutting edge back to its original form.

Page. 338

Tradition in four different versions.
Four different materials however whether it is ox-horn, buffalo-horn box-wood or simply plastic each handle has been entirely hand crafted according to the old skills and techniques of the master cutlers at Coltellerie Berti. And in each case we ask you to follow some simple rules in order to get the best service from your Convivio Nuovo knives:

- Keep Convivio Nuovo for table use only. Inappropriate use will ruin the cutting edge.

Page. 339

- Have the knives sharpened professionally from time to time: the special AISI 420 stainless steel blades rich in carbon, vanadium and molybdenum were specifically used for their long life maintained sharpening after sharpening.
- After washing dry them carefully since the high content of carbon in the stainless steel necessary for that fine cut, will occasionally form stains which do disappear in the next wash.
- Always put the knives back in their box after use to keep the cutting edge sharp.

Page. 340

Convivio Nuovo.
hand crafted handles in ox-horn.

This particular version of the Convivio series, with its natural simplicity, has the closest links with oldest knife making traditions in Scarperia. The solid tip of the ox-horn handle with its exceptional colour shadings must be washed by hand in lukewarm water, using a mild detergent. Wash the blade thoroughly and avoid soaking the handle at all times. The blade must be wiped dry with care immediately. Ox-horn is a natural material and therefore is subject to shrinkage and colour variation.

Convivio Nuovo with ox-horn handle.



Page. 341

No.600 Box set of twelve Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in ox-horn.

Page. 342

No.601 Box set of six Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in ox-horn.

Page. 343

No.602 Box set of two Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in ox-horn.

Page. 344

Convivio Nuovo
hand crafted handles in buffalo-horn.

This particular version of the Convivio series is probably the most elegant thanks to the highly polished black buffalo-horn. This material is very resistant but as is the case with the ox-horn some simple precautions need to be taken to preserve the long life of the knife: hand wash in lukewarm water with very mild detergents, avoid soaking the handles at all times, dry with care immediately. These simple precautions will preserve the special shine of the Convivio Nuovo with handles in buffalo-horn. Buffalo-horn is a natural material and is therefore subject to shrinkage and colour variation.

Convivio Nuovo with buffalo-horn handle.

Page. 345

No.605 Box set of twelve Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in buffalo-horn.

Page. 346

No.606 Box set of six Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in buffalo-horn.

Page. 347

No.607 Box set of two Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in buffalo-horn.

Page. 348

Convivio Nuovo
hand crafted handles in box-wood.

This particular version of the Convivio Nuovo series utilises box-wood from the Tuscan Apennines. Box-wood is a modest wood yet its elegant simplicity gives an antique artisan feel to the knife, though it is incredibly adapt for modern day environments. Box-wood is a prestigious material and should be treated with care: it is sensitive to heat and humidity and should be washed by hand in lukewarm water with a very mild detergent. Avoid soaking the handles at all times, wipe dry with care immediately. Box-wood is a natural material and is therefore subject to shrinkage and colour variation.

Convivio Nuovo with box-wood handle.

Page. 349

No.610 Box set of twelve Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in box-wood.

Page. 350

No.611 Box set of six Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in box-wood.

Page. 351

No.612 Box set of two Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in box-wood.

Page. 352

Convivio Nuovo.
hand crafted handles in plastic.

This particular version of the Convivio Nuovo with plastic resin handle makes it probably the most practical, sturdiest and easiest to maintain in the series. The special methacrylate resin used to make the handle is dishwasher safe.

Convivio Nuovo with plastic handle.

Page. 353

No.615 Box set of twelve Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in plastic.

Page. 354

No.616 Box set of six Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in plastic.

Page. 355

No.617 Box set of two Convivio Nuovo knives with handles in plastic.

Page. 356

Three dozen
From the Convivio Nuovo series
Fixed blade knives with hand crafted handles in plastic.

The three dozen series of Convivio Nuovo knives with hand crafted handles in plastic, in wooden box presentation was specifically created with the restaurant business in mind.

Page. 357

No.620 Box set of thirty-six knives with handles in plastic from the Convivio Nuovo series.

Page. 358

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 359

Valdichiana.
Homage to the valley of the Chianina
And the steak alla Fiorentina.

Page. 360

Valdichiana.
Homage to the valley of the Chianina
And the steak alla Fiorentina.
Raised out in open pastures. Butchered and hung only according to tradition. Then cut in just one precise way, at least two fingers thick. Men's fingers of course. And finally cooked just so: a light brown colour on both sides with that indescribable uniform colour in the middle. This was the real Florentine steak. And what is more the best steaks came from the Chianina herds. In honour of this wonderful dish, symbol of the Tuscan country kitchen we have dedicated its own knife. Specially forged to cut decisively and with ease, without ripping or tearing, the extremely large tender Florentine steak, thanks to the wide straight edged blade.

Page. 361

No.630 Box set of four Valdichiana knives with handles in plastic.

Page. 362

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 363

Plenum.
Pleasure in the cut begins with handle.

Page. 364

Plenum.
Ox-horn tip.

A smoothed edged blade with hand crafted handle in ox-horn. The pleasure in the cut begins with handle. And since we thought a forged steel blade with a super smooth cutting edge, to guarantee a fine delicate cut would not suffice. We also thought to gratify the hand by giving it a smooth whole ox-horn handle to hold. Light and elegant, carved from the extreme tip of the ox-horn.

Plenum with whole ox-horn handle.

Page. 365

No.640 Box set of six knives with whole ox-horn handles from the Plenum series.

Page. 366

Plenum
Box-wood.

A smoothed edged blade with hand crafted handle in box-wood. The pleasure in the cut starts with handle. And since we thought a forged steel blade with a super smooth cutting edge, to guarantee a fine delicate cut would not suffice. We also thought to gratify the hand by giving it a smooth whole box-wood handle to hold. Light and elegant, carved from one unique piece of box-wood.

Plenum with whole box-wood handle.

Page. 367

No.641 Box set of six knives with whole box-wood handles from the Plenum series.

Page. 368

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 369

Intero.
full tang steak knife series.

Page. 370

Intero.
full tang steak knife series.

A knife with a great capacity to cut, a pleasure to handle thanks to its smooth edged blade and sharp tip which allow the user to savour steak the way it should be savoured. It is above all a robust knife thanks to its full tang form which has the blade running the whole length of the handle, formed by two scales of ox-horn. It is the steak knife in its more classic form to give pleasure as it were to the "full" (intero).

Intero with ox-horn handle

Page. 371

No.650 Box set of six steak knives with full tang ox-horn handles from the Intero series.

Page. 372

Intero.
full tang steak knife series.

A knife with a great capacity to cut, a pleasure to use thanks to its smooth edged blade and sharp tip which allow the user to savour steak the way it should be savoured. It is above all a robust knife thanks to its full tang form which has the blade running the whole length of the handle, formed by two scales of box-wood. It is the steak knife in its more classic form to give pleasure as it were to the "full" (intero).

Intero with box-wood handle

Page. 373

No.651 Box set of six steak knives with full tang box-wood handles from the Intero series.

Page. 374

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 375

The Table Collection
by Berti

Page. 376

The Table Collection
by Berti.

The first thing you notice about the table collection designed by Coltellerie Berti is that each piece of cutlery is different from the next. It is not simply because the each of the four lines, dedicated to David Berti, Ersilia Savi, Angiolo Sartini and Eleonora Landeschi have their own distinct qualities, which would be the obvious reason. Nor is it down to the fact that the natural materials such as ox-horn, African bubinga-wood, stag-horn and box-wood used to make the handles all have unique grains and shadings making each piece of cutlery individual. Each piece even though it is part of a complete line is never the same, not even in shape: they are made entirely by hand and as we all know the artistic hand can never duplicate. Even the sizes of these pieces of cutlery differ, maybe unperceivable to the naked eye but nonetheless different. The metal pins which hold the handles in place pass through them at different points. Look at each piece carefully and you will learn to see it. Use them and you will learn to feel it.

Page. 377

The box set of the individual pieces. (no.700-847)

Page. 378

The David Collection.
Handles in ox-horn. Pressed steel.

No.702 Table spoon with ox-horn handle
No.701 Table fork with ox-horn handle
No.700 Table knife with ox-horn handle

Page. 379

No.707 Dessert spoon with ox-horn handle
No.706 Fruit fork with ox-horn handle
No.705 Fruit knife with ox-horn handle
No.710 Tea spoon with ox-horn handle

Page. 380

No.715 Ladle with ox-horn handle

Page. 381

No.717 Large serving spoon with ox-horn handle
No.716 Large serving fork with ox-horn handle

Page. 382

The Angiolo Collection.
Handles in box-wood. Pressed steel.

No.732 Table spoon with box-wood handle
No.731 Table fork with box-wood handle
No.730 Table knife with box-wood handle

Page. 383

No.737 Dessert spoon with box-wood handle
No.736 Fruit fork with box-wood handle
No.735 Fruit knife with box-wood handle
No.740 Tea spoon with box-wood handle

Page. 384

No.745 Ladle with box-wood handle

Page. 385

No.747 Large serving spoon with box-wood handle
No.746 Large serving fork with box-wood handle

Page. 386

The Eleonora Collection.
Handles in stag-horn. Pressed steel.

No.762 Table spoon with stag-horn handle
No.761 Table fork with stag-horn handle
No.760 Table knife with stag-horn handle

Page. 387

No.767 Dessert spoon with stag-horn handle
No.766 Fruit fork with stag-horn handle
No.765 Fruit knife with stag-horn handle
No.770 Tea spoon with stag-horn handle

Page. 388

No.775 Ladle with stag-horn handle

Page. 389

No.777 Large serving spoon with stag-horn handle
No.776 Large serving fork with stag-horn handle

Page. 390

The Ersilia Collection.
Handles in white plastic. Pressed steel.

No.802 Table spoon with plastic handle
No.801 Table fork with plastic handle
No.800 Table knife with plastic handle

Page. 391

No.807 Dessert spoon with plastic handle
No.806 Fruit fork with plastic handle
No.805 Fruit knife with plastic handle
No.810 Tea spoon with plastic handle

Page. 392

No.815 Ladle with plastic handle

Page. 393

No.817 Large serving spoon with plastic handle
No.816 Large serving fork with plastic handle

Page. 394

The Ersilia Collection.
Handles in black plastic. Pressed steel.

No.832 Table spoon with plastic handle
No.831 Table fork with plastic handle
No.830 Table knife with plastic handle

Page. 395

No.837 Dessert spoon with plastic handle
No.836 Fruit fork with plastic handle
No.835 Fruit knife with plastic handle
No.840 Tea spoon with plastic handle

Page. 396

No.845 Ladle with plastic handle

Page. 397

No.847 Large serving spoon with plastic handle
No.846 Large serving fork with plastic handle

Page. 398

Xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 399

Napkin Rings
Each different from the last

Page. 400

Napkin Rings

Each different from the last. Each with distinct differences both great and small. Rather like each one of us really. The napkin rings of Coltellerie Berti. Traditional materials and form. What could be better to distinguish each one of us at the dinner table?

Page. 401

No.850 Napkin rings in ox-horn.

Page. 402

Valentina Berti with a friend.

Page. 403

Berti:
the name, the surname, the secret.

Page. 404

Tradition has a name: Scarperia.

Scarperia was already on the map in the 15th. Century, as the obligatory stop off point for those travelling to the North of Italy from Florence and the South. It was famous for the quality and resistance of its blades. Later on this fame was again revived after the Unification of Italy, when a market for artisan knives from Scarperia was created nationwide. Then slowly year after year regional knife makers started going out of business and the numerous models which constituted the rich tradition of Italian regional knives were all sent to Scarperia for safekeeping, making it a sort of depository for a great artisan heritage. A heritage, which has weathered the storm of industrialisation and survived intact. This is the secret held within Scarperia.

(Photo)

Scarperia: the old main street, which passes through the town up to the Giogo Pass, was once, crowded with small cutlers' workshops.

Page. 405

Once upon a time there was a castle.....

In 1299 the "Committee of the Hundred" (Consiglio dei Cento) from the town council in Florence, to exercise stricter control over the region thought it best to establish new villages and towns in the provinces. Indeed this strategy was quite common in Italy and Europe in the latter Middle Ages, and it led to the foundation of "Castel San Barnaba.. in the place called Scarperia". The first stone was laid to commemorate the defeat of the Ubaldini family from the Mugello valley. Feudal lords and long-term enemies of the Florentine republic. The valley of the Mugello was crossed by a veritable network of roads all leading up to the Apennine pass of the Giogo; which until the mid 1700s acted as the most important connection between Florence, northern Italy and the rest of Europe. With the rapid construction of the castle Scarperia remained firmly under the control of the Florentine council bringing about a profitable development in trade relations.

Page. 406

The art of blade making begins.

Some people say the tradition of making knives in Scarperia dates back to the need for arms and weapons when the castle was frequently under siege. Others maintain that the tradition is linked to the farm work carried out by labourers living within the confines of the castle. The first document referring to the presence of cutlers in Scarperia dates back to the 15th. Century. In actual fact it is an inventory of the possessions of one certain Romolo Bucci, Florentine banker who on the 9th. November 1479 left his heirs among many things.. "29 small ladies knife blades without handles from Scarperia...3 pairs of small knives with gilded handles from Scarperia.....4 small knife blades from Scarperia". It would seem then that the by the second half of the 15th. Century Scarperia enjoyed a reputation for the production of quality knives and blades comparable to those in the rest of Europe.

(photo)

San Piero a Sieve: The battlements of the Medican fortress.

Page. 407

A hard cut.

The reasons for the success of the knives made in Scarperia were not necessarily due to the refined materials used or indeed to an advanced form of craftsmanship, but rather to the fact that the knives were simple and their blades were extremely resistant. The handles were generally made from horn and the hand-forged blades had very simple forms. The quality of the so called 'hard cut' of the blades was a closely guarded secret among the cutlers and in 1538 the Cutlers' Guild took precautions to safeguard the quality in production with regulations set down by the "Statute of the Gladiatorial Cutlers' Guild of Scarperia": the essence of which regulated the characteristics of the knives, controlled the materials used as well as the working relationships between the Master Cutlers and their apprentices.

Streets change history.

The presence of many traders stopping off in Scarperia on their way to, or out of Florence meant knives and blades produced in Scarperia could be found in the various markets all over Europe.

Page. 408

Its reputation had spread so much so that by the beginning of the 17th. Century the name of Scarperia was one of the most prestigious associated with production of blades and knives. The benefits of its privileged position along the main road which ran from Rome to the north of Europe came to an end by the end of the 1700s with the opening of the new Apennine pass of the Futa, which diverted traffic away from Scarperia. This new situation meant that the craftsmen lost their direct contact with customers and they were forced to trade with intermediaries, or middlemen. Subsequently this led to an increased competition, within the town, based on low prices rather than on quality craftsmanship.

Artisans versus traders.

The trader was steadily becoming a key figure in the industry during this period. Often they owned the premises where the cutlers had their workshops. They supplied the raw materials and were owners of the general stores in the town. Gradually they took complete control of the artisans who at this point faced impoverishment and were forced into a survival economy. At the end of the 1700s, despite economic crisis in Scarperia,

Page. 409

There was a continuing demand on the Italian market for the “knives, shears and pocket- knives” produced in Scarperia. However, perhaps due to the opening of the new Futa Pass and Scarperia’s subsequent isolation, the goods manufactured in this little village in the Mugello valley were unable to compete with the more refined, technologically advanced goods arriving from England and Germany.

A national economy is born.

Having lost its foothold in the European market the Italian knife making industry was given a new lease of life with the Unification of the Italian states and the creation of a new national market.

(Photo)

Castle of Cafaggiolo: country residence of the Medicis

Page. 410

Until then the knives leaving Scarperia had been heavily burdened with taxes and duties imposed on products leaving the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. The Unification meant a free open market and the cutlers of Scarperia competed with the other regional knife makers successfully on the grounds of superior quality and production, giving rise to a new period of economic development in the area.

A new law.

Encouraged by this renewed prosperity in the second half of the 19th. Century,

(Photo)

The parish church of San Giovanni Maggiore, Borgo San Lorenzo.

Page. 411

together with new modern technologies, various worker co-operatives were formed in an attempt to increase and improve production. There was, however, another setback to the industry following the introduction of the Giolitti Law in 1908, which imposed limitations on the knives used to be carried around freely. This law had considerable repercussions on production in Scarperia, since the knives produced there were mainly folding knives and nearly always pointed given they were destined for rural work and areas where the custom of carrying a pocket-knife was a deeply rooted tradition.

The decline.

In the face of the devastating effects of the 1908 law attempts were made to found a ‘factory’ the so-called “Officina”.

Page. 412

With the help of German machinery and technicians, local production converted to manufacturing cutlery that could be sold easily: such as kitchen knives and tableware. These initiatives resulted in dampening the individual spirit of the craftsman and in the 1930’s the knife industry in Scarperia finally entered into an irreversible crisis. Many workshops closed unable to renew products and working methods in order to keep up with other industrial centres in the sector. In the following years, despite the numerous attempts made to revive the now impoverished industry, Scarperia would no longer refer to the “cutting iron” tradition as being its main industry.

An after thought.

The extremely traditional production methods used at that time made it impossible to consider alternative ways of developing the industry.

Page. 413

This obstructed any serious attempts to re-launch the centuries old knife making art, which had been hit on one side by a law limiting its production and on the other by a strong competition that had the benefit of new technologies, which the small workshop operations in Scarperia were unable to understand let alone get their hands on: having reached the 20th. Century with a mentality and organisation, that had barely changed since the Middle Ages. The fact that the industry had been in decline for the last fifty years meant that it was no longer the lynchpin of the town's economy and moreover it meant that the traditional 'conflict' in competition between the town's various workshops finally came to an end. There came now a period of serious reflection in order to re-think and analyse what had constituted a history for the last six centuries in Scarperia.

(photo)

The parish church of San Cresci in Valcava, Borgo San Lorenzo.

Page. 414

New developments

The Scientific Committee (Comitato Scientifico), commissioned by the town council in Scarperia helped the new development considerably by carrying out numerous researches and studies in the area. The opening of the "Cutting Irons Museum" in the town centre, the only one of its kind in Italy, has proved a successful initiative. Today only a few companies operate in Scarperia, however they are trying to make good use of all the centuries of experience and tradition available to them. Tradition is now seen as cultural 'baggage', an inexhaustible source for ideas and not something to hamper development and innovation. The stuff needed to create up to date manufacturing techniques which produce objects that are not just knives, but things that are part of our past, a part of us.

(photo)

Galliano in Mugello, view.

Page. 415

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Page. 416

Tradition has a surname: Berti.

The Berti family has been making knives for more than one hundred years, since 1895. It all began with David when he opened his first workshop in Via dell'Oche in Scarperia, and the family tradition has continued without interruption ever since: David was followed by Severino then Alvaro and now Andrea is keeping the wonderful tradition alive. Remember though, producing knives just for the sake of inheriting a tradition is not enough, it is important to have been doing it for quite some time, just about a century!

(Names the same)

Page. 417

The Berti family: the origins

1784- A census shows that labourer, Angiolo Berti (b. 1755) lives in Via dei Melai with his wife Anna and two children Francesco (b.1777) and Assunta.

1800- Pietro Berti is born to Francesco, a labourer.

1834- Niccola Berti is born to Pietro, a labourer.

1872- David Berti is born on May7th. to Niccola, also a labourer married to Angiola.

1884- David is apprenticed to a cutler to learn the trade. These are the boom years following the Unification of Italy that, thanks to an increased demand for workers in the knife industry, gives a large number of labourers the opportunity to improve their social position by learning a new trade.

1895- David, now a cutler is married to Ersilia Savi, daughter of a cutler and trader from Scarperia. David sets up his own workshop in a small premises in Via dell'Oche. David sells his products, almost exclusively "Mozzette" pocket-knives to local traders and the local co-operative workshop.

Page. 418

The Berti family at the beginning of the 1900s.

1902- Severino Berti is born to David and Ersilia.

1903- Bruno Berti is born to David and Ersilia.

1910- David's sons while still at school start working in their father's workshop and as is the tradition carry on working for their father until they marry. After they marry although they remain in the same workshop and use the same tools they each buy their own materials and sell their own products.

1923- Severino marries Valentina Sartini, daughter of a scissors-maker and starts up his own business.

1924- Renzo Berti is born to Severino and Valentina.

1927- Alvaro Berti is born to Severino and Valentina.

1935- Severino's sons while still at school start helping their father.

Page. 419

1938- Severino becomes a member of the "Cutting Irons Co-operative".

1941- Times are hard and work is scarce, Severino sends both his teenage sons off to work in a larger knife factory, where he feels they can gain good experience while waiting for better times.

1944- Work in the old Via dell'Oche workshop, where the Berti's have been working since the beginning, is suspended while fighting on the front line passes through the area. Scarperia falls right on the "linea gothica" (Gothic front line) and families have to leave the village for their own safety.

1945- The front line has now passed and David, Severino, Bruno, Renzo and Alvaro all return to Scarperia and pick up work in the old workshop. Bruno and Alvaro's work experience elsewhere is at an end.

1946- The family leave the old workshop for a bigger and better equipped premises still in Via dell'Oche.

Page. 420

1947- Bruno dies.

1949- David dies.

1950- The Severino Berti company is set up. It abandons the old customers of traders and co-operatives and starts dealing directly with the public. Severino takes on other cutlers and begins modernising his production techniques and machinery.

1955- Andrea Berti is born to Alvaro and Adriana Martini, a farmer's daughter.

1958- Bigger more suitable premises are bought at 21, Via Solferino.

1959-1962- Work is finished on the modernisation of production plant and sales are strengthened by consolidating the market in the south of Italy.

1963-1978- The company is continually developing production and products, changing with the times.

Page. 421

Berti today.

1979- Severino retires and the company becomes a partnership between Renzo and Alvaro.

1983- The Company's head office moves to a new location just outside the walls of the town.

1987- Renzo retires leaving his shares to Alvaro's son, Andrea. The new generational input gives the business a more modern outlook of the market that goes beyond the horizons of the narrow local market. Something that had in the past conditioned the development of the cutler's business in Scarperia.

1989- Severino dies.

1995- The centenary and Andrea decides on an altogether new strategy for developing the tradition.

Page. 422

Tradition has a secret:

Craftsmanship.



How have the Scarperia's traditional knives managed to survive large industrial development? There is a secret. Over the years the craftsmen of Scarperia have developed their production, economizing to the full their use of materials, the most costly resource and taken advantage of a heritage of human resources, experience. In the past working with horn was a real "industrial" secret. An extremely laborious complex job it endowed the knives with handles of great strength and lightness. Work of this kind was uneconomical and could in no way be achieved through automated production. Hand crafting knives according to tradition has been passed down through the generations unchanged. This is the cutler's great secret in Scarperia.

Page. 423

David's workshop.

The tools bought or partially built up by David for the Via dell'Oche workshop included:

- a basin: a stone carved tub onto which various types of grinders could be mounted. Usually the grinders were run by women who were paid by the hour to turn a large wooden wheel the "stella" (star) which rotated the grinder in the large basin by means of a belt.
- a grinder: a stone wheel for water grinding and sharpening.

Page. 424

- "sputafuoco" (spitfire): name given to a wooden wheel covered by a leather belt onto which emery was glued.
- "orso" (bear): name given to wheel covered in soft rag disks for polishing.
- Forge: with large pedal bellows.
- Anvil and various hammers: used for forging.
- Tongs: with long handles used when hardening and heating horn.
- Benches: large wooden tables on which all the assembly and finishing operations were carried out.
- Steel vice: fixed to the benches
- Wooden vice: two pieces of beech-wood glued at one end onto a wedge. Used, together with the steel vice, to hold the handles while working without damaging them.
- "sartuzza": simple drill, consisting of a stand and wooden arch. Used to make holes in the horn handles.
- Bow saw: with a regular blade used for sawing horn. And with blades of varying thickness used for preparing the spring base in handles.

Page. 425

- Measure: wood or steel plate graded in scales. Used to measure horn for the handles.
- Rasp: used to round rough handles.
- File: used on metal.
- "castrino": name of knife with curved edges used for levelling the thickness of horn plates.
- Bone-cutter: as the name suggests a knife with two handles and a curved blade used to cut the first shape of the handles.
- Plates: steel rectangles used in the vice to crush the heated bone.
- Chisels: used for cutting steel.
- Die: steel chisel used for cutting drilled disks, for the handles, from a thin sheet of steel.

Page. 426

- Plate scissors: used for cutting the "sodi" bands used to trim the handles.
- Stamps and punches: for marking the blades and trimming the "sodi" handle trims.

Production in David's workshop.

Work was organised according to the usual working week. On Monday the materials needed for the week's production were purchased. The other jobs were carried out in the following order:

- Working the horn (clamping of the handles)
- Forging of the blades and springs.
- Cutting and filing of handles, springs and blades (ready for assembly)
- Sharpening of blades.
- Assembly and riveting of knife.

- Work on finish of knife with files, rabble and sandpaper.
- Polishing by hand with coal dust and rags.

Page. 427

David's reluctance to move on.

The working timetable was very elastic but normally craftsmen worked a ten- hour day, six days a week. Saturday afternoon was dedicated to selling the knives made during the week. David produced around 180 knives, almost exclusively "Mozzette", every week, that he sold to local traders. When electricity finally reached Scarperia in 1910 David made a move towards modernising the workshop. He installed a motorised basin and a "three candle" lamp. However the work in terms of organisation and knives produced remained unchanged until the end of the Second World War. He continued to use traditional work methods and equipment he had started his working life with back in the 19th. Century. The only concession to what can be considered "something new" was the introduction of the "Zuoave" "Fiorentini" and the banded "Fiorentini". And being of greater prestige only 60 knives could be produced a week.

Page. 428

The workshop finally moves on.

In the midst of a post war Italy which, had taken up the challenge of modernisation David could no longer continue working in the traditional way, without conceding to some change. In a short time the workshop was relocated to a larger premises and modern equipment was installed. He enlarged his work force and developed the collection; in addition to the traditional models he introduced new types like the "Frosoloni", "Pattada", "Caccia", "Senesi" etc. he also had the initiative to start purchasing finished products from other craftsmen to meet the demands of traders. By 1958 David's manual production methods were just a faint memory. The modernisation and mechanisation of production continued and the 'workshop' was again relocated to 21, Via Solferino.

Page. 429

In 1979 further developments took place when Alvaro and Renzo joined Severino. In 1983 the business was again relocated to a premises four times bigger than the previous place. In 1987, after the introduction of another generation of Berti to the business the company structure and product range was completely reorganised.

Steel changes but the work methods don't

The family abandoned carbon steel in favour of stainless steel AISI 420, which, thanks to its high carbon content and the presence of molybdenum and vanadium meant it was possible to obtain a higher degree of forge-ability, cutting capacity, and cutting edge durability. Tempering today is achieved by means of thermal processing in electrostatic furnaces, which guarantee maximum and more consistent results. Sharpening is carried out using three manual operations; the first using a grinder, the second using a laminated disk and finally the third using cloth disks in order to eliminate a 'dead' cutting edge.

Page.430.

Obtained in this way the cutting edge is both keener and easier to sharpen. The handle scales can be made using traditional ox-horn, wood or even special resin plastics. The entire production is carried out on the premises, starting with the 'raw' materials (sheets of steel and brass plate, horn, wood chocks and plastic) working through to the finished product.

Production is still manual

Contrary to what machine enthusiasts may think a knife-making machine has not been designed yet where you put raw materials into one end and the finished product shoots out at the other. Most of the work done is still carried out manually and the machines are often the tools on which the form of the knife takes shape, guided exclusively by the craftsman's hand. As far as knives entirely handmade are concerned, as in the past, the greatest difference is having the metal die cut by a press and grinders now remove the rough metal edges on the blades. From there on in all the operations carried out to produce a knife are carried out by hand:

Page. 431

assembly, cutting handle scales, blade sharpening and finishing, handle finishing and polishing. Machines are a great help in the final polishing stages since the polishing disks and motors run grinders, however it is not so different from centuries ago when power was supplied by water instead of electricity.

Skilled hands.

Of the fifty different operations needed to make a traditional knife about half are manual. Therefore even with the production of a series from between 300 to 600 knives, the work involved still has every right to call itself craftsmanship. Today production is still characterised by the folding pocket-knife, which is at the basis of the tradition in Scarperia:

knives like Zuave, Gobbi, Mozzette, hunting knives, small gardening knives, Roncolini and Pattadesi (although the Pattada has its origins in Sardinia it has been in production in Scarperia since the late 19th. Century). And finally there is also an extensive production of traditional handcrafted kitchen and table knives.

Page. 432

The collections are born and production lines are abandoned.

In 1995 production of collector's knives began. This particular production is characterised by specially branded knives made in small series and is distinguishable from the regular production by the significant amount of detailing by hand on models which have not been made for many years. Coltellerie Berti has been devoted to developing these original collections over the past few years. Production has been completely reorganised in order to reduce machine work and accommodate the slower traditional methods. Work divisions and so called production lines have been abandoned in favour of the craftsman.

This has meant a long apprenticeship for all the workers (a cutler needs at least five years experience as an apprentice) since every collection knife is made from start to finish exclusively by one craftsman. Preparation of the metal parts is realised in small series of between 300-600 pieces but assembly and finishing of the knives are carried out in very small lots of between 10-15 by just one person. There are no two knives the same not only because every craftsman's hand works differently but also because every blade, spring, band, or pin is made to fit only one handle and it would be quite impossible to adapt them for a similar knife.

Page. 434.

"Symposium. Quattro Stagione" Restaurant, Cartoceto, Pesaro.

Page. 435.

The cut and the taste.

Art, craft, and tradition in Italian knives.

Page. 436.

Traditional knives in the modern world, something which Andrea Berti talked about extensively on the television series "Il Taglio ed il Gusto"; literally the cut and the taste, shown on the Gambero Rosso TV channel in 2001. During the thirteen episodes televised, Andrea explained the limitations, precautions and fascination behind knives made today respecting old traditions.

Page. 437.

Knives have been with us since the dawn of civilisation and perhaps it's because of this 'natural affinity' we tend to underestimate them and fail to understand fully the correct use of the numerous types of knives available to us. It is true that a knife rarely, if at all, comes with instructions for use. Probably the makers take it for granted that everyone knows how to use a knife. Nothing could be far from the truth! Many people regardless of social position use only one knife to do everything in the kitchen and are not in least bit worried about what they use at the table. However they do eventually without fail end up complaining about the poor quality of the cut. And this all depends on the right choice of knife.

Using knives correctly.

Before giving any specific indications on how to choose the right knife for the job there are seven very important points to consider. Fundamental to using knives correctly.

Page. 438

1. I don't want to delude anyone but the knife capable of doing everything does not exist, (that would be pretty sad: imagine if there were only one type of wine!), as don't indestructible knives or knives which never need sharpening.
2. In order to cut well it's important to know knives and the uses they were destined for. In the best kitchens around the world every knife knows its position.
3. Never use a knife improperly: to open cans, cut frozen foods, or as screwdrivers...etc. It's the best way to ruin the blade and cause harm.
4. Always keep knives sharp. When knives are sharp they are less dangerous because you don't need to resort to drastic cutting actions.
5. Use solid, firmly secured planes when cutting and always replace to a secure place after use. Never throw them into a pot pourri of kitchen utensils.
6. Kitchen knives today, are nearly always stainless steel: so they can be washed but they must be dried carefully (a good stainless steel has a certain amount of carbon and can occasionally mark).

Page. 439

7. If you really can't do without washing knives in the dishwasher make sure they are not submersed beneath the other utensils and crockery.

Distinct knife categories.

For the sake of not wanting to complicate the matter or appear too pedantic and the purpose of this section is to help someone choose rather than hinder. We could begin by distinguishing two large categories of knives:

1. Knives with serrated edges: these knives should only be used to cut bread and other oven baked products which have a dry texture. Knives with serrated edges are in-adapt for any other type of cut since the blade tends to pull at the fibres and dry the juices conserved during cooking therefore depriving food not only of the taste but also of nutritional value.

Page. 440

- Furthermore the serrated blade does tend to leave its "mark" on the food it is cutting which can be aesthetically 'un-pleasing'.
2. Knives with smooth edges: the only knives which are adapt for cutting meat, fish, cheese, fruit and vegetables. The smooth edge cuts finely and does not spoil the nutritional value. It preserves and enhances the subtle flavours of the food it is cutting.

Page. 441

As has already been established every kitchen needs a serrated edge bread knife. Now we have to distinguish the smooth edge knives according to shapes and forms of their blade end edges and tips.

1. **wedge shaped tip with curved edge:** this is the oldest and most common form of blade, and it is also the most versatile. Knives which have this type of edge guarantee a lasting, clean, sharp cut. Particularly adapt for raw and cooked meats, vegetables and cheeses these blades have to be sharpened manually.
2. **rectangular shaped tip with double edge:** knives with this form are strong and not very flexible. They are indicated for heavy duty use for example cutting through bones etc.
3. **wedge shaped tip with simple edge:** knives with this form are very sharp and very flexible. The only limit these knives have is that they need sharpening frequently. Their delicate form makes them particularly adapt for filleting fish and slicing vegetables (foods which do not have

Page. 442

compact textures and need to be cut delicately in order to preserve their form and flavour)

diadgram. The face, the "soul", the cut, the edge.

1. wedge shaped tip with curved edge
2. rectangular shaped tip with double edge
3. wedge shaped tip with simple edge

The Blades.

It is always advisable never to be too impressed by knives with weird and wonderful shaped blades. If curiosity needs satisfying as to the excellent cutting power of these knives

Page.443

then by all means try them but only after having equipped the kitchen with a traditional set of knives. Always consider knives whose blades have simple finishes, with little detail since they guarantee effective cutting results. The finish on blades can invariably be divided into two types:

1. **satin finish:** blades with this finish are the most common due to the fact that the production process is kept to a minimum and also because their surfaces tend to 'age' less than those with shiny surfaces. Food tends to stick less to a satin finished blade.
2. **mirror finish:** aesthetically they are more pleasing than satin finish blades and they are less likely to oxidise but they are easily scratched. Food tends to stick to the blade during the cut, spoiling the form.

Page.444

Blade tips.

It may seem strange but the tip of the knife exists because the blade must in some way or another come to an end. In some cases the tip is linked directly to the use of the knife, while in other cases the tip determines basically the style of the knife. I would keep my choice to those with a specific function rather than for esoteric reasons.

1. **centred tips:** ideal for paring knives used in the preparation of meat and can be used for piercing.

Page.445

2. **scimitar tips with straight back:** ideal for cutting large joints where it is important to cut into the meat first with the help of the tip.
3. **rounded or squared tips:** ideal for cooked meats where the cut is made without a point of entry, or as in the case of cheese where the cut is made by a downward pressure rather than a direct slicing action. Ideal for particular cuts of vegetables.

Page.446

The Handles.

The handle determines the comfort of the cut. It must fit fully into the hand to guarantee an easy, secure grip and not slip while cutting. Obviously a simple handle form is synonymous with function. And if your choice has a certain aesthetic criteria then go for horn, wood or special plastics rather than unusual forms.

The Thickness of Blades.

Knives must have the thickness of blade adapt for the job at hand. Thin blades are sharper and penetrate more delicately therefore they are ideal for cutting fish and vegetables, food with easy to cut fibres, which can be spoiled with rough cutting. Blades of a medium thickness are ideal for cutting meat and very often are strong enough to cut through bones.

Page. 447

Forged or pressed steel knives.

1. **Forged knives:** are more prestigious and probably more attractive. Forged steel blades once guaranteed a superior cut due to the forging process which produces a finer and more uniform grain (hitting the steel refines the carbides formed during tempering producing a finer steel) which improves and preserves the cutting capacity of the blade. When choosing forged knives be careful of 'reproductions'; pressed steel knives made to appear forged with a false grain. Generally forged knives are more expensive.

2. **Pressed steel knives:** introduced initially for economic reasons. The production process is simpler and in the past the knives produced were of an inferior quality. However they have been re-valued because the steel alloys used today produce high quality blades (steels of very fine carbides obtained without forging). It is extremely difficult to choose a good quality knife so it is always advisable to revert to a reputable cutlers. The simplified production process has meant an increase in the type of inferior quality knives available.

Page. 448

The complete kitchen.

Now we can finally define the essential kitchen knife set. Obviously there are numerous variations on the matter but a well-equipped kitchen should have eleven knives at its disposal.

1. **One straight edged and one curved edged paring knife:** the all-rounders in the kitchen used for peeling, cleaning, scraping, and cutting all types of fruit and vegetables.
2. **Pesto knife:** a good substitute for the half moon used for finely chopping vegetables and herbs.

Page.449

3. **Bread knife:** the only knife in the kitchen with a serrated edge.
4. **Chef's knife:** the knife used in many ways to cut large forms, especially meat.

Page. 450

5. **Vegetable knife:** smaller than the chef's knife but similar in shape, it used mainly for vegetables.
6. **Cleaver:** used to chop very large joints of meat on the bone. It is not indispensable and if one day you find yourself hitting the chef's knife with a hammer, then it's time to buy a cleaver.

Page. 451

7. **Meat slicer:** used for slicing cold roasts or prosciutto. The blade is very flexible and fine, available with or without a pointed tip. Slices without breaking up or crumbling the slice. When cutting cold meats never use a serrated edge.
8. **Carving fork:** the other half of the carving knife.
9. **Filleting knife:** a very sharp knife with flexible tip used for filleting flakey fibres like fish.

Page. 452

10. **Boning knife:** sharp rigid blade used for boning and cleaning meat joints.

Looking after knives.

When looking after knives you should always:

1. **Store them correctly:** ordered and separate from each other and never mixed together with other objects. If they are kept in a drawer make sure they are not loose and can not move around when the drawer is opened and closed.
2. **Clean them:** ideally they should be washed in warm water (40°C) in a light detergent and dried immediately. They can also be washed in a dish washer, if the handle is not made from horn, wood, or bone.

Page. 453

When placing them in the machine make sure they are not in contact with other crockery. You should always check they have been dried thoroughly. Sometimes the blades can form small reddish marks for a number of reasons. It could be due to iron rich water, or small iron particles coming from other objects in the wash. The fact that sometimes a blade can form rust like

marks is further confirmation of quality steel used in production, since there is a good level of carbon and not too much chrome! Consequently if these knives come into constant contact with acids found very often in fruit and vegetables and are not washed and dried properly after use, days later you may find reddish rust like marks on the blades formed by oxidation with the carbides resting just below the surface. Sometimes oxidation can be caused also by low quality steels damaged during the tempering process.

Page. 454

3. **Keeping the cut:** to keep a keen cutting edge there are two great secrets to learn!
 - a. Only use the knife for what it should be used to cut.
 - b. Always sharpen the blade before it completely loses its edge. A good stone is still the best way to sharpen knives, but for the sake of simplicity use a quality metal sharpener (a sort of rounded steel file).

To sharpen a knife correctly place the blade on the sharpening steel at an angle of 25° near the tip. Holding the sharpener firmly run the edge of the blade lengthways along the steel, starting from the bottom of the blade near the handle finishing at the tip of the blade. This should be repeated alternating the face of the blade.

Then finally pass the sharpener quickly and firmly under the blade to break the blunt edge. The sharpener should always be kept clean and oil free to obtain the best results. The sharpener should be used often and correctly, depending on the knife being sharpened: apply more force for rigid blades and a more delicate force for finer, flexible blades. Be careful. It is easy to cut yourself when sharpening blunt blades.
 - c. **When you can no longer sharpen the blade yourself then it is time to consult the professionals.**

Page. 456

A collection of ox-horn at Coltellerie Berti.

Page. 457

Horn, Bone and Box-wood

Everything there is to know about ox-horn, buffalo-horn, ram-horn, bone and box-wood handles.

Page. 458

Horn and how it is made.

Horns are basically bone structures coated with very hardy layers of Keratin and are produced by both the male and female. Horns increase with age, maintaining their cone shaped form, which usually curves round as the horn grows. The layers of Keratin, which cover the bone, overlap each other determining the overall thickness of the horn; this coating can measure more than two centimetres at the base thinning out to form tips of pure Keratin. Naturally horns grow differently depending on the animal, however horns of workable proportions need to be between eighty centimetres and one meter in length and this can take anything from 4-5 years. Only the Keratin is used and the bone from inside the horn has to be extracted leaving a hollow cone. In eighty per cent of cases the pure tip of keratin used measures between 15 to 25cm.

Keratin is a natural polymer or rather a protein made up of 18 amino acids and is formed by the animal daily. There are various natural polymers and Keratin belongs to the group of polyamides (nylon is a synthetic polyamide).

Page. 459

The molecular structure of Keratin, like all other polyamides, is characterised by chains formed during a slow process of "plasticization". In effect a chain reaction, caused by a massing of amino acids to form amide molecules which in turn link up to form spiral chains (polyamides) through a strong chemical bonding referred to as hydrogen bonding, The unusual chemical structure of keratin, the spiral forms and coupled with the strong hydrogen bonding endows horn with the special properties of flexibility, elasticity and durability making it an altogether exceptional natural product.

The presence of a large variety of amino acids in Keratin means they can unite in an infinite number of ways. These various combinations are responsible for the fantastic colours found in each single horn, making it unique.

Page. 460

Simplifying things a little we could say that horn is a natural "plastic" and that it owes its success to its plastic-like structure (it would be more correct to say that the synthetic polyamides owe their success to the natural polyamides).

Needless to say the quality of the horn depends on the health and nutritional diet of the animal producing the Keratin. A rich diet and good state of health allows the ox to produce good quality, beautifully coloured Keratin. Whereas with a poor diet, infection or hereditary diseases all have their effect on the formation of the horn. Making it streaky, fragile and flaky. Horn can also be affected by fungi, mould and bacteria but above all exposure to hot, humid atmospheres can cause it to crack.

The plasticization process of the Keratin happens through the loss of water. Excessive humidity and very dry atmospheres act upon the molecular structure causing flaking or colour alteration. Variation of the humidity levels also affects the actual volume of the keratin, swelling or drying out the horn.

Page. 461

Finally a few words for the so-called stag antlers, which are inappropriately referred to as horn. The classic branch like antlers are in fact bone structures which the stag loses seasonally. They only grow on the male, taking five months to develop and fall off after the mating season. In the following five months the new antlers grow bigger with more branches, than the previous ones.

From a structural point of view antlers are closely linked to skeletal bones with a hard compact exterior and softer spongy interior rich in protective minerals like calcium and phosphorus and ossein, the organic basis of the bone. Generally antler is much harder than horn and it is also less sensitive to humidity and does not shrink. However it is less elastic and so more brittle which increases with age as it discolours.

Page. 462

Horn in the artisan workshop.

Since prehistoric times bone and horn taken from animals killed for meat has been used to make handles among many other things. The horn, bone and skin of the animal were not eaten and given the scarce economy of prehistoric man it is not difficult to imagine how these natural materials became fundamental in the production of the utensils and weapons. These materials proved to have exceptional qualities which, given the infinite materials technology produces today, have never been substituted. They have in effect been with man since the dawn of time and are still used today for the simple reasons that they are:

- Easily located: wherever man has hunted and eaten meat, bone, horn and skin have always been easily obtained.
- Low cost: availability has meant they have been inexpensive work materials.
- Excellent aesthetic and organic properties: although out dated by many technologically produced materials they are still coveted for their durability and resplendent beauty.
- Easy to work: since they are not worked by expensive machinery rather crafted with experience and time they have proved excellent materials for slow, backward economies; and time is the main resource available in these type of economies.

In fact, until the 19th. Century the knife production in Scarperia was certainly regarded a backward economy. Moreover Scarperia was strategically placed near large agricultural areas with Maremma and Valdichiana to the south and the Romagna to the north. Large quantities of ox-horn were in an abundance and naturally the production in Scarperia specialised in the production of ox-horn handles from the 19th. Century until completely disappearing in the mid fifties when the social and economic conditions of the town changed.

The introduction of mechanised machinery to work in the fields meant farmers no longer needed to rear work animals and consequently ox-horn became a rare item throughout Europe after the Second World War (animals reared for meat are young and so their horns are practically inexistent).

Page. 464

Moreover the reorganisation of poor, backward economies in the mid 20th. Century meant that slow artisan productions, like the crafting of horn handles, were regarded uneconomical and practically disappeared. In the past the cutlers used to buy the horns whole and he selectioned and designated the various horns for their various uses, either for the regular production or for the more expensive custom made knives. Since the 1960's horn has been imported from countries outside Europe, where work conditions and farming techniques still require work animals. The fact that horn is now imported from distant places means that the horn has to be selected when it is already hollowed out and not complete. All in all the scarcity of quality horn adapt for crafting has meant that prices have increased incredibly. Coupled with the boom in cheaper plastics, other technological materials and time saving production techniques has meant knives with horn handles have become rare items.

Page. 465

Working with horn at Coltellerie Berti.

The founder of the company David Berti produced knives exclusively with ox-horn handles. The tradition was handed down to his son Severino and then to his sons Renzo and Alvaro. Until around the end of the forties horn from the Maremma was used and hard times meant that everything that could be used was used. After the Second World War things started to change.

More than forty years have passed since the 60's when Santandrea arrived in Scarperia with his last load of horn from the Romagna the so-called "Romagnole", but I still remember him very well.

Romagnole ox-horn was the only horn available during the fifties and Santandrea, whose first name I don't remember, left a long lasting impression on me. He was a tall well-built man with a particularly eccentric moustache, to say the least. He wore a cape, a large brimmed hat and a red exotic scarf tied round his neck. Then he spoke with a Romangolo accent, which made him seem a little affected and altogether foreign in a Scarperia of only forty years ago.

Page. 466

During those years the only materials used to make knives were steel and ox-horn, while the arrival in the town of the first, though much more important, did not represent a grand event. Probably because it was an anonymous product manufactured in the steel works and delivered on trucks while ox-horn was becoming scarcer everyday and it was linked also to characters like Santandrea. Ox-horn was bought by the truckload and very often the horns were still attached to the skull. Then the hard work began, selecting and cleaning the horns. First the inside bone was removed and then the full tips were separated from the hollow sections. This job could last days and my father usually selected the horn. I remember following him round as he worked and the "smell" of his clothes denoted the various stages of the work.

By the beginning of the Second World War the wonderful green toned horn from the Maremma and Chianina had already lost its dimension adapt for making knife handles and the production in Scarperia was forced to find an alternative in the black and white horn of the Romagnole which was decidedly inferior in quality though produced in workable proportions.

Page. 467

At the beginning of the 1960's the Romagnole horn followed suit: day-by-day it became smaller and the horn tips were so subtle they were impossible to work. Instead of importing horn, production of the horn-handled knives was abandoned and cheaper alternatives of wood and plastic were made. Seen today the decision seems incomprehensible and indeed completely misguided, though I do feel in a position to justify the decision taken not only my family but also other cutlers in Scarperia. Since the beginnings those who bought the knives were merchants passing through Scarperia. Travelling salesmen or the occasional tradesmen who by nature are not interested in quality products. They prefer a weak market where they can buy cheap products and realise a quick turnover thus keeping the market under control.

This type of situation produced a sort of survival economy for the cutlers in Scarperia, who were at the mercy of outside forces. At the onset of the 60's the decline which promised the complete disappearance of an age-old tradition was in its last phase.

Page.468

Those cutlers who were still managing to stay in business saw the only way to develop an already failing industry was by keeping prices down. Consequently they took the necessary steps to abandon the production of traditional knives. The production of costly horn handles was seen to be uneconomical in the boom years of the 60's in Italy and as a result Coltellerie Berti substituted their beautifully worked horn handled knives with the more economical plastic and wooden handles.

At the beginning of the 90's determined to revive traditions and abandon the economical production introduced in the 60's, I had to resolve the problem of finding horn of workable proportions. I had previously decided that I was going to use only the full tips of the horn and realise the handles from whole pieces as opposed to cutting and heating them. In this way the colour and the structure of the horn would be preserved even though only one handle for every horn tip would be made. Moreover I would be working only the inner most part of the tip; the part which is less likely to be damaged either while the animal is alive or after during seasoning:

Page. 469

The ideal period for seasoning horn is anything from 18 to 24 months. Seasoning should stabilise the fat content and the humidity levels present in the horn therefore minimising volume reduction. It was clear at this point that I was going to have to resort to importing horn. Imported horn is not always good quality and it is extremely important to know exactly where it comes from for a number of reasons. Today the best ox-horn comes from the flat lands in Central Africa, which are characterised by very lush green areas rich in water reserves and where more importantly there are no endemic diseases. Buffalo-horn should be imported from India because the quality of Indian water buffalo-horn is far superior to any other. It grows slowly in a hot humid environments and the humidity is such that it strengthens the structure of the horn.

Finally stag-horn should also be imported from India because the antlers of the Indian Sambar Stag have for a long time been the best for its strength and attractiveness. I am forced to use the conditional form here since the Indian authorities have blocked exportation of stag-horn. European stag-horn is available but the quality is not the same.

Page. 470

Once it has been selected the horn is divided into two parts.

Page. 471

....then using a template the handle is drawn.

Page. 472

The horn is checked for defects: cracks and marks etc.

Page. 473

Then the shaping begins on the grindstone.

Page. 474

Holes are drilled....

Page. 475

....but there is still a long way to go.

Page. 476

The Box-wood story.

Buxus Sempervirens or simply "Bosso" in Italian is admired for its beautiful shiny evergreen leaves and is used frequently to mark out hedge areas, especially in ornamental gardens. The fact that it can be trimmed to almost any desirable shape made it a favourite with the architects of the Italian Renaissance. Historically it is also renowned for possessing important medicinal properties and was used to cure a myriad of afflictions and illnesses from syphilis, epilepsy and rheumatism to gout and malaria. During the Renaissance it was deemed to be an effective prevention against baldness and in popular culture was used as a cleanser, laxative, sudorific, or to reduce a fever.

The Bosso bush is actually poisonous and when taken in large quantities can cause extremely dangerous gastrointestinal disturbances. Buxus Sempervirens belongs to the botanical group Angiospermae, classification Dicotyledones, of the Tricoccae order and the Buxaccae family.

Bosso is a dense evergreen bush and can reach a height of between 5-6 metres. It grows very

slowly and its roots spread out along the ground.

Page. 477

When the bush is young the bark is green and it becomes a yellowish brown colour with age. Its wood is hard and compact and of a vivid yellowy orange colour. It produces long oval shaped berries of about 3mm. in length. And the flowering berries are long but round in shape.

The leaves are simple and oval shaped, 3cm. in length and 8-12mm. in width. They are very hardy with short stalks and are similar to leather in texture. The upper side of the leaf is a dark shiny green colour and slightly hairy along the central vein, while the under side of the leaf is an opaque light green colour. The leaves can last for around two years.

The bush flowers from March to May and the tiny flowers grow in tight bunches located under the branches of the bush. The seeds of the Bosso bush are poisonous and once they fall they are dispersed by ants, which are attracted, to the strong smell they emit. Bosso is one of the very few shrubs along with broom that is dispersed by ants.

Page. 478

Bosso grows in broad-leaved woods on stony ground and in rockeries. It can be found growing in oak and ash groves, with lindens and sycamores but above all in beech tree groves. It grows spontaneously in dry rocky areas in flat lands or in mountainous areas at 800 metres, in southern Italy and Sardinia. It prefers chalky, porous terrain and thrives best in hot climates though it does withstand harsh winters.

Box-wood in the artisan workshop.

The Bosso bush is an extraordinary and incredibly adaptable plant: it grows very slowly and can live until 600 years old. It can withstand light inferior to 180 volts but thrives in the heat and light; it is heat resistant and survives forest fires and due to its compactness it is the only wood in Europe that does not float in water. The fact that its wood is hard and does not warp has meant that it has been used throughout history to make various objects from mathematical instruments and musical instruments to combs, chess pieces, pipes andknife handles.

Page. 479

It has also become the symbol of solidarity, stoicism and protection and has been used to make Masonic lodge hammers and religious icons. In ancient Greece Bosso was used to make small cylindrical vases -"bussolotti"- to preserve medicines. It was also used to make tablets covered with a layer of wax to write on. In the past Bosso bushes reached incredible heights unfortunately the biggest and most beautiful specimens were all utilised for the excellent characteristics of their hard wood.

Page. 480

Unfortunately surviving examples today are a lot smaller and not as robust. We have to remember that in order to reach a trunk dimension of between 10-15 cm in diameter it must be at least one hundred years old! Unlike today in the past there were no alternative materials as resistant, durable and easy to work and so the cultivation of Bosso was wide spread making it easily accessible and economical.

Box-wood at Coltellerie Berti.

Box-wood from the Bosso bush has always been used in the production of plain rustic knives (it was rarely seen to be used for engraved or decorated handles). Today however it is destined for a more sophisticated use in the production of simple yet elegant knives. Box-wood has an old fashioned feel to it but can easily be used in a modern day design context. However due to its scarcity and the small dimensions available it can only be used to make objects or indeed knife handles of small proportions.

Page. 481

There is a type of box-wood available in larger dimensions but it belongs to another species of the *Buxus Sempervirens* L, the *Buxus Balearica* that grows on the Iberian Peninsula. Unfortunately it can not be compared to the Italian box-wood, in particular to the one that grows on the Tuscan-Emilia Romagna Apennines; notable for its vivid yellowy orange tones and delicate light brown knots and veins which can not be found in any other box-wood anywhere.

I recently found a box-wood from the Balkans which is quite similar to Italian box-wood and I resort

to using it for the production of large handles. Otherwise all the knives from the Italian Regional Knife Collection and the cutlery from the Convivio Nuovo series are made from Italian box-wood from the Tuscan-Emilia Romagna Apennines. This box-wood requires a maturation period of at least 24 months (36 would be better) and the colour of the wood constantly changes with age. The initial vivid yellowy orange tone transforms to a warm rich nutty brown colour over the years.

Page. 483

Steel.

The heart and soul.

Page. 484

A little basic metallurgy.

Steel is a poly-crystalline metal whose molecular structure is characterised by the presence of crystalline grains, which ultimately influence the physical properties of steel. In order to understand the workings fuller it would be better to determine what happens to a metal during solidification, while cooling down after reaching fusion status. Every metal has a fixed temperature at which fusion occurs. Fusion is basically the point at which a solid like metal assumes a liquid state or rather when the atomic bond between the atoms is weakened considerably by thermal conditions and the atoms move around freely. During the solidification of a metal random atoms begin to position themselves into an orderly arrangement. This transformation from disordered arrangement to orderly arrangement is defined as "solidification" or "crystallization".

The growth of crystal grains.

Page. 485

During this transformation the initial arrangements of atoms are very instable and they break up and reform continually until thermal conditions permit the formation of more stable atomic arrangements similar to sub-microscopic crystals. These sub-microscopic crystals trigger off the formation of the real crystals through a process of nucleation and growth. Initially the random atoms start positioning themselves at the edges of the crystalline lattices forming periodic arrangements. These crystals are numerous and grow independently of each other. Once the liquid is saturated the crystals then come into direct contact with each other forming poly-crystalline metals. Poly-crystalline metals are made up a large number of elementary crystals called grains. Atomic bonds between the grains are formed by the atoms positioned on the edges of the crystal lattices, which act as a sort of go between or links, since they do not enter to form part of the crystal.

Page.486

The temperature at which the metal starts cooling down, the speed at which the process takes place and the presence of impurities all determine the dimension of the grains formed in the metallic mass:

- a slow cooling process produces a large grain crystalline structure (large crystals with linear dimensions up to 0.2mm)
- a rapid cooling process does not allow full crystal grain growth therefore the grain structure will be very fine (small crystals with an average linear dimension of 0.005mm)
- impurities alter greatly the crystalline structure of the metal thereby affecting its physical properties (the presence of atoms different to those of the metal alter the crystal lattice).

It is also very interesting to note that the surface of a metal that has been rapidly cooled has an extremely fine grain, which increases in size nearing the centre (the centre always cools down at a slower rate than the rest of the mass).

Page. 487

Of equal importance and interest is the fact that alloys have grains characterised by their different compositions: crystals which have a higher fixed temperature of fusion (and therefore solidify more quickly) together with crystals which a lower fixed temperature of fusion. To obtain an alloy with a uniform composition a slow cooling process has to be used to allow the formation of a large grain throughout the whole of the mass. Uniformity of the alloy is paramount in maintaining the multiform physical properties of the metal. Due to the difficulties and cost involved in the slow cooling process and the problems of stabilising the balance between solid-liquid states, steel works produce steels with large grains and non-uniform compositions. Steels with large grain structures

are undesirable from an engineering point of view therefore the metal is heated up again to a temperature at which the diffusion of the components of the alloy occurs at a more acceptable speed. The aim of reheating is to place the metal in a more balanced structural, chemical and crystallographic state, which can be obtained in two ways:

Page. 488

- by heating the metal to a temperature inferior to that of re-crystallisation in order to establish the uniform mechanical conditions for pieces worked at ordinary temperatures.
- by heating the metal to a temperature near to that of fusion in order to obtain uniformity in the metal.

How steel is produced.

Pure Iron is a silvery white metal, which is relatively soft. It melts at 1535°C and boils at 1740°C. At room temperature it crystallises in a body centred cubic crystal structure (ferro alpha), at 911°C. it transforms into a face centred cubic crystal structure (ferro gamma) and then returns back to a body centred cubic crystal structure at 1392°C (ferro delta).

Common crystal structures. Left: Simple cubic lattice, cubic body centred lattice, cubic face centred lattice.

Page. 489

The Delta and Gamma phases of iron absorb limited quantities of carbon, while the Alpha phase only absorbs very small amounts.

Steel is nothing more than a solution (an alloy) of iron and carbon in which the various atomic forms are more or less stabilised according to the thermal conditions the steel is fixed at:

- **ferrite** obtained at the Alpha phase (723°C) is a solid iron-carbon solution and can contain up to 0.025% carbon, which occupies the spaces between the crystal grains. Ferrite is supple and soft.
- **austenite** obtained in the Gamma phase (1147°C) is a solid iron-carbon solution and can contain up to 2.0% carbon. Austenite is less dense than ferrite and is supple and soft and normally instable and therefore is only present at high temperatures, though it is present in some special steels at room temperature.
- **cementite** an interstitial compound of Fe₃C, it is extremely hard and brittle. Formed at high temperatures in the presence of carbon above 0.8%. It remains stable and is present at room temperatures.

Page. 489

- **pearlite** a mix of ferrite and cementite, which comes about through the saturation of austenite at 723°C.
- **graphite** carbon at its pure state, which has not been absorbed.

The formation of all the components listed above is linked to the percentage of carbon present in the solid solution and the cooling process. The final result, or rather the quantity of the various components found in the steel at its solid state, influences its physical properties.

To understand this process let's examine the different stages of the slow cooling down process of steel with a carbon content of 0.5%.

Beginning the cooling the first solid nucleus of austenite is formed (a solid solution of carbon in the ferro gamma phase with 0.5%) continuing the cooling process the austenite grains transform into ferrite (austenite is instable at low temperatures) freeing carbon atoms (ferrite has less carbon than austenite) which saturate the part still at the austenite stage and at this point the formation of cementite begins. Lower the temperature further the fixed compound cementite (stable even at low temperatures) mixes with the ferrite to form the compound pearlite.

Page. 491

Steel and knives. In search of "perfect steel".

Without a doubt the most important feature of every knife is the metal used to make the blade.

Almost 100% of the time steel is used. I hesitate to say 100% of the time because in recent years steel has been put to one side in favour of alternative materials like porcelain, nylon etc. Obviously these knives raise a certain curiosity and interest for their originality and innovation however I have to limit the discussion to steel since it has been around the longest.

The quest for a "perfect steel" is endless, much like the quest for a "perfect knife" and cutlers have

experimented and tried out various forms. The quest invariably leads to a compromise of one or more of the characteristics on the list. The following elements are what should constitute the "perfect steel":

- **workability:** it is extremely important that a steel can be worked with regular workshop machines. Thermal processing can reduce the flaws in steel to a minimum. It also increases the workability no end, which means that any slight errors made during production can be corrected.

Page. 492

- **hardness and a fine grain:** the correct hardness and a fine grain determine the superior cut of a blade. In theory the ideal hardness of a good blade by today's standards should measure between 55 and 58°R C on the Rockwell scale (the official scale used to measure the hardness of steel) and depending on what the intended use of the blade is, it should have a tolerance rate of +/- 1°. It is widely thought that the only way to determine the quality of any cutting instrument is through the hardness of its blade. This is a necessary condition but not the only one. One could say, quite definitely, that an increased hardness in the steel used to make the knife guarantees good quality but if the grain is not fine and the transformation from austenite to martensite is not completed then it is almost 100% certain the sharpness of the blade will be fragile and will not last.

- **toughness** A good steel must offer resistance to the stress a blade is subjected during normal use. An ability to resist a substantial force without bending or breaking.

Page.493

- **wear and tear:** that the steel guarantees the blade a long lasting sharpness even through continued use: in other words that the blade stands up to wear and tear and still be able to cut well.

- **resistance to corrosion:** knives today, especially if they are meant for culinary use, should resist corrosion. They should be stain free and not mark, in extreme cases with rust. This condition has to be paramount considering that oxidisation is caused by acids, that are mainly found in meat, fruit and vegetables. Corrosion can be kept under control by adding more than 12% and less than 18% of chrome to the chemical composition of the alloy. A valid compromise which helps to maintain the cutting edge of the steel while at the same time increasing resistance to corrosion. The truth of the matter is that no steel is 100% inoxidizable: in fact stainless steel is just more resistant to oxidisation than traditional carbon steels.

Page.494

We use the word "stainless" to give a good idea of what the steel is meant to do. If you leave a stainless steel knife, without cleaning it, outside exposed to the elements or sea water signs of deterioration will certainly appear. It may take longer than with ordinary steels but it will not remain "stainless" for ever. We could say that this knife has been made with a good quality chrome steel. Steels with an extremely high content of chrome as used in steels used to make pans and cutlery. Although they remain "stainless" they too in time lose their resistance and strength. It is common belief that carbon steel blades have a much superior, longer lasting cutting edge than stainless steel blades. It is not altogether true and dates back to when the first stainless steel knives were made from steels which were chemically adequate but had not been treated correctly in the thermal process. Technological development since has meant that a whole range of thermally treated steels are available today giving manufacturers more choice.

Page. 495

Choosing a blade steel today tends to be based on the type of knife and its intended use. A good rule to adopt I find, is to use stainless steels for knives intended for the kitchen and culinary use, for hardy environments and collectable knives, while I prefer to use cheaper more resistant carbon steels for tools and work knives.

- **easy to maintain:** Today we have a wide variety of "special steels" on hand and it is very easy to be tempted into using them incorrectly. So beware, abandoning solid principles just for the sake of owning an expensive knife, which is difficult to maintain and may never be used properly, is completely wrong in the long run. Each knife must be made with a blade steel fitting for its intended use. And easy maintenance is something, which should interest the person who is buying the knife directly.

Page. 496

How blade steel is manufactured.

Steel is an alloy whose base metal iron has had a small quantity of carbon (less than 1.5%) added to it during production. No subsequent operation during production or working can modify the strength or hardness of steel as can its carbon content. There is also a limit to the amount of carbon which can be added and going over the limit the strength and hardness is no longer altered positively. For example, a carbon content over 0.8% produces less significant increases in the hardness of the steel. In fact if the carbon content is in excess of 1.5% the steel produced will be so fragile that it will be impossible to use.

One exception to this rule is in the case of Damascus steels, which can have a carbon content up to 2% and still maintain their elasticity. The secret of these steels lies in the special production process that consists of welding layers of sheet steel with different carbon contents together, forming a stratified structure.

Page. 497

The steels used today in the production of knives and cutlery are complex alloys made up of various elements each donating a particular characteristic to the steel; inoxidability, workability, resistance, consistency and strength etc....

The ideal characteristics should:

- a. Given a specific level of hardness, increase resistance.
- b. Given a specific level of hardness, increase consistency
- c. Increase resistance to corrosion.
- d. Reduce deformation during tempering.

The first three qualities are to the advantage of the knife user the latter is to the advantage of the manufacturer. To improve the overall performance quality of steel it is normal practice to add varying amounts of the following elements to the base compound of iron and carbon:

-magnesium: reduces the presence of oxygen and therefore reduces the formation of damaging oxides. It gives stability at high temperatures and when kept to a content of less than 0.7% increases the hardness range of the steel. In excess quantities blades are too hard and tend to crack easily.

-silicon- silicon also has the same capacity to reduce oxidation. A combination of high silicon content of more than 2% and a moderate carbon content of between 0.4 and 0.6% makes the steel more consistent.

-chrome- an important element which has varying effects according to its content in the alloy:

- a. In small amounts (0.25 - 0.50%) it increases hardness and reduces the weak points common in some steels.
- b. In moderate amounts (0.8 - 1.25%) it delays corrosion, oxidation and generally increases resistance to the action of external agents (acids etc).
- c. In large amounts (more than 4% - 12%) it increases the resistance to abrasion, oxidation and marking. Steels, which have high carbon contents become "stainless" with 12% of chrome or more.

-nickel- rarely is present in the "sophisticated" steels used for making cutlery. Nickel increases consistency and lowers the temperature for tempering.

Page. 499

The great advantage of nickel is that it reduces cracks and imperfections on the blade, especially on long subtle blades. Moreover it reduces the oxidation level of the steel and increases the resistance to chemical and atmospheric corrosion.

-molybdenum- is used to increase the hardness of the blade. Only very small amounts (0.2 - 0.3%) are required to achieve the desired effect while at the same time decreasing fragility. It also reduces the tensions normally formed during forging and thermal processing.

-tungsten- has the same properties as molybdenum as well as increasing resistance.

-vanadium- was used primarily to reduce the presence of impurities and later it was discovered to have the added benefit of increasing resistance.

Page.500

The thermal processing of blade steel.

It is a well-known fact that knives should be made from specially tempered steels. Maybe it is not

so well-known, what tempered steel actually is. It is common knowledge that tempering involves heating the metallic mass to a given temperature followed by a rapid cooling down or "quenching" but what many probably don't know is why steels are thermally treated and how they change when are thermally treated.

Thermal treatment is absolutely necessary given that steels are produced and sold to cutlers in their "soft" state which otherwise would be impossible to work with normal workshop apparatus due to their extreme hardness.

Thermal treatment induces a physical change in the structure of the steel without altering its chemical composition and confers the right properties for a blade: resistance, consistency and hardness etc.

Page. 501

This thermal treatment is fundamental to the production of a good knife. In the past every cutler believed he possessed unique talents which enabled him to produce knives superior to those of other cutlers. In effect until technology brought about the desired compositions and metallurgists were on hand to scientifically determine the course of the thermal treatment, cutlers relied heavily on intuition, experience and their own ability to produce a good blade. The correct temperature for tempering the steel, for example was a determined through trial and error, until the best results were obtained. In fact, the more 'enlightened' cutlers could avoid further misfortune once they had learned that the correct temperature for tempering had been reached only when the metal had lost its magnetic qualities.

Once the correct temperature had been determined cutlers began recognising further the critical point by the colour of the sparks the metal gave off. This is the reason why many workshops had a so-called "dark corner", not infiltrated by natural or artificial light, where they could carry out tempering.

Page. 502

The results of trial and error were jealously guarded trade secrets handed down from father to son. Today they may seem bizarre anecdotes but examined more closely they prove to be intelligent solutions to the problems at hand, as in the case of the cooling down process. Oil, water, air, various salt solutions and even urine were used! The urine of the local bishop was sought after, which is not surprising because he ate well and as a result his urine was rich in phosphates and various salts. Used in "quenching" the metal was "treated" much the same as it is today with sophisticated technology, that aims at hardening the surface of the steel. The final stages of the process were also subject to naked eye observations and trial and error. In order to verify the hardness of the tempered steel, a piece was worked with a file. Judging literally how the steel "bit" the file cutlers could determine the hardness of the steel and by the form and colour of the sparks coming off the lathe they could evaluate the overall success of the tempering process.

I. Steel with low carbon content produces long yellowy orange coloured streams of sparks with bright orange flashes. Occasionally it gives of star shaped flashes, coming from the carbon in the steel.

Page. 503

II. Steel with high carbon content produces a "rain" of feathery sparks, which are fine and brief. And the high carbon content produces a less persistent "rain" of star shaped sparks.

III. Alloy steels (stainless and others) produce sparks of varying forms depending on the elements contained in the alloy and combined with those from the carbon give off an effect of long colourful rays.

Once the best method of tempering had been determined it was up to the cutler and his experience acquired then to reproduce it successfully time and time again.

Page. 504

The various methods of tempering amassed over the centuries through trial and error could be associated more to common superstition and witchcraft than to scientific reasoning. However their merits have been subsequently explained scientifically and the use of precision instruments and analysis has transformed tempering in to a technological process.

From a purely theoretical point of view, other than being able to choose the correct steel for a particular use, today we know the chemical composition of each alloy and therefore the correct

thermal treatment to use (each steelworks indicates the best way to temper its steel). Nevertheless small differences in composition do exist between lots produced from one single steel and if not corrected in the thermal treatment by the cutler's experience they can compromise the quality of the knives and their brand name.

Page. 505

Until now thermal treatment has been referred to as a single process whereas in reality it is in fact two distinct phases:

- **tempering:** at room temperature gives

1. an allotropic form with a crystalline structure stable only at tempering temperature.

2. a solution saturated with one of the alloy's base elements.

The aim of tempering is to obtain an allotropic transformation from ferro-Gamma to ferro-Alpha while maintaining the same properties and have a saturated carbon solution at room temperature. Tempering consists of cooling down rapidly from a determined temperature to room temperature while maintaining a relatively unstable structure (metastable) referred to as martensite. Martensite has a tetragonal crystal lattice, which can be considered an intermediary between the cubic face centred crystal lattice of ferro-Gamma and the cubic body centred crystal lattice of ferro-Alpha, that dissolves as much carbon as possible. The more martensite obtained through tempering (reducing the presence of graphite and ferrite) the harder and more resistant the steel will be. This in turn guarantees a blade steel with a superior cut.

Page. 506

Martensite has a hard needle-shaped structure and is characterised by the presence of 'grains' and its volume determines the compactness of the metal: a metal with a large grain structure is fragile since contact between the grains is reduced and therefore the links between the grains are also greatly reduced.

1. not ideal: large, rough grain.

2. ideal: small, smooth uniform grain.

With a little experience and concentration the grainy texture of a piece of tempered steel can be seen with naked eye by studying the weave in the area around a crack.

Page. 507

A large grain steel will show a harsh uneven crack while a small grain steel will show a smooth uniform crack. To temper a steel correctly and obtain the right size of grain there are also important compositional factors of the steel to be aware of:

a. the temperature the steel reaches before beginning the cooling down process has to be its exact maximum temperature (this varies from steel to steel) otherwise the grains will be too large and the metal will be more fragile.

b. the length of time the metal remains at the maximum temperature before beginning the cooling down process must guarantee that each blade in a batch reaches and does not exceed the desired temperature and therefore much depends on the number of blades being thermally treated.

c. the cooling down process must be carried out using the right cooling agent (air, oil, water, salt solutions etc) for the right steel and the desired effects.

Page. 508

d. the length of time taken for cooling down (extremely important) must be quick enough to produce the desired small grains but not too much to produce fractures and cracks or spoil the composition of the alloy.

- **annealing or normalisation:** through tempering a metastable state is reached in the metal. It guarantees the right physical properties for a blade but it is not practical since it is full of strong internal tensions and would break up easily. Imagine a "totally tempered" blade fragile to the point that if it were to fall onto the floor it would shatter like a piece of glass! In order to correct this, the crystalline structure has to be stabilised through a process known as annealing. Annealing steel refines the crystalline structure and removes residual stress it also increases ductility by reducing hardness and brittleness. It involves heating the tempered metal to its critical point (a temperature

much lower than that of tempering- about a 1/4) and maintaining it at a constant temperature for between one to three hours, after which it should be allowed to cool at a rate slow enough to prevent hardening.

Page. 509

Annealing only reduces the physical properties gained in tempering slightly (1-2%) but recuperates the structural balance sufficiently to eliminate the undesirable brittleness of the alloy. In the past annealing required great experience, ability and sensitivity in order to intuit the "right moment" when the blade had reached annealing temperature. The difficulty lay in the fact that these temperatures were so low that it was impossible to judge by the colour of the sparks given off by the steel. Cutlers had to clean a small area on the piece before heating it to evaluate oxidation, which turned it a sort of violet colour at the critical moment. Obviously thermally controlled furnaces available nowadays have increased the effectiveness of the process and guarantee the best results.

Page. 511

Making blades.

Blades can be forged or pressed. Forging is the oldest way of making blades while shearing is relatively recent. Nowadays the traditional forging tools, the anvil and the hammer have been replaced by modern forging "machines" while pressing entails various other methods of cutting, the laser is just one among many. Explanation of the following production processes will help an understanding of the various attributes of different blades.

-working hot steel manually: when forging a blade manually the length of the steel bar has to be long enough to hold one end while heating the other 'red hot' in the forge. The heated steel is then placed on the anvil and hit repeatedly with a hammer, forming a shape approximate to the shape of the blade required. Once forged, the blade is filed down before being thermally treated after which the finishing touches to the blade are carried out and the handle is assembled. Forging blades manually is very important for a number of reasons.

Page. 511

Other than giving form to the steel blade it improves considerably the quality of the cut. The repeated hammering on the hot steel "breaks down" the steel grains into smaller grains, which slowly realign themselves into parallel lines in the direction of the blade. This results in a harder more resistant cutting edge on the blade giving it a superior cut. Another advantage of forging is the unlimited blade shapes one can obtain. Heating and working one very small steel bar means you can form or rather sculpt an extremely fine blade. Nowadays however forging steel manually to improve the quality is no longer necessary (as explained previously since today the modern steel industry can supply a wide range of quality engineering steels) and given the high costs involved and time required, forging by hand is reserved for sophisticated blades destined for knife collections.

Page. 512

-Working hot steel mechanically: mechanical forging operates using a power hammer: a large mechanically powered hammer drives down on the steel which is placed on a reinforced work bench acting as an anvil. The hammering action to realign the steel grains has practically disappeared in modern forges and the working of the red hot steel has been reduced to a simple single 'hit' which reduces the steel bar to a "pancake" after which the blade is cut, thermally treated, filed down and finally finished off. The main advantage is that it is more economical than hand forging and therefore more practical for the production of knives destined for everyday use.

-Working cold steel: involves the cutting of blades from a sheet of cold steel using a mould mounted on a press. With just one single hit the blade is cut and formed. Then it is thermally treated and after a number of filing downs the blades are ready to be mounted.

Page. 513

This kind of process is reserved for low quality production. It is less expensive than mechanical forging and it became popular for the production of knives from low-grade steels for mass markets. In more recent years the production of high-grade sheet-steel has meant that good quality blades can be produced with the cold pressed steel method.

High technology has introduced various new techniques for the pressing method, among many the use of the laser for cutting cold sheet-steel. However pressing or laser cutting sheet-steel is limited

greatly in the production of certain types of traditional blades. Sheet-steel is of an even thickness and so the production of blades appreciated for their "knots" and grains is out of the question. Naturally after all that has been said, among the methods outlined hand forging has to be the most fascinating way of making a blade. Even though it does not automatically guarantee the quality of a knife (that depends also on the steel works and the thermal treatment the steel undergoes) it does recall centuries of experience and tradition.

Page. 514

Sharpening knives.

Although we are always referring to a "sharp edge" of a cutting tool, it is quite probable we are not really aware what the sharp edge of a knife actually is! Sharp edges of all sorts, from the flintstone to precision instruments, have improved the quality of our daily life greatly. We could define the sharp edge as the meeting point of two flat surfaces of a blade, originally discovered accidentally by some Stone-Age man while happily chipping away at a stone. Today it is a series of complex processes which influence the all important cutting capacity and the meeting point of two flat surfaces is not easy to obtain though every cutler has his theory on how to obtain the best cutting edge. Everyday use of the term sharp edge tends to be confused with the cutting capacity of the knife. It would be more correct to think of the edge as the geometric form of the end part of the knife whose form determines the "cutting capacity".

Page. 515

Sharpening any knife is not exactly "a science" but every cutler has his theory formed on personal experience and sometimes that of others, which he uses to verify the best results. As far as "measuring" the sharpness of a knife edge goes there are machines which can measure the length of the cut but they can not judge what we call in the business the "pleasure" of the cut! "Pleasure" may seem out of place when referring to the cut however it comfortably refers to various ideas.

Although every cutler has his own theory, effective sharpening is based on three basic elements:

1. use of correct abrasive material (file and or stone)
2. a precise cutting angle
3. a uniform cutting technique.

Normally knives produced with industrial techniques or in large quantities leave the factory with a sharp edge worked by automatic sharpeners.

Page. 516

This is because sharpening by hand is more expensive and it is not always easy to have a large number of experienced "sharpeners" on hand to work the large numbers of knives manually.

Sharpening with stone.

The best way to sharpen any knife is still by whetting the blade over a stone dampened with either water or oil, depending on the type of stone used. There are many types of sharpening stone, they can be natural or synthetic and should be chosen according to the 'touch' and results they offer. The stone must be washed from time to time to maintain its rubbing effect. The water or oil used while sharpening stop the tiny steel particles, which break off the blade, from blocking the pores of the stone. However when a stone is used and left dirty a film will form and harden reducing the abrasive action of the stone. Sharpening stones can also be used dry as long as they are kept very clean.

Page. 517

The stone has to be of the right size for the blade being sharpened and it has to be positioned on a secure worktop. Since sharpening requires force and a uniform pressure it is best to carry out the action standing. The cutting capacity of any blade depends a lot on the angle used while sharpening, the various theories recommend between 10° and 35° according to the knife and its desired use. Measuring and maintaining the correct angle while sharpening is not easy but the hand becomes expert with experience. Remember the more acute the angle between the blade and the stone is the more acute and delicate the sharpness of the blade will be. A good guide should be to apply an angle of between 15° and 20°. The time required to effectively sharpen a blade depends on the cutting angle of the knife, the hardness of the steel and the smoothing quality of the stone.

Page. 518

There are also different ways for rubbing the blade across the stone. Some people prefer to "rub" using circular motion while passing the blade along the stone (which is what my grandfather Severino did), others however prefer to "rub" straight across the stone running from the handle to the tip of the blade as though cutting a piece of the stone. There are devices available on the market today, which block the back of the blade and help maintain a uniform cutting angle.

Page. 519

burred edge (diagram)

Obviously whichever sharpening method you choose to use it very important to remember both sides of the cutting edge. The first sharpening will leave a rough edge running the length of the blade, which is referred to as the "burr" and it can be seen by placing the blade inclined at 45° on the palm of your hand. Using another stone with a finer grain than the previous and rubbing down both sides using alternating strokes at an angle of about 25° the 'burr' is removed and the knife is now ready to try out. There are different ways of testing the effectiveness of the sharp edge. Traditionally cutlery tested the sharpness of the blade by shaving the hairs on their forearms or by placing the weight of the blade on a fingernail lightly to see if it slipped off or not (a good edge should not slip rather it should cut or hold the nail firmly).

Page. 520

Today there are machines to test the cutting edge of a blade, which operate by slicing different thickness of paper pressing the whole length of the blade.

In effect there are lots of ways to test the sharp edge but above all its important to keep in mind that the sharpness of the cutting edge should be right for the job at hand. For example a knife, which is used, for a razor action will have a very fine and delicate sharp edge and can not be used for large heavy cuts, while a knife used for chopping actions etc will not be able to razor.

Sharpening with steels.

Everyone has seen and admired a butcher when he brandishes his knives on a sharpening steel before cutting a joint of meat. It is a sacred rite and should not be renounced.

The sharpening steel is a kind of circular shaped file with a very fine grainy surface. In the past smooth sharpening steels were used for carbon steels but since the advent of stainless steels they have disappeared.

Page. 521

The end of the steel is magnetised to attract and collect the residue of steel grains, which accumulate during use. It prevents the porous surface from "blocking up" and maintains its abrasive quality. The steel also needs to be washed from time to time to remove the greasy film, which forms on the surface of the file. The sharpening stone does in fact sharpen a blade more thoroughly while a steel really only 'tops up' the sharp edge of a blade which has been properly sharpened previously. The fine grainy surface of the steel file rubs against the blade creating the mini burr (a lot of microscopic teeth). It is in effect a sort of 'false' sharp edge, which does not last long, and this is why the butcher has to continually 'top up'.

The prolonged use of the sharpening steel can in fact ruin a keen sharp edge. A good idea would be to use the sharpening steel when the knife no longer cuts well and when you want to put off the inevitable visit to the experts.

Page. 522.

The correct way to use steel is to let the edge run the length of the file, starting from the handle to the point of the blade, while maintaining the same angle throughout the whole operation. The ideal angle in this case would be between 35° and 40° and the pressure on the blade has to be uniform, enough to feel the bite of the sharpening steel on the blade. Today there are some excellent sharpening steels on the market made of porcelain which I prefer to steels. They maybe less abrasive but the sweeter action does however maintain the original quality of the edge better.

Page. 523

Smooth and serrated edges.

Production of a serrated blade for table and kitchen knives is relatively recent. The success of these serrated edged knives can be attributed to two contributing factors: a need on the

manufacturers part to mass produce kitchen and table knives at economical prices and the replacement of wooden plates with harder materials like porcelain, ceramic and steel etc.

As far as the production of serrated edged knives is concerned the sharpening process is simplified in so much as it is completely mechanised. Moreover if the serrated edge does not cut at least it can "saw". Cooked foods can be "sawn" quite effectively even with a modest knife made of low quality steel. "Cutting" however requires a top quality knife.

Eating off porcelain and ceramic plates has also favoured the use of the serrated edge knife. During the cut the blade inevitably comes into contact with the hard surface of the plate ruining its sharp edge. With the serrated blade only the outer edge of the blade's "teeth" comes into contact with the plate and the inner edge remains intact meaning the knife will need sharpening less frequently.

Page. 524

As far as cutting food is concerned the smooth edged blade beats the serrated edge hands down for pleasure and cleanness of cut. It may cost more and need sharpening more often but I could never renounce the pleasure of a smooth edged knife. It may seem all too highbrow but the idea ripping and tearing at food on a plate gives me the impression of barbaric and sawing away at a piece of meat, which incidentally dries up the nutritional juices, takes the pleasure out of food. Moreover the superior cut offered by the smooth edged knife is valued by the professionals themselves. It is no great secret that chefs never use a serrated edged knife to cut food!

There is the old argument in favour of the serrated edge. Cutting rope or cord like materials with a pocket-knives or fixed blade knife with a smooth edge is difficult. Today there is a production of knives with a partially serrated edge which can be very practical for general purposes.

Page. 525

Steel and sharpening at Coltellerie Berti.

In the previous pages discussion has been concerned with the production process of steel, forging and cutting steel blades and sharpening in general. Now I would like to talk about the problems Coltellerie Berti has affronted on a day to day basis.

The steel we use is a French stainless steel AISI 420, which has a particularly rich carbon content (>0,53%) and added quantities of molybdenum and vanadium, making it an excellent choice of blade steel for knives destined for everyday use. By everyday use we intend kitchen and table knives and pocket-knives intended for other types of cut. This steel reaches a hardness of 55-57 °RC and has a fine grain which gives it long lasting and easy to maintain sharp edge. It also has a good resistance to corrosion.

Some of our blades are press cut and some are forged but the strong point in our production lies in the sharpening methods we employ. As all cutlers maintain, and I am no exception, our sharpening methods are the best and all of the knives that leave Coltellerie Berti are ready to use.

Page. 526

There are three distinct phases to our sharpening process, all of which are carried out entirely by hand. They produce an excellently shaped cutting edge on the blade, which I feel is the absolute best on knives destined for everyday use. The shape of the bevelled edge is such that it guarantees a sharpness, which is consumed very slowly. Our sharpening produces a cut, which is not in anyway aggressive, and food seems to separate 'at will' under the blade. Needless to say no violent cutting action is required!

diagrams.

Wedge-shaped cutting edge:
aggressive cut, quickly consumed.

Rounded cutting edge:
sweet cut, slowly consumed.

Page. 527

Coltellerie Berti: industry or craftsmen.

If you have had the patience to read from A-Z this modest volume then I am sure you already understand the guiding philosophy at Coltellerie Berti. During the final ten years of the last century we decided to take a risk by abandoning industry & co. and take on the challenge of crafting high

quality knives. Not by utilising high technology but by taking advantage of a culture, tradition and craftsmanship which had been passed down to us through the generations. In an age where the meaning of the word "craftsman" is devoid of its origins and is used to intend small businesses where less than 15 people are employed then Coltellerie Berti falls into this category more so because each one of its employees is a "craftsman". Shortly we will rise above the magic 15 employee's line but we proudly remain craftsmen at heart. Work divisions were abandoned long ago and every one of the knives we produce is worked exclusively by just one of our craftsmen. In other words whoever starts the knife job finishes it!

Page. 528

Although the desire was to produce using purely traditional methods particular to Scarperia and indeed my family, certain phases of the production had to be mechanised. In particular those phases where the individual quality or unique character of the product is not compromised. In this way we have been able to produce high quality knives at affordable prices. The phases, which can be mechanised without compromising, are the preparation of the metal pieces including lets say the 'rough sketch' of the blades. Everything else assembly, finishing etc is carried entirely by hand. Our work methods have helped us produce knives, which embody the Italian cutler's tradition. The value of any knife and the pleasure it gives lies not only in the cut but also in the materials used and the work gone into making it. These qualities can not only be seen but also touched when you hold the knife in the palm of your hand. A lot of industrially produced knives have excellent cutting capacities but often the shape, the materials used and the pleasure they are meant to give have been compromised for the sake of practicality, production costs and machinability.

Page. 529

The knives produced at Coltellerie Berti, along with the fact that they need special care and attention, force you to appreciate more fully the cut they were designed to give and give back the pleasure of using an genuine object that not only has to be appreciated but also respected.

Page. 530

Lucio Pompili, "Symposium Quattro Stagioni" Restaurant, Cartoceto, Pesaro.

Page. 531

Handling and taking care of our knives.

Page. 532

Handling and taking care of our knives.

The knives Coltellerie Berti have been hand making for over a hundred years were originally meant to be either carried around as pocket-knives or used at the table. The strict observance of traditional methods and materials demands that only those prepared to accept the following limitations should acquire them.

1. Never leave the blade to soak: it is made from a carbon rich steel, which guarantees a superior cut and long lasting sharpness, but it also has a tendency to stain.

Page. 533

2. The handles are made from natural organic materials and are best maintained without prolonged contact with water and heat.

3. Wash by hand in lukewarm water with a light detergent and dry carefully.

4. Avoid washing in the dishwasher (with the exception of the Convivio Nuovo and other knives with plastic handles). Careful drying is always recommended.

Page. 534

5. With time the line and form of the handles can change slightly due to a natural "shrinkage" of the organic materials used.

6. Always protect the knives from heavy knocks or falls.

7. Always avoid inappropriate use.

Page. 535

8. Always have the knives sharpened by specialists: the blades are designed to last.

9. Always replace them in their proper boxes after use.

10. To maintain their natural shine the handles need to be treated or rather "fed" from time to time with a soft cloth and olive oil, better still with oils used to protect horses hooves.

Page. 536

Andrea Berti 1963.

Page. 537

Open Forum

All you ever wanted to know about our knives.

1) *Can anyone buy your knives or are their laws restricting the conditions of acquisition?*

Even though laws are complex regarding the selling of knives there is no room for interpretation as far as those knives produced by Coltellerie Berti are concerned.

Conditions do not permit Coltellerie Berti to produce cutting instruments, which could be defined as "arms". Our production may be of the two following categories:

1. Pocket-knives (folding)

The pocket-knives produced by Coltellerie Berti from the Italian Regional Knife Collection were designed for legitimate use and not intended to cause intentional bodily harm. Therefore every folding pocket-knife made by Coltellerie Berti can be sold freely, bought freely and carried freely providing the length of the knife does not exceed the limits set by the law: a knife with a pointed blade can not measure in excess of 6cm. And a knife with a squared off blade can measure up to 10cm. but can only be carried with a licence issued by the public authorities. However the sales and acquisition of pocket-knives is legitimate.

2. Kitchen and table knives.

Coltellerie Berti produce knives for use in the kitchen and at the table, which can be sold, acquired and transported legitimately: from the time of the sale between places of use. However they can never be taken out of the context of their intended use i.e. the kitchen where they are to be used legitimately.

Page. 539

2) *Do your knives have to remain within the four walls of the house once they have been bought or can they be taken outside of the domestic context?*

All of the folding pocket-knives produced by Coltellerie Berti can be taken out of the domestic context legitimately providing the blade does not exceed 6 cm. (and the length of the handle measures less than 8cm. and is less than 9mm. in width) or not more than 10cm. for pocket-knives with a squared off blade.

In the case that these measurements are not respected then the knife would need a special licence issued by the public authorities whereby intended use of the knife has to be specified.

Table knives and kitchen knives can be taken out of the domestic context and transported from place to place but may only be used in the context for which they were intended.

3) *What happens if the police stop me and find me in possession of one of your knives? What should I do?*

What ever knife you are transporting, whether it be one of our pocket-knives or kitchen knives an explanation of possession should suffice: it could be that you have just bought the knife, you are taking it to be sharpened, it is to be used in another domestic context or indeed in any other legitimate context. In the event that you are stopped the 'condition' in which the knife is found is very important. For example if the knife is not securely folded in a sheath, box or pocket but open on the front seat of the car then the law could interpret such a condition negatively. Safe handling of the knife is extremely important.

Page. 540

4) Can your knives be taken abroad?

This is a very difficult question to answer since laws differ greatly from country to country. generally within Europe laws are very similar to those in Italy which regard our knives as "cutting utensils" and although they are legitimate personal possession can be considered an offence in some countries It is always a good idea never to carry a knife personally over any border and always find out first from the embassy or consulate what the law has to say regarding the possession of, for example, a pocket-knife.

5) Can I take one of your knives with me on the plane?

It is absolutely against the law to take any knife no matter how small onto any airplane. The only way to transport a knife legally, providing it is a legitimate knife, is by putting it in your luggage in the hold of the plane. You should never attempt to transport it in your hand luggage. In the event that you forget to pack your knife and remember just before the metal detector, as has happened to me, inform the authorities immediately and return to the check in and deposit your knife. It will be returned to you on arrival at your destination.

6) Why are some of the knives listed in your catalogue not on sale for certain periods?

Given that some of these knives require the best materials and some knives are produced by only one cutler, there are moments when either the materials or cutler are not available. Thus leading to a suspension of the order until either one of the situations change. Remember too that "express ordering" does not exist at Coltellerie Berti since it would mean compromising the quality of our knives. And the average apprenticeship of any one of our cutlers takes at least five years meaning that the expansion of our production capacity is quite slow.

Page. 541

7) What should I do if the knife loses its cutting edge?

If you use the knife correctly then the cutting edge will hold for a decent length of time. Sometimes people are forced to use the knife inappropriately thus seriously damaging the blade. Our blades can not only be sharpened but also re-shaped easily. The only advice I would have is to always contact the experts.

A good way to judge a good cutler is by his workshop! If he cannot carry out a simple knife sharpening on the spot then I would not entrust him with your best knives. If he has a sizable area dedicated to sharpening with at least two grinders then he can be regarded someone who should know his job.

8) What should I do if a knife is damaged or deteriorates due to bad handling?

It is not always economically feasible to repair a knife. Consult an experienced cutler to evaluate an eventual repair.

Page. 542

xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 543

Where to buy our knives.
The official Coltellerie Berti outlets.

Page. 544

The Berti Flag store in Via Roma, 43 Scarperia.

Page. 545

xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 546

xxxxxxxxxx

Page. 547

xxxxxxxxxx



Page. 548

Where to buy our knives.

The official Coltellerie Berti outlets.

The knives made by Coltellerie Berti are not ordinary knives. They embody a tradition handed down from generation to generation and each knife has a story to tell and a role to play. They have to be respected and understood and that is why we have selected very carefully the shops entrusted to display our collections. These people are experts and can advise and help you in your choice. Making sure you get the knife you always wanted.

Page. 549

Sales outlets
list

Page. 550

list

Page. 551

list

This is the list of outlets at the date of publication. It is constantly being updated and an up to the minute list of sales outlets can be found on our internet site www.coltellerieberti.it

Page. 552

Alvaro Berti sharpening knives.

Page. 553

Where to sharpen our knives.

The cutlers recommended by Coltellerie Berti.

Page. 554

Where to sharpen our knives.

The cutlers recommended by Coltellerie Berti.

The knives we make at Coltellerie Berti were made to last. The steel selected for our blades has been specifically produced to guarantee a hold on the edge for a certain length of time. However from time to time the blades will need sharpening. Sharpening is a particularly delicate operation and those who you entrust your knives to should know this ancient art well. We have put together a list of professionals, we feel happy entrusting our knives to.

Page. 555

List of recommended cutlers.
(andrea transfer Italian list)

This is the list of cutlers at the date of publication. It is constantly being updated and an up to the minute list of recommended cutlers can be found on our internet site www.coltellerieberti.it.

Page. 556

Hold on and don't give in!

Way back in the summer of 68 we must have seemed like the survivors in the aftermath of some bloody dispute, to get this comment from the PR guy who was visiting from the tourist promotion board in Florence. It was the first thing that came into his head as he walked into our workshop that day in Via Solferino. I have to confess at the time I didn't quite understand what he meant. and thought his asking me to hang on to a pretty menial job, as I thought as that time, quite insulting. I forgot him and what he said very quickly. I was a thirteen-year-old student, needless to say forced to help out in my father's workshop over the school holidays. It was a well-known fact in the family that I had absolutely no intention of joining my father and that the business would probably fold with the third generation of Berti. After finishing school I happily enrolled on a degree course in civil engineering (my lifelong passion) but....after 21 exams and a series of events I found myself back in the business waiting to become the fourth generation of Berti to make knives in Scarperia. Twenty years on from the summer of 68 the full weight of that comment hit me. At the time I too was a sort of survivor in the aftermath, an aftermath of technology and modernisation. Although I

was feeling pretty shell-shocked I felt a strange sensation of strength, as though something was waiting to be set free. Initially nothing was quite clear and my mind was being continually bombarded with ideas but the one thing that rose out of the confusion was that "Hold on and don't give in!" It was clear that I should hold on to a tradition. Thankfully my family had in fact held on to all it knew about traditional production processes and lines. Stuff, which had gone out of circulation years before.

Page. 557

I worked with this knowledge over the next few years by adding to it. I visited various other manufacturers in Italy and abroad, gathering information and experience hoping to give a new lease of life to what had always been a simple artisan workshop. Then finally in 1995 it all came together in the Italian Regional Knife Collection: it represented everything that was traditionally Scarperia. Looking back to January 1995 when I presented the first sixteen regionals I am sure I had absolutely no idea of how demanding and tiring the road I had just taken would be, but I have to say I still believe it was the only road to take This small volume tells a story and is the result of all that has gone into seven years hard work. And I do hope that you not only find it useful but that you can understand the love and passion I put into my work everyday. My aim is to make something I believe in and hope you can believe in it too.

P.S. At this point I should exercise the author's sacred rite and thank some people. As a reader I agree it seems a little contrived but as a writer I assure you it is a great pleasure for me to thank personally those who made it possible for me to realise a dream. Thank you to the workers who have responded passionately to the great changes taken place within the company. A special thanks to Marcello Bonini and Gianluca Lisi for their constancy over the years. They have listened patiently to all those ideas that come into my head and have given them shape. I would like to thank Alberto Falvo once again, for being the first to believe in me and my knives. Marco Parenti who let me share in his wealth of knowledge and my friend Lucio Pompili who let me in on the secrets of a great chef. The list could go on and on and I hope those who are not mentioned don't take offence. However thank you, thank you thank you. A special and final thanks to my father, a simple man who through enthusiasm for his work taught me to respect and pass on a family tradition.

Andrea Berti.

Page. 558

Bibliography
list

Page. 559

list

Back page

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