

author(s)



**Micaela Mandiola Macchiavello**

Isthmus

Escuela de Arquitectura y Diseño

de América Latina y el Caribe

**Ricardo Rivadeneira**

Universidad Nacional de Colombia

abstract

An object that has always interacted with men is the knife; humans have been making them since 2.5 million years ago according to the Paleolithic tools found in Tanzania. It's been speculated that the use of knives even predates the use of fire. Throughout history they've been used as weapons, tools, ceremonial items, and as eating utensils for longer than any other implement. Our reliance on our most fundamental tool has not waned; indeed it has if anything intensified.

For thousands of years people always carried a knife with them, including to the table, early knives were proud personal possessions that were used to cut food into individual portions, as well as to spear food from communal pots and trenchers. In Saxon England a knife known as scramasax was the constant companion of its owner.

keywords

knife, manufacture, German, Japanese, American.

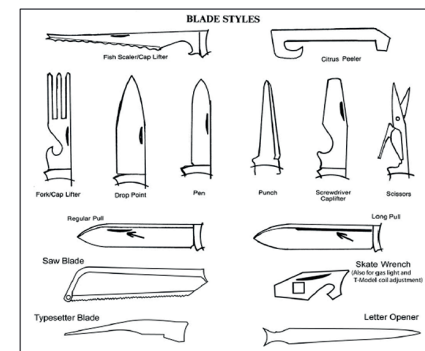
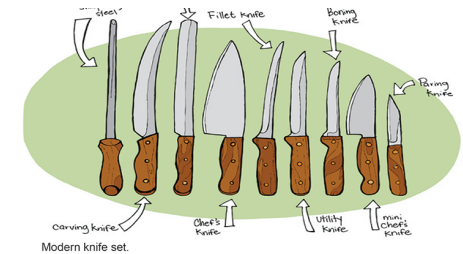
The country of Panama has always been a multicultural place, that's why here we can find a wide variety of kitchen knives in the market. We have them from all over the world, same as its population. It's important to mention that this tool has taken advantage of the technological advances of every civilization and period in history.

## The Knife: Actual man's best friend?

Accompanying mankind since its origins, knives still play a leading role in our lives. The fact they always had been our allies in the kitchen, has positioned them as one of the most vital products in the list of our material necessities.



Central Australian decorated stone knives produced by the Warumangu People (Tennant Creek). Source: Museum Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.



Different types of blades. Knives are used not only in the cooking heading.

Among all the functions that the knife used to play in our daily lives, the only one that remains as essential is the eating/cooking utensil. Without it we couldn't eat nor cook; how would we chop, dice or slice our food? Thanks to this underestimated tool we are able to eat the way we do.

As almost every invention, knives have suffered a lot of transformations along history. Starting with bones, rocks and obsidian, then moved to iron, later on to steel and now we have them made from ceramics and several kinds of steel. They have taken advantage of the technological innovations of every period. The 20th Century plays a key role in the design that we find nowadays in the kitchen knives heading. During this period we see the most notorious transformations regarding the shapes and manufacturing technologies; it is important to highlight that these ideas began in Germany and Switzerland on the last decades of the 19th Century. The most influential designs on contemporary cutlery come from Europe; Japanese design enters the market in the 1960's.

All this was discovered in a field study that was made in three of the most important stores in the sale of kitchenware located in two of the biggest malls in Panama City, Panama. I finished my study with a list of 63 items, 19 of them were sets and the rest were knives for its individual sale. An evaluation work was done afterwards, altogether with an historical investigation in order to determine the current knife tendencies in the market along with its origins.

When it's time to go any kind of shopping, people in Panama like to buy products recognized as new and exclusive. But of course, sometimes price is what matters the most when nothing more than functionality is required; that's why here we can find from the cheapest Chinese knife to the most expensive German or Japanese cutlery.

Having collected the necessary information about the available brands in the Panamanian market, the historical research focused on the brands with the most solid historical background. These would be from Germany, Switzerland, Japan and the United States.

Let's go back to 1814 in Solingen, Germany, where the professional knives production started; this is a city renowned for cutlery design. When and where the Wüsthof Classic was born, launched during the first years of the Industrial Revolution and forged from a single piece of stainless steel, reducing manufacturing processes and eliminating weak points in the form and construction of the knife. This knife has remained virtually unchanged since its first appearance in 1886.

The story of the Victorinox knives starts in 1891, when Karl Elsener first manufactured the Swiss Army knife. The second developed design was registered in 1897 and provided the template for the range. Today the brand has evolved into a wide variety of kitchen knives according to the needs of our contemporary era and also there's a range of nearly a hundred models to Elsener's original design.

The colorful and well known Kuhn-Rikon Swiss knives are directed to the American market, although it is not until 1988 that they expanded to the United States the brand exists since 1899, but the knife heading was not their business at the beginning.

The Japanese knives production started influenced by samurai swords in the 1960's. The first Japanese knives by Yoshikin Company, used to be made of stainless steel and soon they became renowned for their high quality. The factory is located in Tsubame, the Japanese equivalent of Solingen in Germany.

Here in Panama the only Japanese style knives that we can find are the ones by Mercer Knives, named the "Asian Collection". This brand has historically supplied culinary education and professional chefs. Although it is an American brand its designs are very European in their other collections, pretty much like Wüsthof knives.

The ceramic knives are born when Kyocera Corporation was founded in 1959 in Kyoto, Japan. The first North American sales company was established in 1969, which have contributed strongly

to the company's overall success. They embody an uncompromising juxtaposition of traditional Japanese Minimalism with high-tech innovation. Their most popular ceramic knives here in Panama are the Revolution Series.

Sam Farber founded OXO International in 1989; OXO Good Grips was born. He wanted to develop a new line of kitchen utensils based on the comfort of the grip. Farber had this idea in order to help his wife cook again without the pain caused by the arthritis she suffered. The first fifteen Good Grips products were launched in 1990. The handle fits comfortably into the hand, no matter what the size, age or ability of the user. This kitchen knives and utensils are one of the classic choices when it comes to buying good stuff for our homes.

Knives consume in Panama is determined by the commercial situation of the country, considering the characteristic fact of the city regarding the high circulation of merchandises due to its geographic position. Another important fact that differentiates Panama from other countries is the multicultural population that has always been present in the territory; each culture has its own customs and traditions, which creates the necessity towards the existence of a wide variety of products in stock. Because of its commercial port condition, Panama's provisioning is constant, but the models fluctuate very fast making the merchandises vary a lot in the store shelves. The product supply in general, obeys the manufacture tendencies of big production centers like China. From the users' perspective, knives are fundamental tools for the domestic labors. History demonstrates us that they were the first tools developed by the human race; every culture or civilization had their own methods and materials to manufacture their cutting utensils according to their needs.

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