

# ATLAS

THE CRAFT AND CURIO MAGAZINE



# MAKING THE CUT

**T**akeo Tajika and his son, Daisuke, sit cross-legged on floor pillows, each facing a grinding belt. The only sound that can be heard in their chilly workshop is the sharp buzzing of friction between the belt and a scissor blade. The father-son team work in unspoken unison, held together by familial bonds and dedication to their craft of making precision scissors.

They are creating a curve in the face of the blade, the most distinctive feature of Tajika scissors. To demonstrate that the blade is not completely flat, Takeo places the edge of a ruler on the surface of the blade and holds it up to the light, pointing out the light shining through between the blade and the ruler, where there is a scarcely noticeable gap. The subtle curve in the blade makes all the difference.

WRITING BY ALYSSA PAGANO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM HEREFORD





Daisuke Tajika is the fourth generation in the Tajika family line of scissor makers. His great grandfather, Takeji, started the business in 1938 to meet the needs of a changing market. Around that time, people were beginning to wear Western-style clothes, moving away from the traditional Japanese kimono often made of silk, which is uncut and wrapped around the body. To make this new clothing required heavier scissors that could cut through thicker fabric, but the tools also needed to have a high degree of precision in order to cut intricate patterns.

The Tajikas live and work in the small, riverside town of Ono, a two-hour journey from Kyoto, Japan. The workshop is a large shed, with high ceilings, cold cement floors, set a few paces back from the road. The air in the space smells slightly of motor-oil. Just across the street is the Tajika's home, and Takeo and Daisuke take care to look both ways before crossing the busy motorway.

The first step in the scissor making process is to buy the materials. An *imono*, or malleable cast metal, is used for the handle. The iron handle and carbon steel blade are then welded together, ensuring that the hard, black side of the blade faces inward, because this is the part that will be sharpened. The scissors are then sanded down and placed in the fire to soften, making the metal malleable.

The next step, putting the hot scissors into the mold and press, is Daisuke's favorite. Cutting out the shape of the blade is where the scissors really become Tajika scissors. If the line that separates the handle and the blade isn't straight the scissors are useless, so it takes an expertise that Daisuke has developed over time. After the shape of the blade has been cut, they are then sharpened on the grinding belt. This is the moment where the Tajikas add their characteristic curve to the blade. This curve makes it so only a single part of each blade touches at once. Takeo and Daisuke take immense pride in completing this step of the process.

The final few steps serve as finishing touches. The metal face is polished and one half of the scissor is paired to the other. If the particular pair of scissors is to be painted, the handle is dipped in paint and baked to ensure the paint dries and hardens. The scissors are then oiled, packaged, and ready to be shipped.



Takeo and Daisuke clearly have a deep mutual respect for one another. Although Takeo comes across as disciplined and stern, he treats Daisuke as his equal, with a level of trust. Takeo says that part of the reason they work so well side-by-side is because he has instilled a rule of “very little talking” in the workshop. They each focus on the task at hand and they respect each other’s space in the shop. Father and son truly seem to enjoy each other’s company, and are inclined to laugh at one another’s jokes, when they take a break from their hard, tedious work half way through the day, snacking on a Japanese sweet potato, *yakiimo*. They cook these on top of the furnace which heats the workshop and welds the scissors.

When Takeo’s father told him he needed to continue the family tradition of making scissors, he was resistant, wanting to carve out his own path and try a different way of life. His father insisted that he continue with the family trade. After many years of working alongside his father, Takeo came to appreciate the work. He believes in the quality of the scissors and is dedicated to superior craftsmanship. This is what drives him to keep making scissors. When the time came that Takeo’s own son, Daisuke, was old enough to help with the business, Takeo gave him a choice.

Daisuke decided to continue on working within the family business, but he started his own line of scissors, one focused on design and targeted towards the ordinary person. Rather than making scissors specialized for cutting fabric, he designs scissors for everyday uses: stationary scissors, garden shears, and kitchen scissors. Each of these scissors are as much a cherishable object as they are a craftsman’s tool. Most are symmetrical and are made of solid iron or plated with copper. Even though Daisuke’s line emphasizes aesthetic value, the quality and durability of the scissors still remains the top priority.

When Takeo and Daisuke talk about their scissors, it is as if they themselves are amazed at how good each pair turns out. Instead of boasting, it seems more like they’re saying, “Can you believe this?” It is this awe and respect that define the Tajika family as artisans. They feel energized through innovation and creativity, but always with an unbending backbone—a commitment to their clients and the quality of their craft.

