



Introduction



What Are You Going To Do With It?

The first two steps in deciding what knife or knives to buy are probably deciding how much money you want to spend (at least initially) and deciding how you will be using your knives.



Price Guidelines

Of course, budget decisions are strictly personal so I cannot really comment on them except to say that for many of us, this seems to be a moving target. Beware: knife collecting can easily become addictive!

However, I do want to set down some *rough* guidelines for those who are new to knife buying, as follows.

Down to Earth: Most Bang For Your Buck (\$30–\$50)

There are surprisingly many reasonably good quality knives in the \$35–\$50 price range, although it does take some effort to ferret them out. I would guess that the vast majority of these knives are made in China, but that does not *necessarily* mean that they are of poor quality. Indeed, I was told by the owner of one large knife company that by choosing manufacturing facilities carefully and maintaining strict supervision over production, it is possible to get high-quality products out of Chinese factories.

Although it is not my intention in this book to recommend specific knives, I will give you one example. I am quite impressed by the Spyderco Tenacious.



Figure 3: The Spyderco Tenacious

This Chinese-made knife is available on Amazon for about \$35 (with a black G-10 handle). I own one and find its fit and finish to be excellent. The blade steel is quite functional, albeit not of the highest quality, which is to be expected for a knife in this price range. It is also one of the sharpest knives I have ever seen coming from any factory. (Of course, I may have just gotten lucky with my particular knife.)

The Troposphere: Most Bang For Your Buck Made in the U.S.A. (\$50–\$100)

In this price range, one can find many good quality knives made in the United States from a variety of knife manufacturers. This is the upper end of the knife price sweet spot, that is, the range in which you get the most bang for your buck, as they say.

The Stratosphere: High-Quality Production Knives (\$100–\$250)

I think that this is where you will find the “lower end” of the high-quality production knives that are made from high-end components. By high-end components, I mean blades made from the best steels, such as M390, ZDP-189, Elmax and S90V and handles made from high-end materials, such as carbon fiber. (I will discuss blade steels and handle materials in detail later in the book.)

The Mesosphere: Beginning Semi-Custom and Custom Knives (\$250–\$500)

This is the “high end” of the high-quality production knives, along with some knives from smaller companies that are partly or completely handmade. The materials are generally high end and the additional labor put into the construction and assembly of the knives demands higher prices.

The Ionosphere: Very High-End Knives (\$500–\$1500)

Here we find some production knives, but mostly custom and semi-custom knives from smaller companies.

Outer Space: (\$1500 and Up)

There are surprisingly many custom and semi-custom knives in this price range.



Are They Worth The Price?

Whether or not a knife in the higher price ranges, especially in the ionosphere and higher can possibly be worth the price is definitely in the eye of the beholder. I get a sense that there are really two types of really expensive knives. Some of these knives are hand made by companies or individuals who believe their knives are simply worth the price, based on the skill level required to manufacture the knife and the labor involved in that production. (Or perhaps they just believe that the market will support their price points.) I am not trying to pass judgment here—whether or not they are worth the price is ultimately up to the buyer and will certainly be a matter of opinion.

Other knives are highly priced because they are part knife–part jewelry, being adorned with precious metals such as gold or silver and precious gems, such as sapphires or diamonds. Many of these knives also involve a great many hours of engraving. If you are interested in watching a knife engraver at work, let me suggest the YouTube video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_H4ogdBBHo

At the higher price ranges, you are no longer paying for increased performance. For example, you can get a knife whose blade is made from a top-of-the-line steel like ZDP-189 for under 80 dollars. In fact, I think that for most people, the presence of precious metals or gems, or even just the presence of a high price tag, actually *decreases* usability. Would you use a \$25,000 folder to cut up a bunch of cardboard boxes? How about a \$5,000 folder? Or a \$1500 folder? When you can finally say “yes” to this question, you will have determined where your price point is for a utilitarian knife.

So, your options are wide open. You can opt for just a single knife like the Spyderco Tenacious and spend a total of about \$35. If you stop there and read this entire book, you will probably be the most well-informed person in the world who owns only one knife! At the other extreme, you can stock up on high-end, custom or semi-custom knives where the sky's not even the limit.



Knife Usage

There are several ways in which we interact with knives.

Collecting

Many knife owners amass a substantial number of knives whose cutting edges never see action of any kind. I must admit to owning one or two such knives myself. I tell myself that I will use these knives, but they are so beautiful (and expensive) that I

cannot quite bring myself to pull the trigger, so to speak. So I just take them out on a regular basis, open and close them several times, utter a contented sigh and put them away.

Of course, each person must decide for himself or herself what price point places a knife in the “don't use” category. In my fantasies, I would own at least two of every such knife so I could use one and stare at the other!

Investing

Some collectors lock the better part of their knife collection away in a safe and may even lose track of exactly what they own. Generally, these folks are hoping to sell some of their knives at a later date for a nice profit. In other words, they are *knife investors*.

Ordinary-use knives generally do not increase their value over time, but high-end knives can and often do increase their value. A **sprint run** is a production of a particular knife type that is based on a previous production but has upgraded features. Generally, the knife's blade will be made of a higher quality steel and the knife's handle will be made of a higher quality material. The knife may also have additional embellishments like gold anodized standoffs or handle inlays. A key point is that these productions are **limited run productions**, that is, only a limited number of such knives are produced. This can range from a single knife to 1500 knives, but it is *limited* and generally a *one-time* production.

These characteristics make a sprint run (or to a lesser extent any limited run production) highly collectable and it is *possible*, although by no means certain, that these knives will increase in value over time. Investors simply purchase such knives, put them away and offer them for sale at a later date and at a premium price in their *new, unused, unsharpened* condition. (eBay provides a readily accessible market for such knives.)

Just Plain Using

Most of us buy knives to use them, even if we are collectors or investors as well. Small, delicate knives with blades under about 3 inches in length, sometimes called **gentlemen's knives** are sufficient for light use, such as cutting string, small rope, paper, tape, the occasional cardboard box and most food.

For heavier use, such as cutting large boxes (cardboard is actually quite abrasive and therefore hard on a cutting edge), cutting heavy rope or cable ties and light wood carving, a larger knife is generally more appropriate.

If you want to take a knife with you while hiking or camping and expect to do some serious chopping or batoning of wood (pounding the knife blade through a piece of

wood), you may want to consider a fixed-blade knife, since these are generally more substantial than folding knives. On the other hand, I have been in the presence of some very substantial folding knives that the manufacturers claim can do the work of a fixed knife, but I have not put this to the test.



EDC Knives

You will encounter the term **EDC** quite often in your knife researches. EDC is an acronym for **Every Day Carry** and refers to knives suitable for carrying in your pocket on a daily basis, in both casual and formal attire. Of course, what constitutes an EDC is a matter of personal taste.

For my part, an EDC knife should be practical, relatively light, not too scary and perhaps even attractive. I sometimes worry about opening certain knives in, say a crowded restaurant because the knife might attract a few unwanted stares from neighboring tables. When I feel that way about a knife, I conclude that it is probably not a good EDC knife *for me*.

To illustrate, when I am dressed casually (which is most of the time), I carry a medium sized knife like the Zero Tolerance 0770CF. This exceptional knife has a 3.25 inch blade and weighs a light 3 ounces. (I generally don't care for assisted knives, but I do make exceptions, as in this case)



Figure 4: A medium-sized EDC knife (Zero Tolerance 0770CF)

For more dressy occasions, I might carry the beautiful William Henry knife in Figure 5. This knife has a 2.5 inch blade and weighs a mere 1.8 ounces. The bolster and lanyard beads are sterling silver, the scales are bone and the thumb stud is adorned with an opal.



Figure 5: A small EDC knife (William Henry T-10 LE7)

On the other hand, I think that the knife in Figure 6, while very interesting, is a bit too fearsome for an EDC. It is also a bit too impractical for an EDC—I wouldn't want to try to trim a broken fingernail with this 9-inch knife!



Figure 6: The 9-inch Spyderco Civilian—Not my idea of an EDC knife

By the way, I know several knife users who like to carry *two* knives: a small razor-sharp knife for delicate cutting of things like food and a more substantial (and generally duller through use) knife for heavier cutting. There is probably no need to carry three knives ... that is, unless you *want* to.