Interview with Mr. Sawada, president of Nenohi Cutlery

Masa Yamamoto (M): All our customers who get the opportunity to try the G Type and SD series is always pleasantly surprised with the razor sharp edge.

Mr. Sawada (S): I am very honored to hear that our knives have a good reputation. This might sound a little strange but we actually don't really value testing a knife like that because it's only reflective of that single moment with the initial edge.

M: Can you elaborate?

S: Of course I won't deny the joy of testing out the sharpness of the blade when you first purchase a knife. But the initial edge can be changed by the way you sharpen your knife, and that's why we don't allocate any of our costs to the sharpening finish. It's pretty standard for knives of our quality to be hand sharpened for the finish, to obtain the sharp initial edge. *Knives are meant to be sharpened as they are used so we feel that it's important to consider how we can maximize the performance of a knife as time goes by.* That's why we allocate our efforts and costs for high quality materials and the overall construction of our knives.

M: So what is the secret behind the blade performance of Nenohi knives then?

S: Take a hard vegetable like a carrot as an example. Of course you need a sharp edge but what's more important, is the knife's form. I'm sure you've heard of the "hamaguriba" (clam edge)?

M: Yes, by keeping the shape of the edge like a clam shell, you can increase the durability of the blade right?

S: The average western style knife only has this clam shape right at the edge of the blade, and the majority of the blade up to the spine is flat. But Nenohi knives have this curved form all the way to the spine. So the whole blade of a Nenohi knife is shaped like a clam shell so there is no single flat section on the surface. This is an important point, but actually, the average knife has a very flat blade, and the friction against the surface of the food actually makes the cutting less smooth. So *Nenohi knives have minimal contact with the food, resulting in less cell damage and a smoother cut.* A lot of our customers say that they feel like they're slicing through butter when they use our knives.

M: Now that you've told me this, I can actually feel that Nenohi knives are curved overall.

S: This curved surface cannot be achieved with machines so *we sharpen and polish the edge, mid-section and spine of the blade separately, by hand.* This kind of work can only be done by the most experienced craftsmen and it costs more and takes a lot more skill to do this than to improve the blade performance of an initial edge. That's why we expend the skills of our craftsmen on this kind of detail.

M: Can you tell me a little more about High Carbon Super Stainless Steel?

S: I mentioned that the form of the blade is one of the most important factors in determining a knife's performance, but if you don't have proper quality control for the material, you won't achieve great edge retention, no matter how well you construct the knife.

If you purchase a $1 knife and sharpen it as thin as a razor blade, you might be able to achieve a good enough edge for a one time performance. But it would break right away and be useless. Unfortunately I can't release much information about the materials we use because it's our company secret but I can assure you that *we use the highest quality steel that fulfills the demand of professional cooks and chefs who want the right balance of a superior edge, high edge retention and ductility.*

I'll emphasize again and again *but the knives that we make are for professional cooks and chefs so instead of focusing on that initial edge performance, we dedicate ourselves in producing knives with a superior edge, durability and balance.*

M: I get asked about HRC a lot these days but what is your opinion on HRC?

S: What I want you to remember is that you can't predict a knife's quality based on its HRC. HRC is useful because you can express it with a number. But HRC only measures the hardness of the surface of a blade. *People who think that a high HRC= a good knife, probably don't truly know much about knives.* There might be some knife producers who will make their knives harder just so it looks better on the specification sheet, but that would be very sad.

I want people to remember (especially those who cook professionally) that hard ≠good. In reality, there are knives that don't have a high HRC but can cut very well, and those that have a high HRC but will chip because they are brittle. It's not possible to express these qualities of a knife numerically. For example, it's possible for us to make Nenohi knives with an HRC of 64 but we can also finish them with an HRC of 61. *After much research, the results showed us that an HRC of 61 is the optimum hardness for Nenohi knives to perform at their best.* This does not mean that an HRC of 61 will lead to the best result for other knives as well.

M: There's a lot of depth to Nenohi knives! I feel like I understand now why Nenohi knives perform so well. Thank you so much for explaining everything in so much detail today.

S: No, thank you. I hope that more people will use our knives and be satisfied with their quality.