

Let's Make the Shakuhachi by John Kaizan Neptune

“Woody Hands” 1993-December Issue



This article is an abridgment from the Japanese magazine “Woody Hands” on John Neptune's shakuhachi making. Most of the tools being introduced and used are available from www.mejiro-japan.com.

The original text was in Japanese.

Translated by Mejiro Co., Ltd.

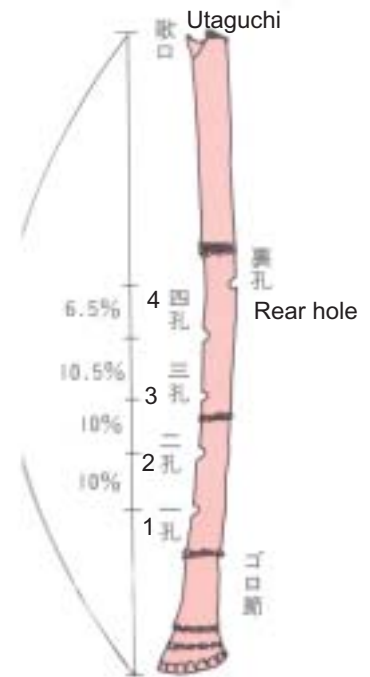
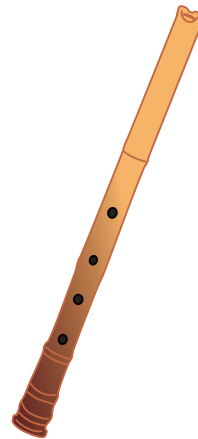
Very special thanks to Chris-san for proofreading & giving me advise on this document. -Saori

List of Tools

【Items with product numbers

can be purchased from www.mejiro-japan.com】

1. Stencil (A0096, 2300 yen)
2. Measure
3. NT dresser (A0045, 1000 yen)
4. Adhesive paper (A0432--A0437, 420 yen--480 yen) attached to a round stick
5. Ruler
6. Pencil
7. Scale (Rectangular equilateral triangle)
8. Dresser
9. Stabber (A9007, 1400 yen)
- 10&11 Small Knives (A0013, 2415 yen)
12. Gari-bou (A0054--A0057, 8500 yen-2000 yen) & Utaguchi Hanmaru Rasp (A0166, 5400 yen)
13. Atsuhiro Thick Rasp (A0042, 6930 yen)
14. Ring auger (Diameter 15mm/A0053, 1700 yen)
15. Professional Saw S (A0033, 7000 yen)
16. Round Lacquer Brush M (A0326, 2000 yen)
17. Abrasive Compound (A0452, 5000 yen)
18. Water Resistant Sandpaper
19. Tonoko Powder (A0300, 1000 yen)
20. Sand Paper (A0432--A0437, 420 yen--480 yen)
21. Acrylic Plate (A0176 or A0177, 2400 yen)
22. Hanbishi Rasp or Hanmaru Rasp (A0160 or A0166, 5400--5720 yen)
- 23.&24. Urushi Lacquers (A0301, 2300 yen)
25. Urushi Spatula (A0318, 1000 yen) & Glass plate



The ground work for making the shakuhachi is the *fushinuki* (removing the inner nodes).

Using a ring auger, *gari-bou*, and saw, you will remove the 7 nodes.

It takes a lot more strength than it seems, so you need to be careful when using a ring auger.



1

Using a stainless steel or plastic ruler, mark a line on the front of the bamboo. The finger holes will be opened on this line, so please be careful.



2

The bottom of the bamboo is called the *kanjiri*. A shakuhachi normally has 7 nodes, so the extra nodes are to be cut off.



3

File the bottom with a rasp. Do so until the surface becomes smooth. The next node should remain, so be careful not to file too much.

4

Using a saw, cut the *utaguchi* (mouthpiece) line.



5

The upper side is thicker than the lower side. This extra width is crucial in making the *utaguchi*.



6

Hold the bamboo with the left hand and remove the bottom node with a small knife or drill. The diameter should be approx. 20-21mm. Upper nodes should remain.



7 Stabilize the bamboo with a vise. Use a ring auger to remove nodes. Be careful with the bamboo's shape, as it is generally curved.



8 Parts where the drill and ring auger cannot reach are removed with a *gari-bou*. Remove the bamboo dust constantly while you work.



9 In order to take off the node at the center, you might want to use a *gari-bou* with the curved rod as shown.

Utaguchi Making Pt.1



10 Draw a straight line horizontally across the top.



11 Cut diagonally according to the line as shown.



12 File the surface.



13 File off inside the hole.



14 Measure the diameter. It should be approx. 20-21mm.



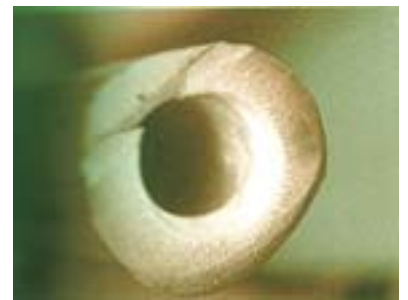
15 File with sandpaper on a round-edged piece of wood to make a nice arc.



16 Draw a line as shown with a triangle ruler. This is for an acrylic plate to be inserted later.



17 File the utaguchi with an utaguchi rasp.



18 Check the top side after filing. It is cut precisely according to the marking.

Utaguchi Making Pt.2

The utaguchi shown here is called Kinko style. Tozan style looks like a half-moon shape.



19 Cut the acrylic plate. There should be no gap between the bamboo and the insert plate.



20 Attach the insert with glue. Super glue is preferred.



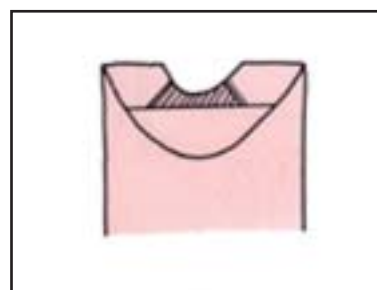
21 Cut off the extra acrylic with a saw. Do so only after the plate is fully attached.



22 Finish the inside edge with the *hanmaru* ('half-circle') rasp.



23 Finish the *utaguchi* by sanding. Do not take off too much of the surface.



24 This is the *Kinko utaguchi*. Other styles are called *Tozan* and *Myoan*. An *utaguchi* line maker from Mejiro is useful.

Opening finger holes

Finger hole locations are crucial in shakuhachi making.

Though there are slight variations, the diameters are mostly between 9.5mm to 11mm. You will need small adjustments with a small knife.



25

Mark the hole locations onto the front line drawn in step 1.



26 Cover the marked holes with your fingers. Sometimes your finger is more comfortable when the hole is slightly offset from the straight line, especially on longer instruments.



27 Mark the center of each finger hole circle with an awl. This becomes the target to drill.

28 In order to open holes precisely and vertically, use a vice to stabilize the bamboo. Using an electric drill on a stand is highly recommended.



29 Make detailed adjustments with a small knife.

Tuning

Tuning is only possible for those who can play the shakuhachi.
The following is a simple outline of the tuning process.



30

You will need a bowl of water and several pieces of newspaper (2cmx2cm). By using a long stick or chopstick, you will place the wet newspaper pieces on the interior wall.

Before using the actual lacquers or epoxy, take several wet pieces of newspaper and apply them to the interior walls. By doing so, you will know where to add some epoxy, if necessary, for accurate tuning. Repeat this process every time you check the tuning, building up the interior of the bore as necessary in order to achieve the correct tuning.



31

On a wooden plate, mix the tonoko powder: 4 parts powder to 1 part water. Then add sejime urushi to the kneaded powder. Do it quickly as urushi gets hard fairly quickly once exposed to air.



32

Place the urushi mixture made above inside the shakuhachi. Generally, put a small amount near the mouthpiece and spread it with a flat bamboo stick.



33

To dry off urushi, it takes 2-3 days in summer, 5-7 days in winter. When it is completely dry, grind with the gari-bou.

34

After it is fully dried, you will need to firm the lacquered part by applying sejime urushi. This is called "Jigatame." Depending on the tuning outcome, you should repeat the process in steps 31 to 34.



Finish up

You are about to finish a shakuhachi.

Polishing the *kanjiri* (bell) with extra-care and make a beautiful shakuhachi.



35

Place the un-dried shakuhachi into a closed container for drying. The container needs a high level of humidity(50%--60%), so it is better to also place a wet towel inside, not touching the shakuhachi.



36

Use water-resistant sand paper.
Add water to prevent dust.
Protect the other shakuhachi parts with tape.



37

Use particle size #120 to #1500 sand paper, starting from the low number (coarse) to high number (fine). Sand it approx. 320 times. Be careful not to scratch the surface.



38

Wipe off any water left after step 37.
Add some oil or Mirror compound and polish the kanjiri again.

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