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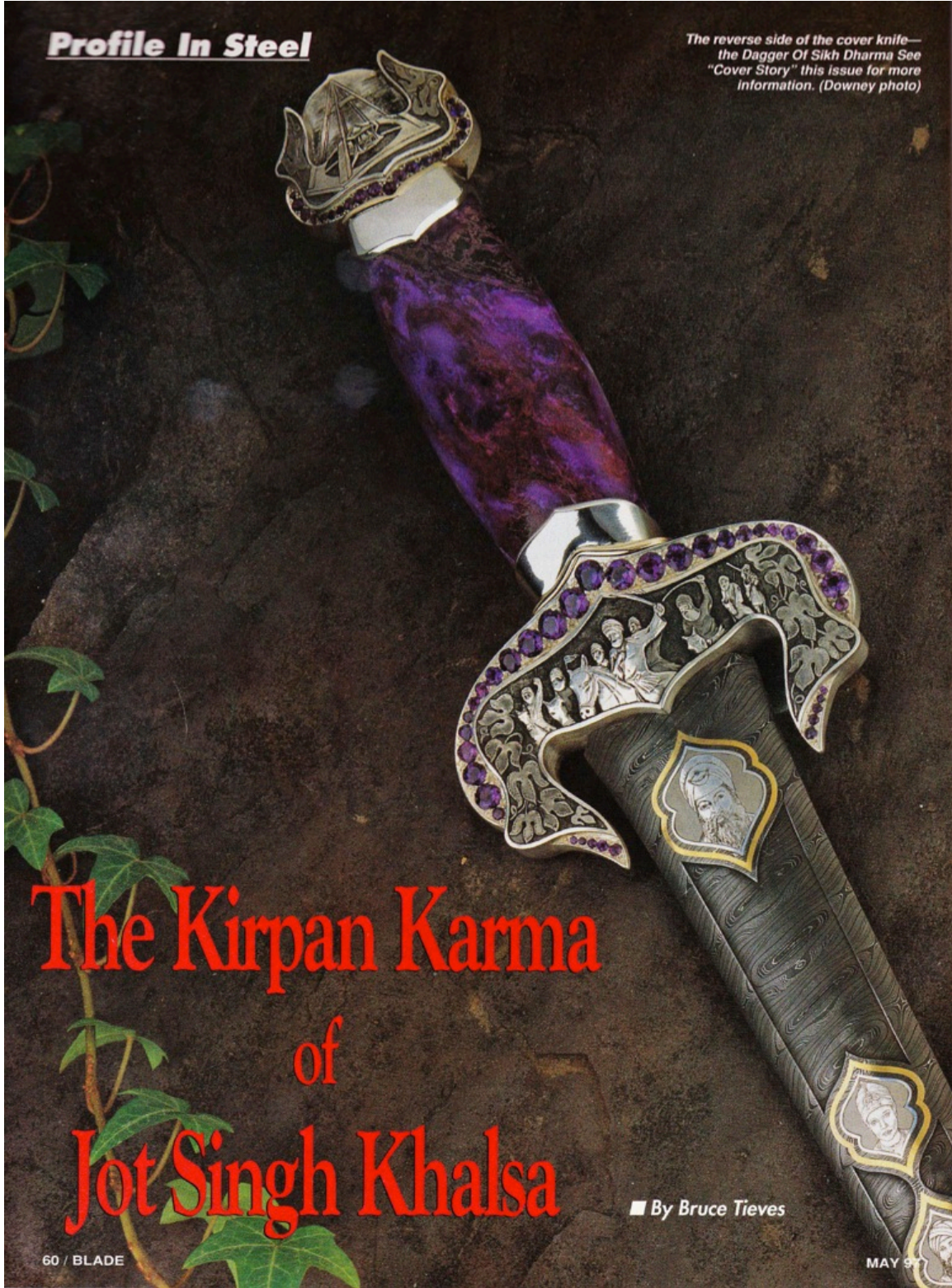


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**Profile In Steel**

The reverse side of the cover knife—the Dagger Of Sikh Dharma See "Cover Story" this issue for more information. (Downey photo)



**The Kirpan Karma  
of  
Jot Singh Khalsa**

■ By Bruce Tieves



Jot Singh Khalsa

## “One of the five symbols a Sikh wears is a dagger.”

**B**lue jeans, cowboy boots and a flannel shirt: Sounds like typical garb for a knifemaker, right? While that stereotype may hold true for many, it doesn't apply to all—especially Jot Singh Khalsa.

Whether you've seen Jot at knife shows or in *Blade*®, he's easily one of the most recognizable people in the handmade industry. Clad in white from head to toe, the 44-year-old first donned his noteworthy attire after adopting the Sikh lifestyle nearly 25 years ago. As a student at New York State University in New Paltz, he was introduced to the Sikh religion by a yoga and meditation instructor who was also a Sikh. Khalsa's exposure to Sikhism eventually led him to the art of knifemaking.

“One of the five symbols a Sikh wears is a dagger,” Jot explained. “It serves as a reminder to be a protector of the weak and innocent. It's a tradition that dates back to the 1400s when non-Muslims faced religious persecution in India.”

It was this dagger-carrying tradition that helped nudge him into knifemaking. In college, the gold/silversmith major

### Jot's Trophy File

- Beretta Award**—1988 California Custom Knife Show
- Best Knifemaker/Engraver Collaboration**—1988 California Custom Knife Show (Lynton McKenzie, engraver)
- Knives Illustrated Best Art Knife**—1989 Knifemakers' Guild Show
- Best Damascus Knife**—1990 New York Custom Knife Show
- Best of Show**—1995 Meadowlands Custom Knife Show
- Best Art Knife**—1995 Blade Show
- Best Folding Knife**—1995 Rhode Island Knife Show
- Best Folding Knife**—1996 Espolama Knife Show (Switzerland)

MAY 97



A turquoise handle with oxblood coral and moonstone accents highlights Khalsa's damascus liner lock. The engraving is by Barry Lee Hands. (Downey photo)

Two Khalsa damascus button-locks, the one at top with gold-lip-pearl handle, opal accents and 24k-gold engraving by David Perdue, the other with a grip of imperial red jasper, red agate accents and Barry Lee Hands engraving. (Downey photo)

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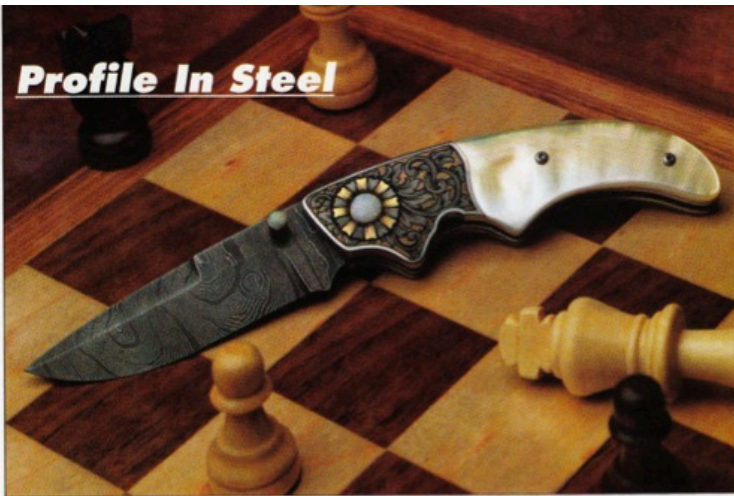
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## Profile In Steel



The handle is gold-lip pearl and accents are opal on Jot's damascus liner lock. The 24k-gold engraving is by David Perdue. (Downey photo)

had become disgruntled with the *kirpans* (knives) being produced in India. At the encouragement of his fellow Sikhs, Khalsa began building some of his own blades. (For a story of how a Sikh was convicted for carrying a religious dagger and how the conviction was overturned, see "Leading Edge" this issue.)

Upon graduation, Jot started work in the jewelry industry but soon realized that his true calling was knifemaking. In 1979 he attended the first New York Custom Knife Show and, the following year, was exhibiting at the show as a full-time knifemaker.

"I attended the show to find out what other knifemakers were producing," he recalled. "By the time I left, I was confident that I could be competitive in the marketplace."

At first, he primarily made utility and fighting knives before eventually moving on to highly embellished, one-of-a-kind daggers. However, as the market for the costly collectibles vacillated, Jot turned his attention to liner locks® for the

steady collector interest they drew and continue to draw.

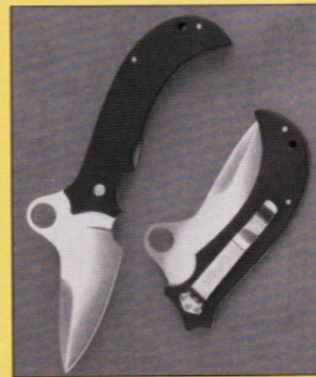
The first thing he did was visit one of the industry's top folder makers. "I went to Florida and spent a couple of days with Mel Pardue, who showed me how to make a liner lock," Khalsa commented. "It was a great learning experience to work alongside him."

Nowadays, Jot (pronounced JOTE) devotes most of his time to building liner locks and one-of-a-kind daggers. In most instances, he forges his own nickel-damascus blades, a skill he's developed over the past eight years. "I start with thin bars of 1095 and pure nickel foil," remarked Khalsa, who also does his own heat treating. Jot—who said he's picked up a few forging tips from Bill Moran, Al Pendray and Steve Schwarzer over the years—said the key to forging a functional damascus blade is to keep the billet extremely hot to prevent the carbon steel from shearing away from the nickel.

When the time comes to build a

## The Spyderco-Khalsa Connection

After developing a friendship with Spyderco President/CEO Sal Glessner, Jot Singh Khalsa and Spyderco decided to collaborate on a factory/custom blade. "A few years back Sal had asked me to make him a personal knife," Khalsa recalled. "Then, a short time later he requested that I design one for Spyderco." Though the period from design to production extended much longer than originally anticipated (about four years), the folder finally made its debut at this year's SHOT Show in Las Vegas. Khalsa said that a very unusual advertising campaign is in the works to capitalize on his notable style of dress.



## Jot Singh Khalsa

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**Brochure** Contact maker for information  
**Stamp** A Sikh symbol (Adi Skakti)  
**Patterns** Daggers, liner locks, miniature  
knife jewelry

handle for one of his blades, Khalsa always reaches for a natural material. "I look for vibrant, colored minerals that are solid," he opined. "They shouldn't be too soft nor too brittle."

According to Jot, jasper is an ideal handle material for his applications. "I find it to be one of the most exciting handle materials out there today," he claimed. "It's perfect for a knife handle because it's tough, yet not too hard to drill, grind and polish."

A member of The Knifemakers' Guild since 1979, Khalsa is learning to engrave and hopes to begin embellishing his own pieces in the near future. To market his blades, he attends a handful of shows each year. Among those on his 1997 schedule are the Blade, Guild and Paris shows.

Aesthetics and uniqueness are foremost in Jot's mind when he builds a knife. "I always want to create something that I believe is going to be aesthetically pleasing," stated Khalsa, who also has a line of miniature jewelry knives. "I enjoy creating designs that are both unique and functional."

Overall, he said the handmade indus-

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**"It was a great  
experience to work  
alongside  
Mel Pardue."**

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try is in pretty good shape. "What we do as knifemakers is unique to the public at large," he theorized. "I think most blade aficionados appreciate what we do for a living, which is really a boost to the industry."

Despite spending countless hours in his shop, Khalsa, unlike some knifemakers, sets aside time for other interests and hobbies. The Sikh minister plays an instrument called the harmonium and often sings hymns from the Sikh scriptures. He's also an avid runner, downhill skier, martial artist and yoga/meditation instructor. In fact, he offers special yoga classes for knifemakers during selected knife shows.

No, Jot doesn't fit the description of your stereotypical knifemaker and neither do his knives, which have a uniqueness all their own. **BLADE**

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