

Handcrafted Ritual Tools

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A Look Inside Melbourne's Pagan Craft Industry

Like the magic baubles from childhood stories, each of us has a stone, a tool, a box, a work of art that we hold sacred. Its power addresses us daily and in doing so, connects us closer to our awareness and knowledge of self. Most of us have purchased an item at some time or another. At stores and in street fairs, from online auctions and at gatherings we are drawn to the beautiful, the functional, the piece that says, "this is exactly what you are looking for."

Who makes these special magical tools, and why? Is it only for financial gain or does something else drive them? Melbourne, Australia is a city full of glorious handcrafted magical items and here I began to seek out and talk with a group of artists who, using their own skill, toil and craftsmanship, produce magical tools cherished the world over.

Faithliaig's Wands

My first conversation was with a wand-making Druid. His home is filled with wands in various stages of completion, and just to look at them is to feel their power. Amhíairghen Faithliaig was first inspired to make wands many years ago when he started on the path of the Druid. Part of his training included making his own wands for ritual use. When he realized that his were far superior in quality to those commercially available he began making wands to order.

For Faithliaig, the process of making a wand is highly intuitive. He says:

The first step in the process is to find the right sacred wood for the chosen path of the end user. Once I find a tree of correct type, I then set about finding

a branch that “wants to become a wand.” It is very rare for me to remove a living branch from a tree, as I usually find what I am looking for resting at the foot of the tree ready for harvesting. This is beneficial in two ways: one, there is no damage done to the tree, and two, I don’t have to wait for the wood to dry and mature. On the odd occasion that a branch is removed from a living tree it is always done with respect... and a “thank you” offering is made to the tree... The next step in the process is stripping and shaping the wood. This is where the inner beauty and strength of the wand is revealed.¹

Faithliaig uses very simple hand tools such as files, knives, and sand paper. He considers it very important to pay attention to how the wood wants to be formed. Faithliaig sees himself as “massaging” the wood into shape, allowing the natural mounds, dents, and coloration to decide the final form. Because the wand is hand formed along the natural line of the wood rather than being put on a lathe and forced in to a straight line, Faithliaig believes the wand holds more of its natural power and integrity.

After establishing the form he sometimes adds precious stones and gems, depending on its intended use, and whether or not the wand is drawn to the gem. Feathers may be added, again depending on the intended use of the wand; for example, effervescent blue feathers for a healer. The final touch is the inscription of the owner’s magical name or the symbols that hold special meaning for them. This is done using a hot scribing tool.

For Faithliaig, making wands has more to do with magical creation than business and what he charges for his work hardly reflects the true value of his pieces. But he believes that charging the true value would place the wands out of the reach of many people. I left Faithliaig inspired by his dedication to his intuitive vocation of wand-crafting.

Athames by Al

What do a motorcycle chain, gearshift, spanner, file, ploughshare, and six automated Nazi marching boots have in common? The common denominator is a forger of Athames, Al Martinez.

Born in Los Angeles and now living in Brunswick, an arty inner city suburb of Melbourne, Martinez has been forging found steel into swords and knives since 1995. Martinez is a talented blacksmith, but he makes his living as a puppet maker and on the day I visited him in his workshop, he was working on the automated Nazi marching boots, a prop for the musical, *The Producers*.

*It’s being able to take a material that is so hard and make it look so soft, that’s what I love. The contrast too, it’s not just the functionality of the tool but also the aesthetic beauty of the piece that attracts me.*²

One of the first athames he made was an immaculate hunting knife with a handle of East Indian rose wood and a hand-sewn sheath. The blade seemed



as smooth as ice, as light danced along its polished surface. “I made it from a file,” he proudly announced. “And this was a ploughshare,” he said, showing me a knuckle protector on a ceremonial sword with a blade made from a gearshift lever.³ He shows me spanners, high carbon coil springs, car axles, and a motorcycle drive change (a variation of which was once used to make samurai swords), all in the process of being made into blades of one sort or another.

“When I make Athames, I have an unspoken ritual: I put enough of myself into the piece to make its form, but I am careful to leave the piece unfinished to allow the new owner room to invest his or her personality in it as well. It’s about the wondrous magic that always happens when a new form is begotten as an old one surrenders its shape,” he explains.⁴

Martinez uses his skills to reshape matter and energy into an entirely new form by combining heat, force and most importantly, human imagination and vision.

Spellbox

The Royal Arcade is a delightful shopping center built of glass and wrought iron lacework, with vaulted ceilings and stone-tiled floors. Within lies Spellbox, an aptly named store that delights the senses with a feast of gorgeous crafts — herbs, wands, athames, chalices, books, poppets, incense, candles, crystals, chalices, censers, pentagrams, bells, quills, and magic inks. Opened in 1993, Spellbox is not just a store selling magical wares, and services; it is also a vibrant, energetic center reaching far and wide, ignoring any boundaries of country or culture and embracing and drawing to it many people of like mind.

Danae, the proprietor of this enchanting store, describes herself as a white witch. For her, all of humanity is her coven. She does not align herself with any particular tradition but rather takes her teachings from the people, animals, signs and symbols she encounters in her waking and sleeping life.



From left to right: one of Faithliag's wands; the work of Al Martinez; Al hard at work on a new athame.

Danae started her company with only one product, the Spellbox ritual boxes, which she created by drawing on her Wiccan creativity to create a spell and then gather together all the components necessary for someone to execute that spell in their own home. She began by wholesaling her spellboxes to retail stores, but the success of the product meant Danae was unable to focus on the thing she loved most — the interaction with people that used the spells. She eventually closed the wholesale side down, and opened her own retail store in the Royal Arcade.

I asked Danae how she went about creating a Spellbox. She described the process in detail:

First I ask, "What do people want to connect with?" Once I have decided on the concept, I then set myself up at home with my tools and utensils and set about constructing a spell to assist in connecting the person with their desired outcome. Each spell has the basic foundation of the four elements, Earth, Fire, Air, and Water. For example, courage; in this spell I use a talisman of the archangel Michael, as each angel is associated with one of the elements and he is the element of fire, he defeats negativity within plus he has got the sword and the strength to conquer our inner demons. I then add a beautiful blend

of lavender and frankincense made from essential oils; I always use essential oils, to anoint the back of the neck, traditionally associated with self protection and centering. I would then select a candle, in this case a red one to symbolize the purification quality of the fire. I then add a small clay bowl for holding water during the spell casting and of course, the scroll on which the spell is scribed and some charcoal by which to endorse the spell. All the elements of the spell are then brought together and placed in the box, resting upon a bed of specially selected herbs, flowers and incense.⁵

Each of the spell elements are priced and tailored to fit a target market. Danae notes that although gold and silver are lovely, using them would push the price of her spellbox beyond the reach of most people. At the end of the day, she believes that it is the intent behind the use of an object that infuses it with energy, not its source of origin. Each time a Spellbox is made, a small ceremony is performed to focus on how precious that this spell will be to person that will use it.

It has taken Danae time to understand the way business operates, but she feels that running a Pagan business is the same as any other.



Danae Thorpe crafts personal spellboxes from her shop in the Royal Arcade.

She advises potential Pagan craftspeople and business owners to :

- love what your business does;
- educate yourself as to business practices; and
- keep your integrity your foremost concern.

As I left her, Danae handed me a heavy black box – a Spellbox she thought I might find appropriate. The box was generous, broad and deep, and closed with sky blue binding, awash with soft magical symbols floating as clouds on a summer day. The words “seek the magic” were inscribed beneath the title of the spell contained within. A small piece of wool peeked beneath the stout lid of the box, a golden straw beckoning me to the yet un-manifested secrets that lay with in. Slowly I lifted the lid and a rush of sweet smelling fragrances rose to my nose. Inside, nestled on a bed of herbs and flowers, lay the six elements of my spell. The secrets of the magic wishing ring were now with in my grasp.

What did I wish for? I can never tell – don’t you know that wishes don’t come true if you tell?

Contact Details for Profiled Artists (all of them can be also be written to c/o PanGaia):

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