

TO THE FINISH | BY DANIEL JACKSON

WORN TO BE WILD

A NUMBER OF NEW
BLADES SPORT FINISHES
THAT APPEAR BATTLE-
WORN AND EDGE WORTHY

The Dwarven Sword Of Kili the Dwarf is United Cutlery's reproduction of the piece carried by the character of Kili (actor Aidan Turner) in The Hobbit™: An Unexpected Journey. The blade features UC's version of the well-worn finish. Overall length: 28 7/16 inches. MSRP: \$274. (Photo of Kili © WBEI™ Middle-earth Ent. Lic. To New Line. [s12])

**"THE BLADE ISN'T JUST BROKEN IN.
IT ALSO LOOKS REALLY COOL."**

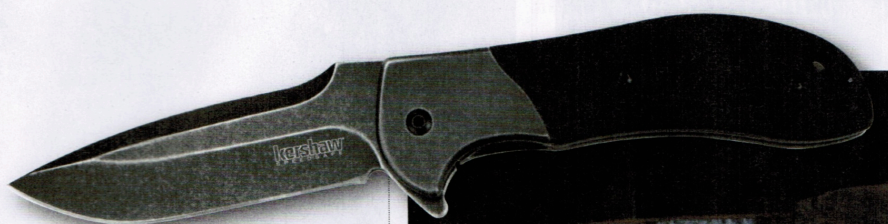
—JIM MACNAIR

The first time Kit Rae, knife designer for United Cutlery, saw a demand for old-looking blades was when New Line Cinema released the first film in the *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) trilogy, *The Fellowship of The Ring* in 2001 (see February 2002 *BLADE**). United created Sting, the short sword used by the character of Frodo, with a polished blade for its official movie reproduction piece. However, Rae said some United customers noticed pitting and wear on the pommel and guard of the sword in the film. He indicated collectors of the movie pieces started to demand highly accurate reproductions of the blades, even talking in forums online about how they could make the blades look worn.

Before the second LOTR film, *The Two Towers*, United added pitting to Sting, adding small details like the dirt in between the handle and the pommel of the blade, to make each mass-produced model the most accurate to the movie. Sting returned in the LOTR prequel, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, along with several more blades "worn and nicked through time."

Rae had to take a prop and turn it into an accurate blade that could be easily mass produced. In order to do that, he opted for casting the steel and leaving the finish virtually untouched.

Weta Workshop, a prop company in New Zealand that created the swords first for LOTR and then *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, designed and created the blades of the dwarves Fili and Kili. According to Magnus Hjert, website marketing manager for Weta, the blades were worn. The actual props for the movie are not steel but high-density urethane, or aluminum, depending on the weapon. Weta used its master painters to create a metal-like finish on the blade.



A BlackWash finish covers the clip side, blade and bolster (above) of the Kershaw Scrambler Blackwash, an RJ Martin design. Blade steel is 8Cr13MoV stainless and the non-clip-side grip is G-10 (top). The flipper folder features SpeedSafe™ assisted opening. MSRP: \$64.99. The tumbling vat containing media—stones, in this case—is the one at the Buck Knives plant. (Kershaw knife images; tumbler image courtesy of Buck)

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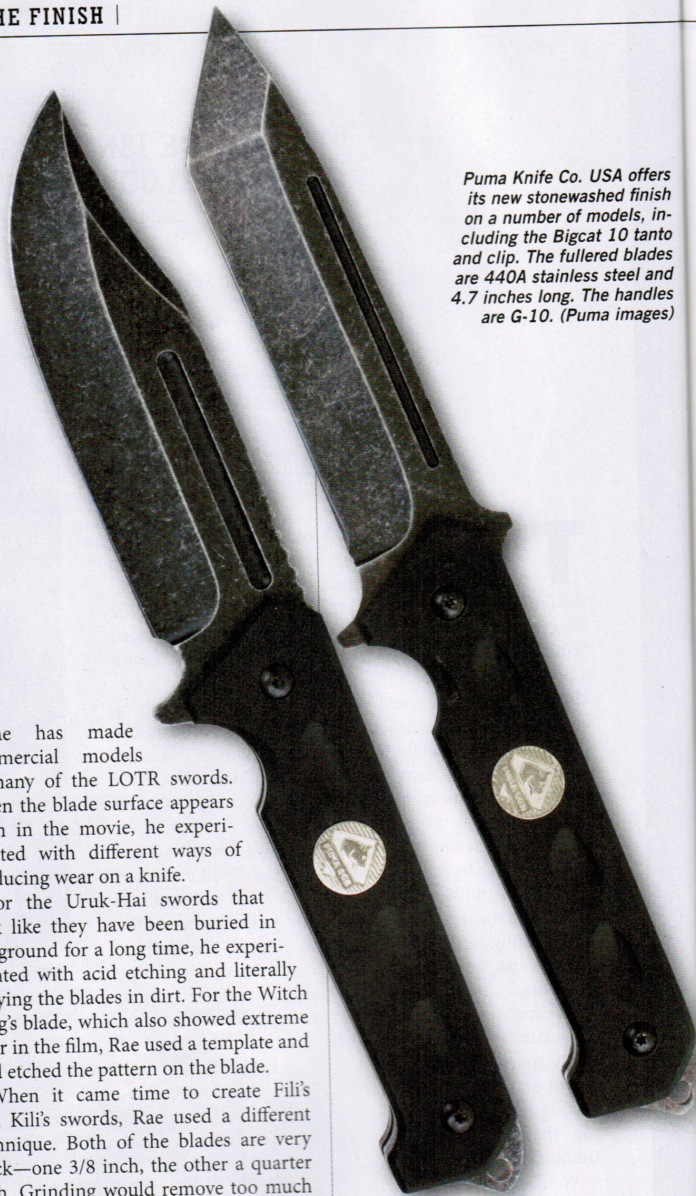
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TO THE FINISH |



Puma Knife Co. USA offers its new stonewashed finish on a number of models, including the Bigcat 10 tanto and clip. The fullered blades are 440A stainless steel and 4.7 inches long. The handles are G-10. (Puma images)

Rae has made commercial models of many of the LOTR swords. When the blade surface appears worn in the movie, he experimented with different ways of producing wear on a knife.

For the Uruk-Hai swords that look like they have been buried in the ground for a long time, he experimented with acid etching and literally burying the blades in dirt. For the Witch King's blade, which also showed extreme wear in the film, Rae used a template and acid etched the pattern on the blade.

When it came time to create Fili's and Kili's swords, Rae used a different technique. Both of the blades are very thick—one 3/8 inch, the other a quarter inch. Grinding would remove too much metal, so Rae cast the blades using stainless steel. The casting process had already left a rough, sand-like appearance deep in the blade finish.

When the blades break free from the mold they are 80 percent complete, Rae said. They are then painted with a dull black enamel wash to darken them, and the finish is done.

According to Rae, the finish is well nigh indestructible because it's integrated deep into the steel. To wear it off, it would

have to be ground away, he said.

the NEXT STEP?

Is Kershaw's BlackWash finish the next step in stonewashing? Kershaw Senior Designer Jim MacNair seems to think so.

Stonewashing has been around as a manufacturing technique longer than it has as a metal finish, MacNair noted. After a piece of metal has gone through the milling process, it's thrown into a vat full

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of stones or other media, often of various sizes, and "tumbled" in the stonewash treatment to remove the burrs along the edges. The process also gives the blade surface a flat, non-glare finish.

Likewise, the BlackWash process consists of putting the blades in tumblers full of similar media, wearing the finish off and creating a "battle-worn" look. While the stonewash process is not patented, the recipe on how each company gets the finish, how long it keeps the knives in the tumblers, the kind of tumbling media used and so on is all proprietary information.

Blades don't have a wide range of colors, MacNair noted. Many knife buyers prefer traditional colors of black, silver and other metallic hues. The BlackWash is advantageous because it's a new thing in that traditional sphere, he said.

In fact, Kershaw officials apparently think the new stonewash finish is so advantageous that they are offering it on such existing models as the Cryo, Cryo Tanto, Cryo II, Thermite, Scrambler, Leek and Blur. As Kershaw's Isidora Forrest noted, "These are the knives with the finish that makes them look like a favorite pair of well-worn jeans."

Like Kershaw, Puma released its new stonewash blade finish at the SHOT

The character of Fili, played by Dean O'Gorman, is ready for action during a battle scene from The Hobbit™: An Unexpected Journey. United Cutlery's reproduction of Fili's sword (right) includes the well-worn blade finish. Overall length: 25.5 inches. MSRP: \$274. (Photo of Fili © WBEI™ Middle-earth Ent. Lic. To New Line. [s12])

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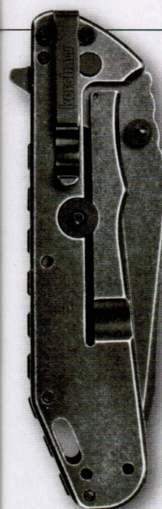
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TO THE FINISH |

Kershaw applies the BlackWash finish to both the 8Cr13MoV stainless steel blade and 410 stainless handle of the Cryo Tanto BlackWash framelock/flipper folder with SpeedSafe™ assisted opening. Closed length of the Rick Hinderer design: 3.75 inches. MSRP: \$57.99. (Kershaw image)



Puma opts for the stonewashed finish throughout on the SW TAC locking-liner folder in a 3.4-inch stonewashed blade, also of 440A stainless. The handle includes a seat-belt cutter in the butt. MSRP: \$150. (Puma image)



The clip side of the Kershaw Thermite BlackWash features the all-BlackWash finish on 410 stainless, while the flip side is G-10. The 3.5-inch blade is BlackWashed 8Cr13MoV stainless. The assisted-opening flipper folder designed by Rick Hinderer is 4.9 inches closed. MSRP: \$64.99. (Kershaw images)



Show in Las Vegas this past January (see the June *BLADE*). To create its stonewash look, Puma uses a process similar to when ammunition reloaders tumble brass, noted Chris Lalik, Puma Knife Co. USA director of marketing. The knives are placed in a tumbler that looks like a 55-gallon drum.

"When you're doing brass, you're using pretty soft media," to create the finish, Lalik said. However, when applying a finish to tempered steel, Puma opts for smooth stones of various sizes that are tumbled with the blades for "hours on end."

The stones create random scratches and a finish that doesn't reflect light and

blends into its surroundings—ideal for hunters who want no-glare blades that won't alert game animals, Lalik said.

All the etching, tumbling and wearing is in search of a look. As with many things in today's society, perception is reality. "The blade isn't just broken in," MacNair concluded. "It also looks really cool."

For the contact info for the knives in the story, see "Where To Get 'Em" on page 89.

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BLADE