

Introduction to Glove Making

History and Origins

The art of glove making, also known as glove cutting or gloving, has a long and fascinating history. The earliest known gloves date back to ancient Egypt, where they were worn by royalty as a symbol of status and power. These early gloves were simple pouches made from linen or leather, designed to protect the hands from the sun and heat.

In medieval Europe, gloves evolved into more sophisticated garments, with distinct styles for men and women, and for different social classes and occasions. Gloves were often heavily embellished with embroidery, jewels, and perfume, and were considered an essential accessory for the fashionable elite. The city of Grenoble in France emerged as a major center of glove production, renowned for its fine kid leather gloves.

The industrial revolution in the 19th century brought significant changes to the glove making industry. The invention of the sewing machine and the development of new tanning methods allowed for the mass production of gloves in a wider range of styles and materials. However, the art of hand-crafted, bespoke gloves has persisted, valued for their superior fit, comfort, and craftsmanship.

Anatomy of a Glove

A well-made glove is a complex garment, consisting of multiple precisely cut and sewn pieces. The main parts of a glove include:

- **Palm:** The main part of the glove that covers the palm of the hand. It is typically made from a single piece of leather, cut to allow for shaping over the contours of the hand.
- **Back:** The portion of the glove that covers the back of the hand. It may be cut from a single piece or multiple pieces, depending on the style and fit of the glove.
- **Fingers:** Each finger of the glove is composed of three pieces: the front, back, and fourchettes (the narrow side pieces that create the three-dimensional shape of the finger).
- **Thumb:** Like the fingers, the thumb is made up of a front, back, and fourchette. The thumb is typically cut separately and attached to the palm of the glove.
- **Quirks:** The small triangular gussets inserted between the fingers to provide ease of movement and a better fit.
- **Vent:** The opening at the wrist of the glove, which may be finished with a hem, binding, or button closure.
- **Lining:** Some gloves, particularly those intended for warmth, may have a separate lining made of silk, cashmere, or other soft material. The lining is cut to match the shape of the outer glove and sewn in as a separate layer.

Leather Selection and Preparation

The choice of leather is crucial to the quality and performance of a glove. Different leathers have unique properties that make them suited for different styles and uses. Some common glove leathers include:

- Kid: Soft, supple leather made from young goats. Kid leather is prized for its fine texture and is often used for dress gloves.
- Lamb: Another soft, pliable leather, lamb is similar to kid but with a slightly more textured grain. It is a popular choice for driving gloves.
- Deer: Deerskin is known for its strength, softness, and stretch. It is often used for work gloves and casual styles.
- Peccary: A durable, water-resistant leather made from wild boar. Peccary is often used for luxurious dress gloves.
- Cowhide: A sturdy, versatile leather that can be finished in various ways. Cowhide is commonly used for work gloves and heavy-duty styles.

Before cutting, the leather must be carefully inspected for flaws, thin spots, and variations in texture and stretch. The leather is then graded and sorted by quality and thickness. The pattern pieces are laid out on the leather to maximize yield and ensure that the grain direction aligns with the length of the glove for the best fit and flexibility.

Cutting and Construction

Glove making requires precision and skill at every stage, starting with the cutting of the leather. The pattern pieces are traced onto the leather using a silver pencil or awl, then carefully cut out using specialized glove shears. The cutter must have an expert eye and a steady hand to ensure that each piece is accurately shaped and free of nicks or jagged edges.

Once cut, the pieces are assembled and sewn together using a combination of machine and hand stitching. The seams must be strong and durable, yet flexible enough to allow for ease of movement. The most common stitches used in glove making are:

- Inseam: A tight, flat seam used to join the fingers and thumb. The seam allowances are trimmed close to the stitching for a smooth, comfortable fit.
- Prixseam: A decorative, raised seam used on the back of the glove. The seam allowances are folded to one side and topstitched for a bold, contrasting effect.
- Quirk stitch: A small, angled stitch used to attach the quirks between the fingers. The quirk stitch is often done by hand for precision and flexibility.

After stitching, the gloves are turned right side out and shaped on a heated brass hand form. The heat and pressure help to mold the leather to the contours of the hand and give the glove its final shape. Any

excess leather is trimmed away, and the gloves are aired and brushed to remove any residual dust or markings.

Fit and Sizing

One of the hallmarks of a fine glove is its perfect fit. Glove sizing is based on a combination of hand length and circumference, measured in inches. The standard sizes range from 6 (XS) to 11 (XL), with half sizes in between. However, getting an accurate fit often requires taking individual measurements and making custom adjustments.

When measuring for gloves, the hand should be relaxed and held slightly cupped, as if about to shake hands. The length is measured from the tip of the middle finger to the base of the palm, and the circumference is measured around the widest part of the palm, excluding the thumb. These measurements are then compared to a size chart to determine the best fit.

A well-fitted glove should feel snug but not tight, with no excess material at the fingertips or palm. The fingers should be long enough to allow for a full range of motion without binding or stretching. The wrist opening should be comfortable and secure, without gapping or slipping.

Care and Maintenance

Proper care is essential to maintaining the beauty and longevity of leather gloves. Gloves should be stored in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight and heat, which can cause the leather to dry out and crack. When not in use, gloves should be stored flat or gently folded, never balled up or crushed.

To clean soiled gloves, start by gently brushing away any dirt or dust with a soft-bristled brush. For more stubborn stains, the gloves can be lightly cleaned with a damp cloth and a mild soap, taking care not to saturate the leather. The gloves should then be reshaped and allowed to air dry naturally, away from direct heat.

Leather gloves benefit from occasional conditioning to keep the leather soft and supple. A small amount of leather conditioner or beeswax can be applied to the gloves and worked into the leather with the fingers. Any excess conditioner should be wiped away with a clean, dry cloth.

With proper care and storage, a well-made pair of leather gloves can last for many years, developing a rich patina and molding to the shape of the wearer's hands over time.

Conclusion

Glove making is a craft that combines artistry, skill, and a deep understanding of the materials and techniques involved. From the selection and cutting of the leather to the precise stitching and shaping of the final glove, each step requires focus, dexterity, and an eye for detail. The result is a functional and beautiful object that not only protects and enhances the hands but also serves as a statement of personal style and elegance.

Whether you are a fashion enthusiast, a collector, or simply someone who appreciates the value of a well-made accessory, the world of glove making offers endless opportunities for discovery and appreciation. By understanding the history, craftsmanship, and care that goes into each pair of gloves, you can develop a deeper connection to this timeless art form and the skilled artisans who keep it alive.