

A NEW EVENT

Text and photos: Mardjane Amin and Milena Lassalle

Every year on 1st May, the International Tool Fair takes place in Bièvres (91). Dozens of exhibitors come to sell their collections of antique tools to enthusiasts and craftspeople. This year, marking the 40th edition of the event, provided an opportunity to showcase a major new initiative: an association of contemporary toolmakers, blacksmiths and cutlers.

Thirteen blacksmiths and metalworkers, men and women alike,from all corners of France, showcased their work on the fringes of the fair. Having lain dormant for several years, this traditional craft is now enjoying a resurgence of interest, driven not only by a growing demand for specialised tools for working with materials, but also by the technical aspects of this craft, which are attracting an ever-increasing number of enthusiasts. The need to come together and meet in order to discuss the subject was a key factor that led to the formation of the group in question. With exhibitions of their work, discussions amongst trade professionals and networking opportunities, this gathering of professionals proved to be a rich experience in every respect. We'll tell you all about it:

// The origins: *Les Amis De l'Outil*

The association Les Amis De l'Outil (LADO) is behind this event. The organisation's origins date back 43 years to a small group of tool enthusiasts committed to preserving this heritage. Its primary mission is "the preservation of the heritage of work through its historical and systematic inventory, with the aim of raising awareness of it and promoting it." To this end, the association has established a museum showcasing an incredible collection of preserved and catalogued tools, representing over 35 trades. These objects are sometimes loaned out for use in heritage restoration projects. In addition, there is a library containing a veritable treasure trove of books on the subject. Together, these form a true gem in the preservation of this heritage, nestled in the heart of Bièvres.





1 / Exhibition stand by Govel Ar Meneziou.
2 / Exhibition stand by Cahuant Forge showcasing a variety of woodworking tools.

// An international tools fair

Today, LADO is best known for its traditional international antique tools fair: the first edition was launched on May 1986 . Thanks to the support of Bièvres Town Council, its technical services and a team of around fifteen dedicated volunteers,the event has grown from just under ten exhibitors to more than 50 in 2026, drawn from several countries. Its aim: to provide a market for tools to meet growing demand and thereby preserve traditional skills by keeping the craft alive. To share, reuse and perpetuate: that is the ultimate aim of the 1st May event in Bièvres. Over its 40-year history, the fair has seen trends in its customer base evolve. Whilst early buyers were mainly collectors or enthusiasts of old tools, a new audience has emerged in recent years, represented by a new generation of craftspeople. "Young people are returning to manual trades and getting back into the arts and crafts", explains Hubert Vigneron, former president of the association and still a very active volunteer in organising the fair. "Naturally, they're looking for tools," he adds cheerfully. Indeed, it was on Hubert's initiative that the Bièvres tool fair opened its doors to contemporary tool-making.

"It had long been my wish to see contemporary manufacturers exhibiting. But I couldn't find anyone ," he explains.

// When the current tool stands alongside the old one

In 2019, he finally learnt of Michel Auriou, director of GMA-Auriou, a tool-making company based in the Tarn and known as the last in France to produce hand-chiselled rasps. Accepting the LADO's invitation, Michel Auriou has been showcasing his contemporary tools at the event ever since, including at this year's edition. Subsequently, it was thanks to the restoration project at Notre-Dame de Paris that Hubert managed to trace the origins of a new generation of wood-carvers, by contacting the consortium of five tool-making workshops responsible for producing the chopping axes required for the restoration of the nave and choir roof structures, as well as a sole trader who had manufactured tools for the restoration of the spire. From 2024 onwards , and following on from a movement to bring the community together that had begun a few months earlier at the Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne Axe-Makers' Museum, a small group of axe-making businesses was represented on the fringes of the Bièvres fair.





3 / Pruning shears and grafting knives on display at the Taillanderie Sauvage stand.
4 / Blacksmithing tools on display at the Outils Perrot stand.

// Toolmaking takes centre stage in 2026

At the 2026 edition, we were able to count on the presence of thirteen exhibitors in a small village of cutlers just a stone's throw from the fair. Bièvres' central location made it possible to offer the trade this new gathering on a scale never seen before.

Among the companies represented, a variety was evident on several levels. Firstly, in terms of age, there was a mix of relatively new and older companies, ranging from those established just one year ago to the oldest, which had been in existence for around a dozen years, operating either as sole traders or with one employee. Geographically, a significant proportion of mainland France was also represented in Bièvres, according to the following regional breakdown:

- In Brittany: Atelier du Rossignol – Alice de Kerchove de Denterghem (Belgium); Govel Ar Meneziou – Tangi Le Rouzo (Côtes-d'Armor); Taillanderie Claudel – Martin Claudel and Mardjane Amin (Ille-et-Vilaine).
- Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Vienne: La Forge Rayonnante – Léo Malloigne; Outil Perrot – Adrien Perrot; Taillanderie d'Ignis – Romain Rimbert.
- In Bourgogne-Franche-Comté: Taillanderie Sauvage – Dimitri Sauvage (Yonne); L'Atelier de Max – Maxime Lang (Belfort).
- In Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes: Taillanderie Atelier L.E.T. – Jérémy Roger and Milena Lassalle (Isère); Cahuant Forge – Jean Michaux (Cantal); Forge Tiomana – Romain Carmona (Drôme).
- Occitanie: La Forge du Terrier – Tao Bouthet (Lozère).

In terms of the items on display, common types of tools could be seen, such as pruning knives, axes and hatchets, and wood chisels. Nevertheless, across all categories, the tools produced by different makers remained distinguishable, marked by a personal touch, testifying to the fact that here, each individual's sensibility is given free rein. Furthermore, highly distinctive types of production were on display at each stall, drawing on the specialities unique to each individual, including scythes, basket-making tools, blacksmithing tools, farriery tools, beekeeping tools, cooperage tools, and so on. A wide range of tools and trades was thus represented, demonstrating the richness of contemporary cutlery production, all of which meets current needs and demands for hand tools.

// A broad community of industry professionals in attendance

In addition to the exhibiting craftspeople, many other professionals in the trade – as well as aspiring craftspeople – made the journey to discover or rediscover the venue, and to take part in the lively atmosphere of meeting and exchanging ideas. One German blacksmith, interested in Taillanderie and having travelled 1,200 km specifically for the fair, was in particular present with the aim of meeting the members of this exceptional group. An ornamental engraver, Brieuc Audrain, was also exhibiting alongside the Taillanderie craftsmen, offering a complementary service to theirs. Several professionals from various trades – both those seeking and those using forged hand tools – were also present in the village to talk with the craftsmen in attendance.

In addition to the tools on display, a knife-sharpening service – a skill intrinsically linked to the craft of cutlery-making – was also offered at the market. This proved a great success. Romain Carmona, who was in charge of running the stall, confirms this: "Many people were delighted to be able to have their tools sharpened [from the flea market] and to receive maintenance advice." ●●●

// Creating a new dynamic in the tool-making industry in France

At the end of this major event for the trade, there was a great deal of positive feedback from the professionals in attendance . "When I started 20 years ago, this sort of event didn't exist. There was hardly anyone there. To see such diversity today, combined with this level of quality, is invaluable," said Simon Pellequer, one of the blacksmiths who had come to take part in the event. Several people also noted the quality of the exhibits, as well as the wealth of technical discussions amongst professionals and with the users of the tools: "Bièvres allows us to make incredible connections to keep the craft alive and exchange ideas: it's a real hub for encounters," notes Jérémy Roger enthusiastically, co-organiser alongside LADO of this year's toolmakers' market. Several speakers thus highlighted the importance of this type of gathering for the resurgent craft. The public's evident fascination with contemporary tool-making was also noted, as was their interest in new tools. One thing is certain: this gathering is helping to create a new momentum.

// Research and outreach on cutting tools

Alongside the exhibition and sale of tools, a series of talks were also held, including one on the blacksmith's trade today. Presented from a dual perspective by Caroline Hasne, a toolmaker, and Colette Hasne, a PhD student in sociology whose research focuses on practitioners of the blacksmithing trades, this talk provided the audience with further insights into the current vitality of the trade. The need for networking and solidarity amongst those involved in contemporary tool-making was notably highlighted as a key factor, given the lack of schools or institutions dedicated to the craft and itstraining.[1] The long-standing presence of ornamentation on handcrafted objects was also highlighted as a form of expression unique to human creation, drawing a natural parallel with the expressiveness and uniqueness of each tool on display at the blacksmithing stalls. In the Grange aux Fraises, a recently restored municipal building, an exhibition on this craft—conceived and loaned for the occasion by Milena Lassalle—was also on display. It enabled the public to gain a broader understanding of this theme, which lay at the heart of the 2026 edition. These initiatives – whether academic research or cultural outreach – are far from being merely anecdotal; on the contrary, they are all part of a broader movement towards the revival of the craft in France today.

1/ Comments attributed to Colette Hasne, taken from her Master's thesis: *La taillanderie en France. Étude d'un groupe professionnel en construction*, research thesis, 2024–2025, Sciences Po Toulouse.





5 / Round-table discussion with the stonemasons the day after the fair, moderated by Mardjane Amin.
6 / Tour of the LADO Museum, exhibition room on the restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris by the stonemasons.

> "When I started 20 years ago, it didn't exist. To see such diversity and such high standards today is a real treasure."
> SIMON PELLEQUER

// A special opportunity for discussion between male and female blacksmiths

A round-table discussion involving craftspeople specialising in metalwork was also held the day after the fair, to capitalise on the presence of a large number of professionals in the field. Discussions on future projects and prospects, as well as a review of a proposed metalwork association currently being set up, were facilitated by Mardjane Amin. A round-table discussion on trends in terms of demand and production for each participant highlighted the specific markets in each region, as well as the variety of products produced. It also revealed a near-collective focus on the manufacture of woodworking tools, while at the same time supporting the revival of practices such as squaring timber with an axe. From this, the idea emerged that, as toolmakers, we fulfill a need, but we can also create the demand of tomorrow. "The more people there are offering tools, the more clients there will be, and the higher the quality will be," remarked one of the participants.

Several categories of tools that have so far been little or not at all explored also emerged in participants' wishes for future research and production, particularly those for working with leather, thatch, or blown glass, suggesting an exponential boom ahead in the world of toolmaking.

The day finally drew to a close with a visit to the LADO museum, which houses a significant collection of tools displayed by trade, with each type of tool represented by a variety of models. At a glance, one can appreciate the breadth and depth of the knowledge and expertise of the past in the field of tool-making. It is enough to spark inspiration in the eyes of this new generation of toolmakers at work. This is all the more true given that, unlike in traditional museums, here every tool can be picked up, handled and examined, thus providing anyone with an interest in the subject with highly valuable study materials.

This event thus confirms the growth of forged tool-making in France on a small-scale, artisanal basis. The diversity of the tools, the practices of the trade and the business models only serves to underline the exploitable richness of this discipline, which, until recently, was on the verge of disappearing. And this 1st May 2026 has only served to strengthen this determination to champion the craft of tool-making, to come together and to forge links with the public. That is why 1st May will henceforth be an annual gathering for tool-making. So if the world of tools interests you or piques your curiosity, make a note in your diaries now for the next event on 1st May 2027! For those who can't wait, in the meantime you can visit the LADO museum in Bièvres to discover the diversity of tool families that have existed for several centuries! ●

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