



getting containers filled with shit—sorry, I mean containers filled with disposable things.” Recycling metals allows for a nearly infinite cycle of creation.

Collette is the kind of guy who daydreams about the incredible things he could forge with all the metal available on the planet. “It would take us 400 or 500 years to reuse all of it,” he adds. A nice banister made out of the Pont de Québec? Or a knife made out of the Golden Gate Bridge? There’s a certain amount of “melting loss” that occurs every time a piece is thrust back into the furnace’s internal temperatures. But even those residues could be swept out of the ashes and melted back into iron ingots, the blacksmith’s raw material.

04 Collette’s hands create objects that, in the future, will create others—they endure. More than just a manual profession, the forge is, for Collette, a spiritual experience. He cherishes his workshop as a living study in contrasts: the temperature gap between the hearth and the room, the

make the trade axe the French once swapped for furs with the First Nations. “They would send thousands of axe heads that were stamped, minted like coins. They were worth a certain number of furs,” explains Collette. This axe could be used to clear the forest, or simply stay alive in it.

The history of the forge goes back even further. It also separated sedentary from nomadic people, Collette says. The Iron Age marked the beginning of settlements—a requirement for the emergence of civilizations. There is a reason why metallurgy holds a special place in the human imagination—from Genesis to Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, and all through Greek mythology.

“The forge is the door that brings us back to values like sustainability, eco-responsibility, and buying local. Its mission can reach beyond the making of objects,” adds the master blacksmith. By creating things that last, he wants to take a stand against a system that values novelty, disposability, and waste. “We can’t keep

04 Collette reverse-engineers traditional tools.

05 Collette knew from childhood that he would take up his family’s ancestral occupation.



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subdued lighting to avoid overpowering the shining glow of the fire, the stillness of the anvils from which erupt incandescent shards of iron, the barrels of water to cool the burning metal. Working here becomes a form of meditation. “The window for striking the iron while it’s hot is very short. I don’t have the leisure to think of anything else; I can’t dwell on it. The only time is now.”

It’s all of this—the meaning, the slowness, the close contact with matter—that attracted Collette’s “star” pupil, Ivan Savchev, seven years ago. The 29-year-old Montrealer had moved up from mechanic to mechanical-engineering technician and was well on his way to hitting a wall. “I’d lost all motivation. I didn’t want to work just to cater to the interests of the Department of Finance, building objects that were only meant to last a few years,” says Savchev.

While the master is frankly stirred by the work of his apprentice Savchev, he remains worried: “I might still have about 25 years >



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06 Metal can be recycled almost infinitely.

07 The forge, for Collette, is a site of meditation.



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MATHIEU COLLETTE