Making a Bamboo Screen

One of the most important tools for making washi is the bamboo screen (*su*) used to form and drain the pulp slurry. Each screen is made of approximately 3,000 strands of split and shaved bamboo, bound with silk thread. It typically takes a week to make a single screen, and only one remaining artisan in the area is capable of making them.

The photographs here show the process of making a screen, along with the tools used to split and shave the bamboo. The bamboo strands are carefully joined along diagonal cuts to achieve the desired length, and bound with raw silk thread to create a smooth surface for the paper. Artisans sit on the tatami-mat floor to make the screens, which are fixed to a wooden board hung with dozens of bobbins of silk thread for binding.

Other tools on display include blades for cutting the bamboo used to make the screens and the steel draw plates and pliers used to reduce the circumference of the bamboo by drawing it through progressively smaller holes.