

Samurai News from Honbu



ISF • AB • KTRR



Aikido & Aikibujutsu

Spring 2010

Issue 0048

Spring 2010

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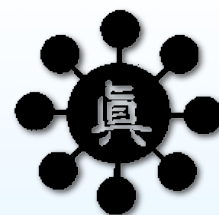
Word from Obata-Kaiso

By Obata Toshishiro-Kaiso

I would like to announce that our dojo location has moved to Second Street, in downtown Little Tokyo. We are located on the second floor of the building. Thank you to all our members who helped look for a new location, and those who helped with the move. Changing the location means that everyone starts fresh again in a new environment and with a new attitude. We at the Honbu look forward to all the students who will visit and train with us in this new location. It is in our plans to keep searching for a bigger location, and teach in 1-3 locations.



I would like to remind our instructors to check the dojo listings page on the website and notify us if anything needs to be updated. Also, if you send out a menjo request but do not hear anything back in a month, please do not hesitate to contact me.



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“Art of the Samurai” Exhibit – Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

By John Liu, M.D.
Honbu Dojo

For students of the sword, Japanese museums offer rare glimpses into the past. I feel it would be fair to claim that many, if not all of us Shinkendo-ka are fascinated by the historical katana, forged so meticulously, with such pure materials, that they survive not only the brutality of war, but also the ravages of time.

On my last trip to Japan, I was fortunate enough to visit several museums and see many blades from different eras in Japanese history. In Japan, it is often difficult to see many “Culturally Important” swords, let alone blades which are considered to be “National Treasures.” This is because they are so often sequestered away by preservation-minded museum curators, for fear of over-display. This is why when the Metropolitan Museum of Art announced their exhibition, entitled “Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor 1156-1868,” I was initially skeptical. Traditionally, once a nihonto (Japanese-made sword) was designated a culturally-relevant object, it then becomes exceedingly difficult for it to exit Japan under any circumstances. How many nihonto would be permitted to leave Japanese soil for this Met exhibition in the U.S.? Luckily, an unprecedented arrangement was struck between the Japanese government, the Tokyo National Museum, and the Met for this exhibition. When I perused the Met catalog online, I quickly realized this was definitely an exhibition I needed to see first-hand. Over 64 Culturally Important items, and 34 National Treasures were to be brought to New York – the largest such display ever amassed!

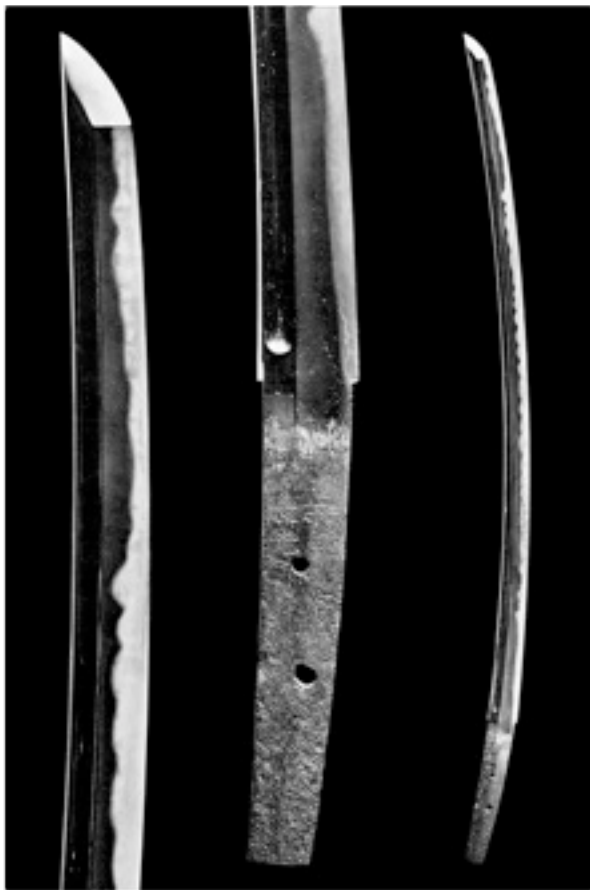
New York City is a marvelous place. My wife and I try to



visit “The Big Apple” whenever possible. The crisp November weather welcomed us as we met up with Michael Mason-sensei of the Shinkendo New York at Brooklyn Dojo on the steps of the museum. Each of us looked forward to seeing all those great items on display. November 8th held special significance for the exhibition, because on that day, special guest Victor Harris, the esteemed curator of Japanese Antiquities at the British Museum, would be giving a lecture on the “Art of the Samurai”!

Braving the crowds gathered that day, we ventured forth. We were not disappointed. Many rooms full of cases displaying katana, wakizashi, tanto and naginata awaited us. Michael Mason-sensei had the forethought to bring a bright mini-flashlight for “those not-so-well illuminated” pieces. There were some extremely rare swords, including ones



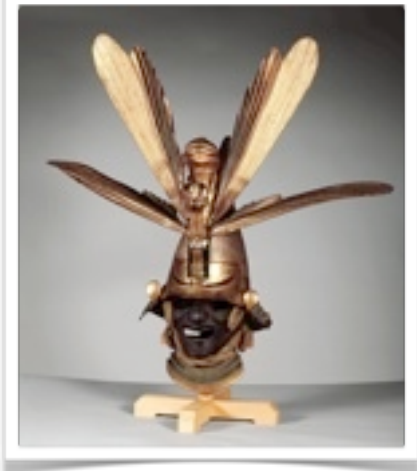


crafted by such revered historical swordmakers such as Kotetsu (Edo period), Muramasa (Muromachi period), and Sadatoshi (Kamakura period). There was a particularly beautiful ōdachi (long tachi) from the Nanbokuchō period (1366) forged by Tomomitsu, which survived intact (unfortunately, many ōdachi fell out of fashion and were cut down to shorter sizes in succeeding eras). The amazing hamon (temper lines) of these blades are still apparent, hundreds of years after crafting! We were even treated to a gorgeous and rarely-seen meibutsu (“famous piece”) called

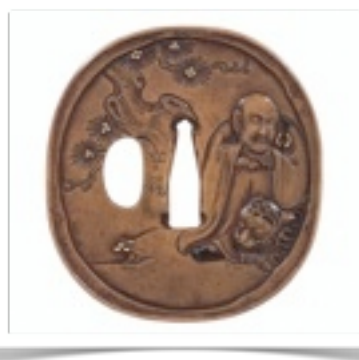
Nakatsukasa Masamune, forged by none other than the greatest smith of them all, Masamune! Indeed, this was a more comprehensive showing than any I had seen in Japan.

But this exhibition was far more than just blades –

there were armor, helmets, scrolls, sword fittings, and lots of other exquisite pieces. It took a whole day at the museum just to take it all in! The lecture by Victor Harris was very educational, and towards the end of the day, the museum even brought in a polisher from Japan for a sword-polishing demonstration! All in all, it was an outstanding exhibit. Many thanks go especially to Michael Mason-sensei for his gracious New York hospitality.



The painstaking training and creation of these marvelous historical pieces by people who lived hundreds of years in the past underscore the precept that we should all try to excel at every pursuit, whatever that may be. Our efforts just might result in something that may resonate through history. That, in my opinion, is part of what Shinkendo teaches us.



Keiko Hajime 2010

By Peter Parker
Sojokan Dojo, Illinois

What is with Shinkendo seminars that keep people coming? Anybody who attended Keiko Hajime 2010 knows the answer. The reasons might be different for each of us. Some come to Honbu to see old friends, some to make new ones. Some feel ki energy flowing, some feel like learning new technique. All of us come here to train and to listen to Kaiso's stories.

There was a small crowd gathered in front of Honbu early Friday morning. We had quite a group, all levels from a few months of training to a few decades, beginners and instructors, English and French, Hungarian and American, East-coasters and West-coasters. All of us swordsmen by heart. Some of us could see familiar faces. There was venerable Sensei James from Arizona, Sensei Byron representing his "Merry Old England" dojo, and "YouTube celebrity" Sensei Matthew.

The training was intensive. Aikibujutsu was first, then Bojutsu, and Shinkendo. Everybody got to try something. It is a good way to start the day with Aikido-style warmup. Nothing is better for blood circulation than stretching wide. It is not easy to keep up with Obata-kaiso, though. There was a quick break and Bojutsu started. It was good there were plenty of bo in the dojo. It is not easy to travel with a long staff, especially on the plane. Mrs. Obata kindly showed basics to new students, while more experienced practitioners continued with bo tachiuchi techniques.

The echo of kiai filled the dojo when the Shinkendo session began. Air moved with swings of bokken. "Ki surrounded us, penetrated us, and bound us together." The first session was focused on tachiuchi and Toyama Ryu Battodo. Throughout the day we flipped between different styles, ending it by participating in

regularly-scheduled Shinkendo class. The experience was a very refreshing one, especially for those of us who were not local to Honbu.

The second day continued the training pattern. During the Aikido session, Obata-kaiso explained the most common defense technique. It was the one when an attacker tries a grabbing move or straight one-handed strike. Those techniques date back to samurai times, when an attacker would try to grab the opponent's sword and/or strike with a wakizashi. Like in the Japanese proverb, "the past is the future of present," all techniques have their roots in the past and are still applicable today. One can easily imagine using this exact defense against an attacker grabbing one's bag or striking with a beer bottle. That is also one of the reasons some sarcastic people prefer wine to beer. In wine culture, it is less likely to be attacked with a wine bottle...

Another interesting story told by Kaiso was one about the bo. A long staff is a very versatile tool. It can be used as a walking staff, or a pole for many weapons, such as the spear or the naginata. One person with a spear was able to effectively hold a path or castle entrance. Nowadays, the long staff is less likely used for walking, but is still visible on backpacking trails. A bo-skilled person would not mind keeping one close to the home entrance. It would be very useful in dealing with nasty solicitors or snake-oil salesmen... or maybe not.

Saturday ended with a feast in the dojo. We had lots fun and even more food. Everybody enjoyed a shot of sake and a bowl of bean mochi made for us by Mrs. Obata. I think somebody even tried to pick up croissants with chopsticks. After the dinner, everybody got to say few words.

At that time, our wide spectrum of personalities and backgrounds was unveiled. We come from many places in the world and we are united with a common passion for Shinkendo, and deep respect and appreciation for its founder, Obata-kaiso.

The appreciation was summarized by Mrs. Obata. Until Shinkendo, there was no single Japanese swordsmanship martial art that would be complete enough. Iaido is focused on drawing and cutting, Kenjutsu uses an already-drawn sword, and Kendo is more sport-oriented. Shinkendo not only incorporates all aspects of swordsmanship and a life philosophy, but also is a bridge between Aikibujutsu and Bojutsu. Shinkendo is a modern and live martial art. It is shaped by Kaiso over time, keeping safety as a primary goal. That is why we are grateful to Obata-kaiso for creating Shinkendo.

Sunday training ended with a group picture session. Before that, the most senior students and instructors demonstrated tachiuchi we had been practicing for the past two days. The idea was to present the complete form to all of us as a visual aid. There is no better way to recognize an individual technique's pieces as observing the best of the best performing it.

The very last hour we were free to practice whatever we wished. Before the seminar ended, one question by Sensei Trevis from Chicago triggered a long story told by Kaiso. The question intrigued Kaiso so much that he decided to answer it in Japanese. The response was very fast and passionate. Yoko-sensei was present to translate Kaiso's quick thought process.

After answering the question, Obata-kaiso turned toward all of us. This time, the message was about Shinkendo and safety. We were told stories of flying bokuto, and shattered ones. Kaiso explained why he decided to use waxwood bokken for tachiuchi instead of other

hardwoods. He also told us about unfortunate swords accidents, mostly due to carelessness or doing circus-like acts. Learning how to use a sword from TV or movies is not a good idea. Kaiso stressed how important it is to care for shinken and to carefully examine them before each use. Especially pins (mekugi) should be looked closely after, and that is why Shinkendo requires double pins for additional safety.

We do enjoy practicing Shinkendo, and we are keeping it safe, too. Keiko Hajime is over, and year 2010 of Shinkendo has officially started.

Lisa Visits Honbu

By Nicholas Lauridsen

This past January, Lisa, a Shinkendo student from Adrien Six-sensei's dojo in Arcueil, France, visited the Honbu Dojo for an extended stay. Lisa has been a dedicated student and a loyal attendee to Obata-kaiso's seminars in Europe, and this winter she took it upon herself to travel to Los Angeles during her vacation for some additional training.

Regrettably, a storm front also decided to visit Los Angeles at this time, and most of Lisa's stay was hosted by uncharacteristic cold weather. Lisa was hardly daunted, however, and took the time to explore the city, including the Getty museum, showing particular interest in the architecture (which she studies). Near the end of her visit, the weather thankfully cleared enough to visit the beach with sensei and Mrs. Obata, where the dissipating clouds and intermittent sunlight made for quite the dramatic seascape.

Everyone at Honbu was happy to have Lisa come and train with us over her stay. Since she returned right before our dojo move in February, she has the honor of being the last visiting student to train at the Little Tokyo Square dojo!

Keiko Hajime 2010 in Review: “Shatter My Ego”

By David J. Derdiger
Sojokan Dojo, Illinois

This year, I was lucky enough to be able to afford the time and money to venture out to Los Angeles for Keiko Hajime, the traditional beginning-of-the-year seminar. This was my second time visiting the Honbu, my first time being over the summer of 2008 when I was but a wee Santen. Now, one and a half years later, I have attained the rank of Goho and hold strong aspirations of becoming a sensei and, one day, opening my own dojo.

Never before have I had the experience of training with so many people coming from different corners not only of the country but of the globe. There were those making the relatively short trip from another dojo in California, some coming from Atlanta and New York, and even those who came all the way from England and Hungary!

I noticed that each sensei from every dojo had their own strengths and weaknesses, and that this notion was reflected in the students accompanying them. By observing the strengths and weaknesses of all those before me, I was able to better assess my own ability and deduce that which needed to be improved upon, and that which was a current strength of my own. This was a totally unique and valuable experience.

I know that before I went to Honbu for Keiko Hajime, I thought that I was pretty good in my execution of technique and form, as well as display of spirit. But being at Honbu made me realize just how much more growing I have to do.

My first day at Honbu, I learned all of Juppon Omote. Two days later, I had the honorable and most humbling experience of training Juppon

Omote with Yoko-sensei, Kaiso's daughter. Never before in my three and a half years of Shinkendo have I ever experienced a practitioner as swift, precise, and teeming with spirit as Yoko-sensei. Any shred of ego that had lingered in my soul was shattered that day, training with her. She showed me what one can hope to attain in spirit and ability from diligent and disciplined practice over time.

I also had the personal honor of being Kaiso's example dummy of what not to do to a person with a blade and why one shouldn't attempt to do stunts with or flourish a set of nunchaku, especially when considering knocking a cigarette from another's mouth.

After being at Keiko Hajime for the first time, I can already say that I will do everything in my power to return to Honbu at least once a year, if not only for Keiko Hajime. The camaraderie of training day-in and day-out with a cohort of Shinkendoka has given me new inspiration and amplified my drive to grow and progress in the art of Shinkendo.

My thanks go out to the Obata Family and all those who participated in Keiko Hajime who are responsible for my wonderful and transformative experience.

David J. Derdiger



Obata-Kaiso coming to town? Get on the mat!!!

By Michael Mason
Shinkendo New York - Brooklyn Dojo

I began training in Shinkendo in February of 2004 at Shinkendo New York, Modern Samurai Dojo, under the instruction of Shibuchō Louis D'Agostino. I continue to train with Lou-sensei regularly, while teaching at our Brooklyn location.

Our own instructors are very important to us. They give us the foundation that defines who we are as Shinkendo-ka. It is important to honor that relationship as you progress. At a certain point however, both you and your instructor need you to take the next step, which is to train with Obata-kaiso.

One of the best things about Shinkendo is the fact that we still have our founder available to guide our training. It is a rare opportunity in martial arts circles to be able to study directly with the founder of an art. Many arts have become diluted by decades, or even centuries, of interpretation. In Shinkendo, we can receive the information unfiltered, exactly as intended. I cannot express how valuable this is.

As instructors, we focus on pieces of technique to the best of our abilities. Obata-kaiso sees the big picture. It's *his* picture after all. While we may see a certain technique as a single piece, Obata-kaiso knows where it goes in the puzzle. By training with him, you can start to see some of the big picture as well.



For the majority of students not directly training at Honbu, the best opportunities for receiving direct instruction are at the many seminars which Obata-kaiso gives each year. I was very lucky, in that during my first year of instruction, Lou-sensei hosted a seminar with Kaiso at our dojo in New York. I was so inspired by the experience that I attended another seminar (this time in Alabama) with Lou-sensei later that same year. As I continue my Shinkendo journey, I try to attend as many seminars as I can, in as many locations as I can.

Seminars have an added benefit: Not only do you get to train directly with Obata-kaiso, you often get to meet and train with instructors and students from other dojo. This is a great benefit, as each teacher and student has his or her own strengths. Each has a unique rhythm, and all of them provide some new lesson, if you pay attention. I have learned many things from Obata-kaiso, but I have also learned a lot of little things from the many gracious and

friendly people I've met through seminars.

I hear the voices of students and instructors each time I step on the mat:

- Kalila-sensei (Georgia) reminds me to center myself for maki-osae...
- Jim-sensei (Livermore) reminds me to apply that center to tsuki...
- Saito-sensei (Orange County) reminds me to keep my rear heel down...

I see the positive example of outstanding swordsmen and women and strive to match them:

- move more like Nicholas-sensei (Honbu)...
- make my cut angles as sharp as Mike-sensei (USC)...
- demonstrate technique with the precision of Blake-sensei (Illinois)...
- give my tachiuchi partner the energy and focus that Trevis-sensei (Chicago) brings...



•focus on kihon, to keep the foundation that Lou-sensei (NYC) built for me.

Some folks have trepidation about attending a seminar “too soon.” They are worried about making mistakes in front of Obata-kaiso, or not representing their dojo

properly. I understand these concerns, but please, do not let this stop you from attending. Obata-kaiso cannot help your technique if he doesn't get to see you. If your efforts are safe and sincere, there is no shame in making mistakes. The only real mistake you can make is not to attend.



Some tips on seminars:

- Be the volunteer. Get on the mat.
- When not on the mat, pay close attention – sometimes it's the notes *other* people get that are most helpful.
- During training, keep up as best you can, keep an open eye and an open heart. Do not become discouraged by advanced techniques (smile).
- Be aware that Obata-kaiso makes improvements regularly... You may have learned something one way, and be taught a new (or different) way at a seminar.
- Always keep safety in mind.

Seminars can sometimes be crowded. You must be aware of both yourself and others. The only bad mistake is carelessness.

•During breaks, ask questions. Sometimes the questions between training are as valuable as the mat instruction.

•Remember, many of our techniques are flexible. If you see something taught from migi only, there is probably a hidari side as well. When in doubt, ask (during a break).

This April, I will be attending my 22nd Seminar with Obata-kaiso in Morgan Hill, CA. I can't wait!

Kaiso Returns to Birmingham

By Paul Couch
ISF-AL/GA, Birmingham Dojo, Alabama



What a great event to have Kaiso return to Birmingham after a year-and-a-half absence. The clinic was held at Samford University, a familiar place for several years now. The ISF-AL/GA Dojo is now located on campus. The clinic began on November 21, Saturday, and continued on Sunday. Training on both days was a very thorough coverage of basics that was much needed by younger students as well as advanced students. Kaiso demonstrated tameshigiri on Saturday. This was a first for many to see the skill and techniques required and of course the case made for safety. For those who had never met Kaiso before, it was a "make my day" time. During breaks, many books,

passports, and photos were signed, and, as usual, questions were asked by eager students, who got answers. Thanks to Sensei Mary Giles, Kikentai Dojo, Norcross, Georgia, and Sensei Nayef Smith, Gwinnett Dojo, Georgia, who brought several lucky students with them. For myself and Yumi, it was an opportunity to talk to Kaiso about Shinkendo, his recent travels, and just about everything else. Kaiso was introduced to our year-old twin boys, who were impressed with their future teacher. It was truly a quality time. We even had time to make Kaiso another leather belt. He wears out more leather belts faster than anyone I have ever seen.



Keiko Hajime 2010

By Lydie Jones
Seikishin Dojo, Morgan Hill, CA

Toshishiro Obata-kaiso is a direct samurai descendant. It is a name that one immediately associates with Japanese samurai tradition. His name is recognized and respected worldwide. One must read his book Shinkendo to appreciate the experience and knowledge that this man embodies.

So when Sensei Margarita invited me to join her and other students at a seminar given at his Honbu dojo in Los Angeles, I had to refuse, for as a beginner of the Shinkendo art – I started in November 2009 – I did not believe that I had earned this privilege. I believe that students are a reflection of their teachers; therefore I was not about to embarrass my beloved Sensei Margarita. I remember her grabbing a ruler, and explaining to me as she was holding the ruler upright: “You see, we are like the marks on this ruler; we are all at different levels, but we are all on this ruler. We all started at the first mark.” How can you possibly argue with that? With my fears behind me, I rode with my friends down to LA, ready to meet my sensei’s sensei, the legend, the founder, Toshishiro Obata-kaiso.

We arrived at the dojo located in a mall early Saturday morning. After a brief introduction, we were bowing in and starting class promptly. Just enough time for me to remember my friends’ advice: “During the warmups, go in the middle of the floor so that you can follow when we change direction!” Somehow, I managed to go with the flow – not as fluid as the higher ranks, but fluid nonetheless. Then Obata-kaiso separated us into pairs, and we got to learn from some amazing teachers! Nicholas-sensei and Mike-sensei who worked with me on different techniques had the patience of angels. This is where I had to remember to “empty my cup.” That day, I absorbed a lot more than just techniques. I had to memorize the Japanese terms rapidly, which I found the most challenging. I admire Sensei Margarita for learning the language of her passion, of her teacher. I am inspired to follow her example. After a whole day of training, Mrs. Obata surprised us all with a nice display of food. It was then that we gathered and learned about each other. One by one, students from Poland, England, Hungary, and all over the U.S. stood up and shared their experiences, their personal journey. Mrs. Obata took the time to explain the origin of Shinkendo, which is “considered a unique, comprehensive re-unification of

techniques and principles borrowed from other well-respected arts.”

I did not expect to be so tired when we returned the next day for more training. At this point, my cup was full, and I am so grateful to Mrs. Obata for taking me aside and working on all the basics. Long live basics! After a while, the lower ranks got to watch the higher ranks practice with each other. It was quite a spectacle! On the edge of the mat, Obata-kaiso stood, his eyes apparently looking down at the floor, but extremely alert. He was watching everything in his peripheral vision. Obata-kaiso sees everything! As a woman, I can’t help being inspired by watching other women flowing on the floor. Obata-kaiso’s young daughter, Yoko-sensei, came in nonchalantly on the floor and fought fiercely, moving like water. She is absolutely amazing. Here and there, Obata-kaiso would interrupt the class to correct and improve a technique. Those were my favorite moments. I can’t wait to learn Japanese so that I can understand him better. I am thankful to Yoko-sensei for translating her father’s lessons. He uses a lot of images. Two of them strike me for their beauty that helps us understand the gracefulness of the move. The first one is when he compares the necessity of moving out the way fast and calmly just like a duck on the water. On the surface it looks like they are calm, but under the water their feet are paddling quickly. The second is my favorite, for it reminds of a poem a dear friend shared with me before I left: “The flowers whirl away in the wind like snow. The thing that falls away is myself.” While practicing Juppon Ura, Obata-kaiso compared his move to the cherry blossoms whirling in the wind.

What an honor and privilege to have had the opportunity to meet and train with the man who introduced the genuine art of the saber to the Occident, the founder of Shinkendo.

We returned to Morgan Hill, enriched by our growing friendship and filled with new knowledge, aware and excited by how much more there is to learn not only about the sword but also about ourselves. “Life is Shinkendo,” as Kaiso keeps saying. I remember reading his quote in the French magazine Art et Combat: Le magazine des Arts Martiaux:

“We do not look for medals, but to improve the individual. Here is the real goal of this practice.”

Honbu's New Home

By Nicholas Lauridsen
Honbu Dojo

Photos by Matthew Lynch &
Nicholas Lauridsen



On February 20th, the Honbu Dojo moved from the Little Tokyo Galleria to a new space on 2nd St., in the heart of Little Tokyo. The dojo is on the second floor, overlooking 2nd St., the main east-west thoroughfare through the district, and is a stone's throw from the entrance to the Japanese Village Plaza pedestrian walk.

Although the new space is not as large as the previous one, it has numerous advantages, not the least of which is its complete privacy, a welcome change from the previous "exhibition space," which, though not without its merits, was vulnerable to unexpected visitors and curious onlookers. The new dojo is comfortably insulated from the outside world, and has a more traditional, intimate dojo feeling conducive to our style of martial arts training. Overall, it feels a bit more inhabitable than the previous mall space, and with every new day spent training there, it's more like home. It is in a coveted spot in the neighborhood, and we are also situated between the three main event spaces in Little Tokyo – Noguchi Plaza, Japanese Village Plaza, and Weller Court – making it very easy to conduct demonstrations (like the recent Sakura Matsuri on April 11th).

The move entailed conveying 80 or so martial arts mats, disassembling and transporting furniture, strategizing about mat placement and allocating spaces for the office, dressing rooms, storage, etc., as well as thoroughly cleaning both the old and new spaces. Dr. Melvin Astrahan kindly provided an enormous truck (it just barely maneuvered through the Galleria parking lot) to transport everything, and, even completely filled with cargo, it required at least seven trips to transfer everything between the old and new spaces. The entire Obata family, distributed between the two locations, coordinated every aspect of the move, and we were able to complete the bulk of the project on Saturday alone.

I would like to thank the many students who

took the time to research and visit prospective properties over the preceding months, and everyone who devoted their weekend to helping with the move. It was a pleasure to see several generations of Jim Duncan's family working together and donating their time to fix up the new dojo. Jim's father, an expert electrician, and his son contributed immensely by thoroughly investigating and repairing the electrical system (which had a number of loose wires), making the new space safe for us to use, in addition to installing overhead lamps. Richard Blanke-sensei also treated us to delicious food catered from his restaurant, Le Pain Quotidien.

Classes resumed straightaway the following Tuesday.

More information about the new Honbu Dojo location can be found at www.shinkendo.com/honbu.html.



Shokai 2010 – Behind the Scenes

By Michael Shu
Honbu Dojo

Photos by Charlice Lin &
Melvin Astrahan

For well over a year now, Obata-kaiso, Mrs. Obata and I have been talking about creating an update to the 2004 Shinkendo video that has been featured on the front page of the Honbu Dojo's website (www.shinkendo.com). This time around, we wanted to shoot specifically for the video instead of using archival footage like previously. Due to all of us getting busy, the idea floated around in our minds but was always placed on the back burner... until now.

News hit that we would be moving out of our 333 South Alameda location, and we had no idea which new location we would settle on. I didn't know whether the new location would be suitable to film in, so a sense of urgency to get the ball rolling came onto me. We decided on February as the month we would choose a day to film in. I made sure I used everything in my arsenal to make sure everybody's efforts in front of the camera would be well used.

Over the years, I have amassed a load of filmmaking equipment geared for... wait for it... wedding cinematography. I've been learning how to take very little time and resources and create film quality work. I brought each tool to the dojo during classtime to try it out and show the results to Obata-kaiso. The tools included the Steadicam (to "fly" the camera when running around), slider (miniature dolly), and the new DSLR cameras that shoot HD video.

After I had a good idea of what worked and what didn't, we set the date – February 7th, 2010 – coincidentally, Superbowl Sunday. Even if any of the Honbu members were hardcore football fans, they wouldn't dare make that their excuse, now would they???



I arrived on "set" at the Honbu Dojo around the same time Kaiso and family did (9AM), and started to set up lights. Michishiro has a great interest in photography, and helped out with the lighting setup. Louis Rosas has done a lot of work in Hollywood as a set dresser, and came up with ways to dress up the set with absolutely zero props or set plans. Melvin Astrahan loves photography as well, and coincidentally has the same model video DSLR as I do. So we doubled up on lenses and cameras.

On set were: Obata-kaiso, Michishiro Obata, Yoko Obata, Mrs. Obata, Nicholas Lauridsen, Matthew Lynch, Gabriel Koneta, Louis Boyarsky, Jason Ives, Quanah Sugiyama, Ikuru Kanuma, Yoshi Ando, Masa Fukushima (aka Lance Masa), Guy Mayeda, MD, and Gabriel Ayala, who were all volunteering their Sunday morning for the shoot. As such, I worked doubly hard to make it as smooth and quick as possible so I wouldn't hold them on their day off for too long.

To cover all possible camera angles for each technique, I had two cameras running for each take, while the students in front of camera performed each technique a minimum of five times. Many apologies to those who got super tired from 10 takes! Many thanks go to Melvin Astrahan and my friend Charlice Lin for handling alternate angles in each take.

Obata-kaiso performed his impressive tameshigiri techniques with single and dual katana. As a director used to commanding actors and crew around, I was really out of my element when it came to directing Obata-kaiso, who I'm used to commanding me around. Eventually I realized my timidness of yelling "Action!" sometimes confused Kaiso, who has worked on many movie sets before. So I just tossed my reservations away and did the whole yell-"action!" thing and everything went





weren't filmed that day. After I edited a first solid rough cut, I showed it to Obata-kaiso and the sempai of the Honbu Dojo to generate some ideas. We decided we should balance the video out with a bit more Aikido techniques.

I brought a couple of my cameras during an Aikido class one night and Obata-kaiso started by throwing in a set of unexpected techniques (no pun intended). Michi got his chance for screen time by being the uke in some over-the-shoulder and backflip throwing techniques. From where I stood, it looked like Michi got a load of punishment. He took it in stride, though. Gabriel Koneta and Nicholas Lauridsen demonstrated some moves, and Yukishiro Obata returned to the spotlight with some tantojutsu. The last time I remember him demonstrating on screen was the original Shinkendo video way back in the '90s. What a treat to see!

Those shots were then edited into version 1.0 of the shokai video, which was quietly rolled out into public – first virally with Facebook, then on YouTube. Quickly, it became very hot, garnering more than 1,000 views in under two weeks on the vimeo.com website alone, not counting Facebook and YouTube views. Even with it being such a popular video, I still didn't consider it complete until we added something that was in the original video – nihondake tameshigiri (bamboo-cutting).

smoothly from there.

I looked over the footage that night and was very happy with what we filmed on our main day of shooting. I brewed up some ideas to add variety and bring in some techniques which

After a couple of weeks, after the Honbu Dojo got settled into its new location, Obata-kaiso and I decided on Tuesday, March 9th to chop up some bamboo in front of his home. To make it look like Kaiso was in a forest or grove, we adjusted our angles in front of his lemon and kumquat trees. Everything had to be a tight shot or from a certain angle, which worked just right for

The Cast and Crew





video with new techniques as they are filmed – demonstrating the many things there are to learn within Shinkendo and Aikido.

It was an honor and privilege to be able to film an important piece such as this to represent the arts online. I express my greatest thanks to Obata-kaiso and his family, as well as the Shinkendo family of the Honbu Dojo for their help in pulling everything together to make it happen. The video is now featured on the Shinkendo Honbu website. Please share it with everyone you know to help spread the word of the arts we love!

the yokogiri and kesagiri shots. That day's bamboo was of the really old and dry variety (what Kaiso called "professor age" bamboo), which didn't always cooperate. Helping out that day were Nicholas and Melvin. Nicholas helped Mrs. Obata hold the bamboo while Melvin took still shots of the bamboo-cutting.

Obata-kaiso then showed us something we'd never seen done before – splitting a 3-4 foot piece of bamboo straight down the middle. The bamboo was balanced on the ground and Kaiso did a dotangiri straight down the middle for a couple of takes. To make things more challenging, the breeze was blowing the stalk of bamboo around pretty hard, but Kaiso got a couple of really good takes in there.

As of this writing, the shokai reel is at version 1.1 with the bamboo shots, and I plan to continually update the

