

Armor and the SCA

The Rules

<http://www.sca.org/officers/marshal/combat/armored/>

The Uses

Armor can be functional or decorative, or both at the same time. No matter what, it is resource intensive, whether it is time, money, blood, or all of the above. Before you begin, it is important to know what you are trying to get out of your investment.

Armorsmithing

Armor Making at its best is high art. Note the many museum exhibits featuring such. If you are interested in learning the skills that were mastered in the Medieval/Renaissance period, you have a life of work ahead of you. Resources, to start with are:

<http://www.arador.com/>

<http://www.armorarchive.org/>

Please note, if your goal is to learn to be an armorsmith, there is a huge amount of information available on the web, and all sorts of instructional tutorials, DVDs, weekend retreats, forums, books, etc. However, that is not what I am trying to cover in this document.

Your persona

If for you the armor is an extension of your persona, another way to be accurate for a particular period, then you have a lot of work to do and compromises to figure out. For example, when in history did combatants put grilles with 1 inch openings over their faces? Unless you go with a close helm (think jousting) or a Barbute (maybe), you have to start explaining things. Also, one word, foam. Do you really want to mat wool into padding, and then use that to protect yourself from concussion? Again, I am not trying to cover techniques for "authenticatifying" your armor.

I just want to fight

If on the other hand, your goal is to comply with the rules, and be fighting in safe, effective armor, at the lowest cost in time/effort possible, then things are different.

Basic Armor Options

The huge time period that we cover, and the really great number of cultures, and the variations due to social class, role in combat, etc, mean that an exhaustive document cataloging your options would be gigantic. However in practice, I see 4 options.

Pay several hundred to several thousand dollars to buy the whole thing.

<http://spiers-saddlery.stores.yahoo.net/stst1f.html>

OR

<http://store.fastcommerce.com/icefalcon/full-suit-specials-ff80808117344aab011752db61a5016b-c.html>

Become an armorsmith.

Be prepared to spend a lot on materials, and tools, easily more than if you had simply bought a low end suit, in addition to blood, sweat, and tears.

Get Sport Armor, and be done with it.

Plastic armor, metal helm, knees, elbow, and gorget (neck-piece), make a big ole surcoat, sew a pretty design on it, and join the ranks of people who feel they are enjoying the highest fun to effort ratio.

Build a suit bit by bit

This will take years, your armor will look terrible, and probably never fit right, as none of it was custom made for you, or to work with the other peices. (don't worry, you'll fit right in)

Purchasing

Vendors

You can find many many different vendors online. Some examples I would recommend checking out are:

<http://www.icefalcon.com/>

<http://spiers-saddlery.stores.yahoo.net/> (Stone keep armoury)

<http://www.performancearmour.com/>

<http://www.windrosearmoury.com/zc/>

<http://www.eggarmor.net/>

<http://darkvictory.com/>

<http://www.ashcraftbaker.com/>

Are there more? You betcha. See my next point.

Who to buy from

Primarily, buyer beware. This is not a regulated industry, and myself, I have only purchased one item from one of these vendors. (Spaulders from Stonekeep. They were nice.) That being said, the best people to talk to are going to be people currently fighting heavy in the SCA.

Advice

So, my advice is, identify what you want to be doing as a heavy fighter, and find people doing it, and doing it well. Ask them their thoughts, and ask as many people as you can find. One point that I would hope would be obvious; If the armor of the person you are talking to consists mostly of duct tape and bruises, smile, nod politely, and ignore everything they say.

Making your own

A greatly rewarding option. Check out your local groups site for a local guild.

Materials

Your choices (to simplify things terribly) are leather, plastic, mild steel, or stainless steel. Note on cost. Exact prices aside, as things do fluctuate, generally Leather is the most expensive, and plastic is the least, and the difference can be large, so find vendors for your materials, and price it out ahead of time.

Sources

For Brigid's sake, just Google it. I can tell you where to buy these things in Madison, if you like...

Techniques

Sport armor, hardened leather (cuir bouilli), Splinted leather and steel, steel plate, chainmail, (riveted vs. welded vs. butted is a big deal), lamellar/scale and obviously any mix of these.

Tools

http://www.armorarchive.org/essays/essay__artskippy.shtml

Advice (Yes, again.)

My advice, mainly, is to have a plan before you start. You can spend years blindly putting forth a ton of effort getting nowhere, or you can have armor you like relatively quickly, and start learning to fight.

And, be open to using things that are partially prebuilt.

<http://www.roughfromthehammer.com/parts.html>

<http://www.ashcraftbaker.com/DIY%20sheet%20metal%20.htm>

<http://www.ashcraftbaker.com/helmparts.htm>

<http://www.plasticlamellar.com/>

<http://www.polarbearforge.com/lamellar.htm>

<http://www.tandyleatherfactory.com/store/products/44228-25.aspx>

Armor Maintenance, Transport, and Storage

Maintenance will vary greatly. The only thing that won't vary is that you will need to upkeep your armor. Steel rusts or breaks, leather tears, cracks, or rots, rivets fail, and plastic can fail, but is by far the least problematic. (Except for that bit about it not being period...)

Repair Kit

Learn to set a rivet, and get the hammer, rivet setter, nippers, lump of metal (anvil proxy), and rivets. Get double sided tape for your foam, duct tape for general purposes, and zip ties are actually useful way too often. Also, if your armor breaks, stop fighting until you fix it.

Color

Please, do me a favor, and color your armor. Dye the leather, Dye the linen, use accent metals, look into blueing or russetting your armor. Paint your shield. People in the time period we are recreating introduced color wherever they could. You should do the same.

Clothing

Make clothing specifically for the purpose of fighting.

Shields

You don't need an aluminum shield! Also, try to imagine edging your shield with leather instead of plastic/rubber!

Heavy Armor

Melee Weapons

You need to meet the minimums set forth by the SCA, and your local group, so check both places.

Projectile

Is only technically different in that you are allowed to use half gauntlets without something else protecting your fingers. However, in practice, everything is different for everyone. There aren't that many people fighting as combat archers (YET!), and I personally feel that the paradigms have not yet all been established. Again, please consider my point that you should talk to the people doing it well, and ask what works for them.

Combat Archery

Bows

The rules explain clearly what these have to be. Some suggest, with good reason, that you use an inexpensive fiberglass bow. But that is not period now, is it?

Arrows

Again, the rules lay it out. My only suggestion is that you color your arrows, and in a bold way.

Quivers

The promised discussion will happen at the event. Let me just say: clips, honey comb, common eye, hanging from the APD.

Gauntlets

A true point of debate. Hockey glove on your bow hand? Or, do you want a knuckle shield like polearm fighters use? For your draw hand, is a demi good enough? What about finger gauntlets? What about a "convertible" gauntlet, of a hybrid that is clamshell up to your last knuckle, with individual finger tips. Do you want plastic fingertips, or leather glued to metal? Or are you not worried about fraying your bowstring? (You should be.) Do you want to be able to drop the bow and pull a sword?