

Turrentine Guitars

A First Edition Portfolio

with Galleries of the Models & Special Projects





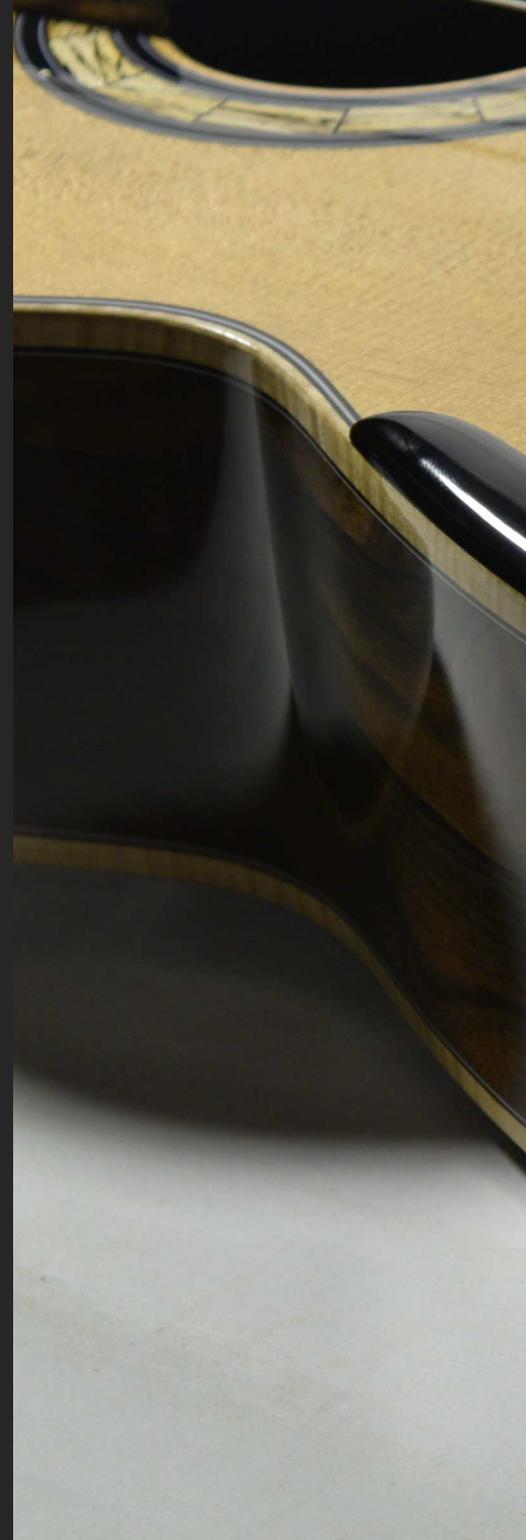


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Preface

This portfolio presents a story in pictures of my work to date. From the very start of this guitar building endeavor I have captured photos of each completed instrument and presented them on a Website gallery. Nowadays, I assume that books have a special place in our society - if not for the hard copy to touch and share, then this is for those seeking a reprieve from their computer screens.

So kick back on the couch and enjoy the finite world of page turning through a portfolio of some special projects inspired by beautiful wood and the continual pursuit of creating the ideal classical guitar.



Background Sketches

I'm the son of a timber framer and visual artist, born in the first log cabin my father ever built and was raised as the 4th generation on that family farm. My grandmother, a Julliard trained pianist, exposed me to classical music at a young age, and I later came to study classical guitar performance at Shenandoah Conservatory. During and after conservatory studies, I built guitars for Gallagher Guitar Company in Wartrace, TN. I later worked in the Peace Corps and ran a non-profit organization. These experiences coalesced into the creation of my own workshop where I work full-time handcrafting classical guitars on a mountain top in the Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee. Owners of these guitars include performers and collectors around the world.



Raison d'Etre

While it is often taken for granted, being useful to others is perhaps the single most challenging endeavor. The economic viability of spending all one's time building guitars requires a peculiar attention to this fact. Perhaps even an obsession.

I have an obsession and a perpetual fascination in what makes a great guitar. Reducing this work to its most fundamental level, I focus on what makes a guitar irresistible. It's easy to bury this goal in subjectivity, but that is often the excuse used to avoid the more difficult question of whether or not one's work is essential. If nothing else, I hope my work imparts a sense of craftsmanship, utility and endless imagination.

Process Notes

Aesthetics aside, building the great guitar is the ultimate fusion of intuition and objective reasoning. In many respects the guitar is an infinitely complex system, but it has many properties that are quantifiable. My general rule with a system so complex - quantify and record what is known without losing sight of the big picture. In this case, "the big picture" refers to visualizing the end product down to the smallest sensory detail. For instance, luthiers can record everything knowable about the material properties of their work, but if they lack a strong, sensory perception of the end product, then they are working without the most vital metric.

Every guitar I build begins with handling the materials involved and forming that initial visualization of the guitar I am about to create. As I visualize this completed instrument throughout the various stages of the building process, I am continually placing this vision within the context of measurable criteria. These criteria always represent my current understanding of how the ideal guitar can be quantified.

Elegy

Elegy is a modern, dependable tool for the concert hall. It's solid, lattice-braced top has a traditional timbre with a fundamental resonance that remains salient and rich in the toughest performance settings. The design combines my own unique views of construction with those past and present - many of whom I consider friends.







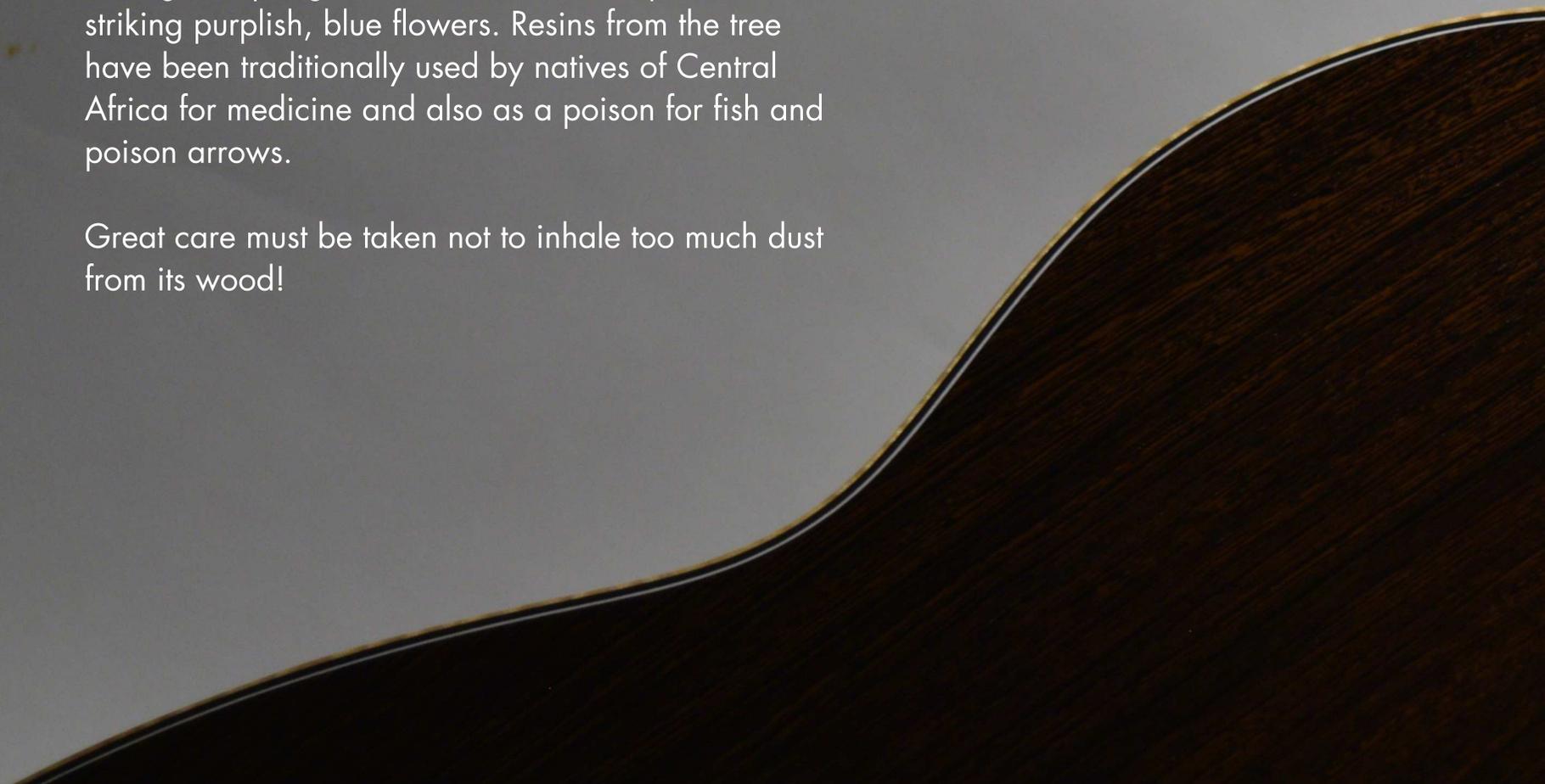


Wenge (*Millettia laurentii*)

Wenge has become my first choice for the back and sides of Elogy. A Central African wood, Wenge is consistently dense and very responsive albeit extremely hard to work and finish.

Wenge trees can reach up to 50 meters in height. During the spring and summer months it produces striking purplish, blue flowers. Resins from the tree have been traditionally used by natives of Central Africa for medicine and also as a poison for fish and poison arrows.

Great care must be taken not to inhale too much dust from its wood!



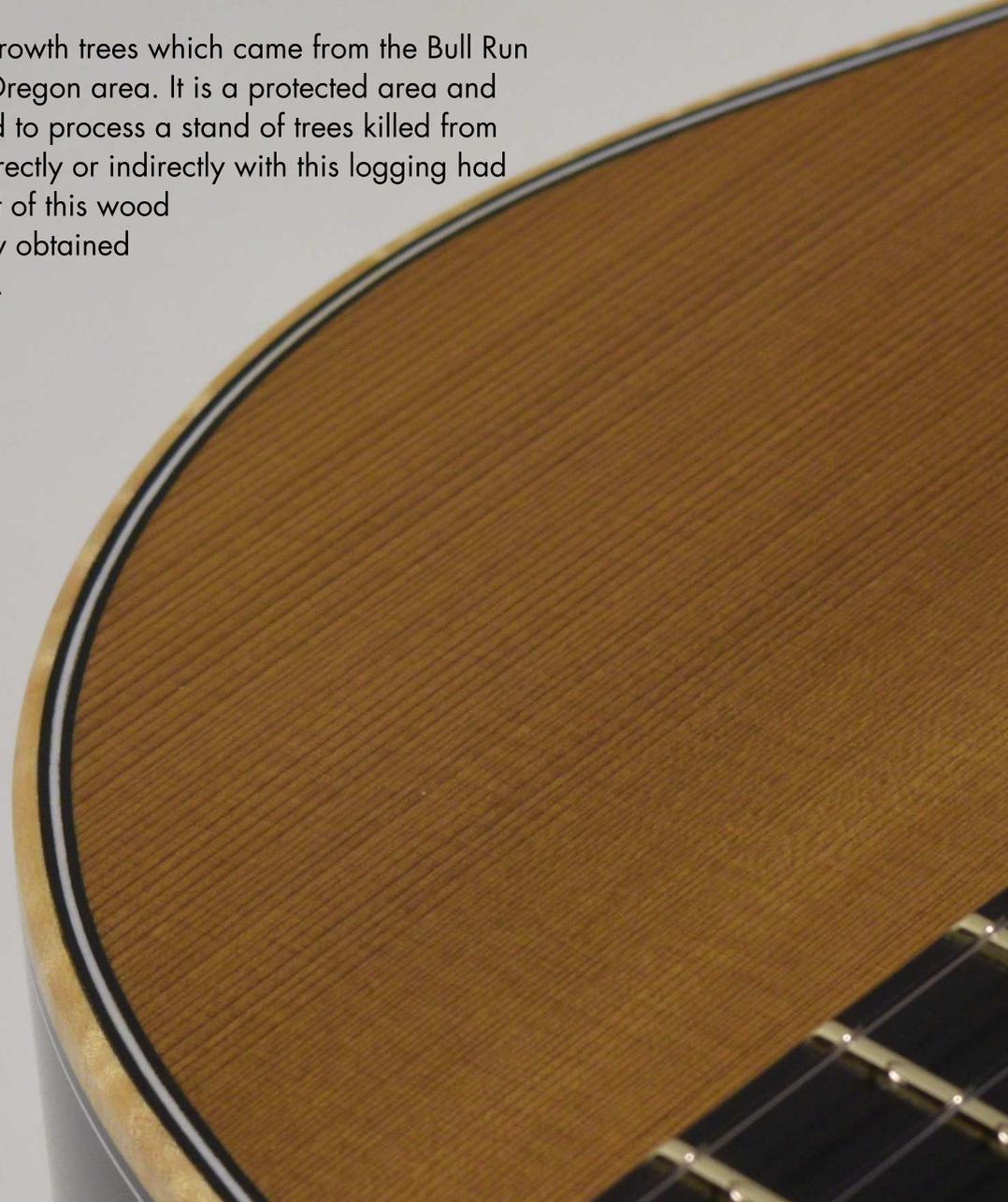


Elegy's Soundboard

My western red cedar tops are from a few, old growth trees which came from the Bull Run Watershed, that supplies water to the Portland, Oregon area. It is a protected area and while logging is prohibited, permits were granted to process a stand of trees killed from flooding. Fortunately, someone involved either directly or indirectly with this logging had associations with instrument builders and the best of this wood was reserved for use by luthiers and subsequently obtained by the late, world renown luthier Robert Ruck.

That was over 20 years ago. When I started building guitars full time I bought enough flitches of this wood for over 300 guitars. The Bull Run Watershed cedar is to be the soul of my guitars.

Western Red Cedar is the second largest type of tree on our planet, second only to the giant redwoods in California. It can grow over 200 ft. tall and is also one of the oldest things on earth, living up to more than 1400 years. While it is sad to see that most of these ancient trees are gone, it gives me a peace of mind to know that my guitars will give new life to this precious part of our ecosystem.





The Frets

The Gold Evo used for my frets was developed by Jescar, a company which has years of experience manufacturing products for the optical industry. This harder material lasts much longer than its traditional nickel-silver counterpart and its gold color adds a beautiful touch to the finish of each guitar.



The Machines

Gilbert tuning machines are among the finest and most creative designs available. I offer each customer a choice between these more modern looking tuners and the more traditional and widely accepted Sloane tuning machines. These Gilbert tuners are for me, the best functioning design available.





Armrest

For years I created an armrest that was fit directly onto the top edge of the guitar. I recently changed my method to embedding the armrest into the binding so that it follows the guitar's natural edge without adding any extra depth to the guitar's body. This new method feels more natural and consequently more comfortable.



Binding

I have used flamed maple binding from the very beginning. This was inherited somewhat from my days at Gallagher Guitar Company where we used this wood for the binding of the Doc Watson Signature model. It's an aggressive contrast with the darker hardwoods we use for the back and sides, and has the effect of framing the guitar within.



Lattice Bracing

It is very strong and that is its greatest weakness. Lattice style bracing of guitar tops is accompanied by many stigmatic myths created by the traditional schools of guitar building. I was first drawn by its allowance to reduce top density and in turn create a better projecting guitar. As my design has matured, I have found little reason that the lattice, or any other structural novelties of reinforcing a guitar soundboard, have inherently negative impacts on a guitar's sound.

My design of Elegy acknowledges the traditional successes without losing sight of the bigger picture - an ideal sound and playability that is much more essential than marriage to tradition.





Four Concepts

My greatest challenge is suppressing the creative impulse. Few boundaries were exerted upon me in my early years, thus my burden has become an overwhelming need to explore. Indeed, adventure is an essential element of the human spirit. I find great pleasure working to secure and expand our relationship to the classical guitar. Guitars can be works of art. They can be the inspiration for the compositions we play. There might also be new instruments that can be adapted to classical guitar technique. The following guitars reflect the inability to suppress that creative and adventurous spirit.

Praetoria

The Spanish guitar building techniques and aesthetics are just as relevant today as they have been in the past. Praetoria is a defender of the existing order, a tribute to the time honored Spanish design. It's an opportunity to explore the aesthetics and sound that have generated interest in the classical guitar for generations.

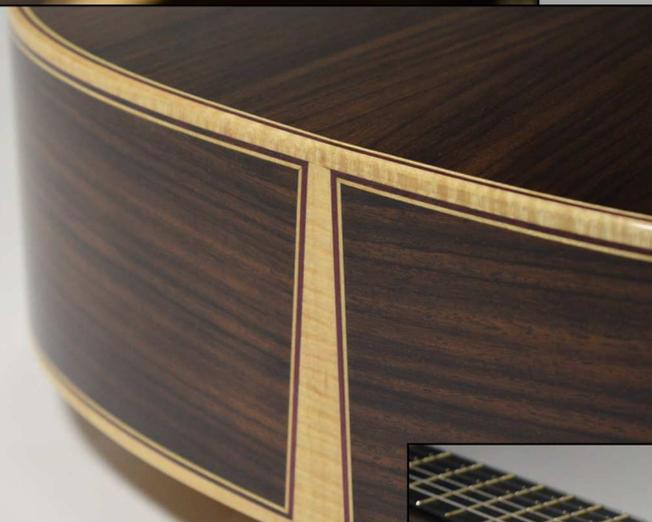




I have always possessed a genuine love for the Spanish guitar and Praetoria is an homage to the design that kindled my love for the classical guitar.

Every time I build a traditional guitar, I learn and appreciate more about what makes fan bracing work so well for playing our music.

Admittedly, Praetoria is also an opportunity to extend the guitar's binding around the heel. Such an elegant feature and expression of craftsmanship.



Campanella

Campanella was commissioned by British guitarist, Stanley Yates, with the goal of authentically reproducing the Baroque guitar Campanella and strum styles on a modern concert guitar. This 9 string helps me accomplish my goal of inventing new instruments that classical guitarists can use to express themselves and their repertoire.







Some luthiers prefer to be left to their own creativity and know-how - wanting customers that have no interest in collaborating on their order. I find this relationship with customers very agreeable. I do my best work when I come to know the guitarist for whom I am building an instrument - his or her past frustrations with various instruments - their own concept of the ideal guitar.

I love this challenge and find that it not only generates wonderful sounding and unique guitars, but it also leaves behind a durable friendship.

Those friendships are always the bedrock of any successful career in the arts.



Sonata

Short scales are becoming popular for those with less reach. The 630 scale, used by the romantic period makers Lacote and Panormo, is still an option for the serious classical player, resurrecting the sweetness and warmth of the salon. The guitar pictured here takes Eley and moves the neck up about 10mm with the underside of the upper bout. This creates a obvious challenge in executing the heel joint.







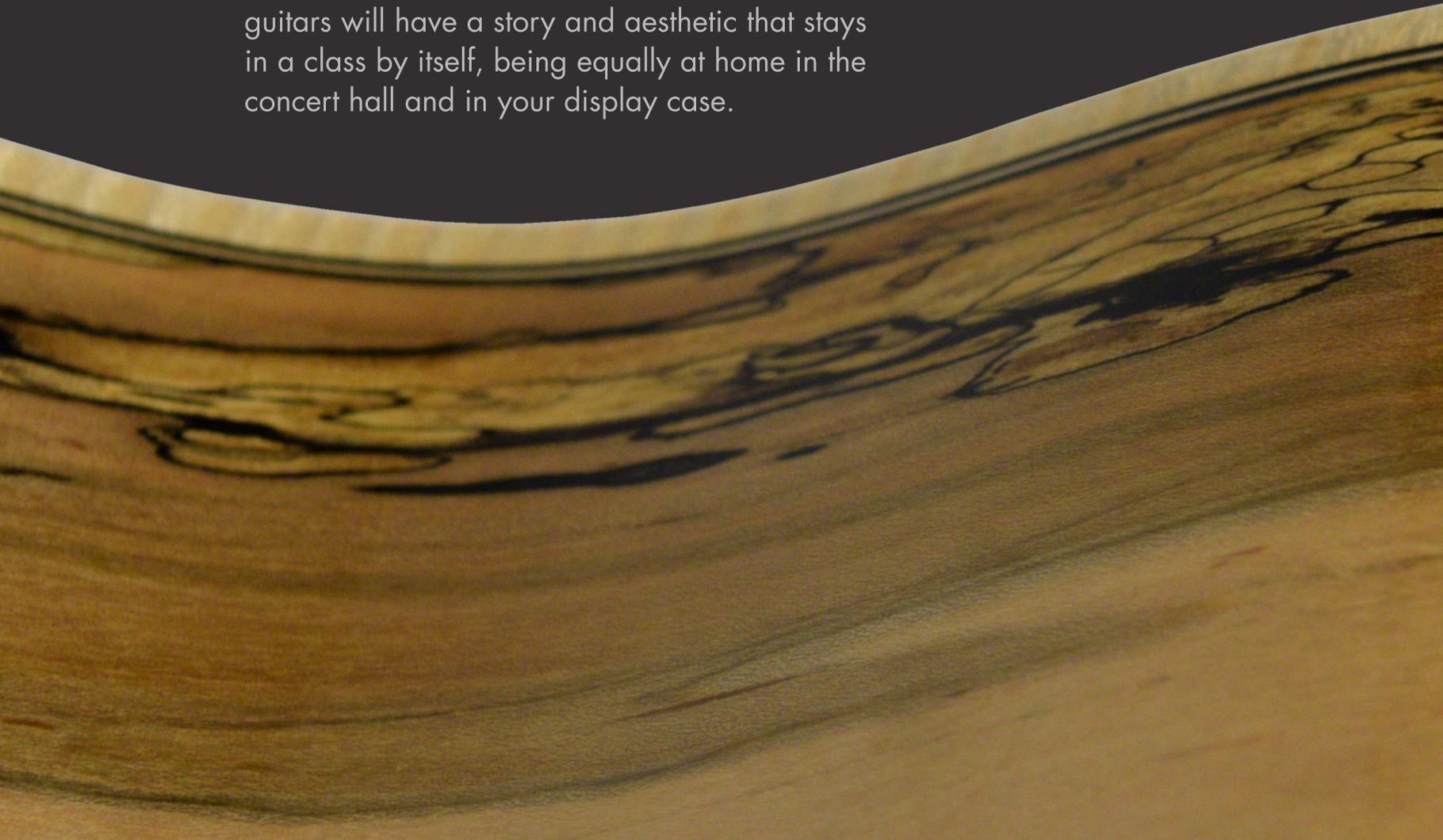
Shortening the scale of the classical guitar carries many challenges. Not only does the shorter string length decrease the string tension, but it also lessens the amount of higher harmonics available on the strings. My approach with this guitar was to reduce the density of the top to compensate for the decrease in tension while maintaining my traditional stiffness by reducing the size of the body - obviously height, but width too.

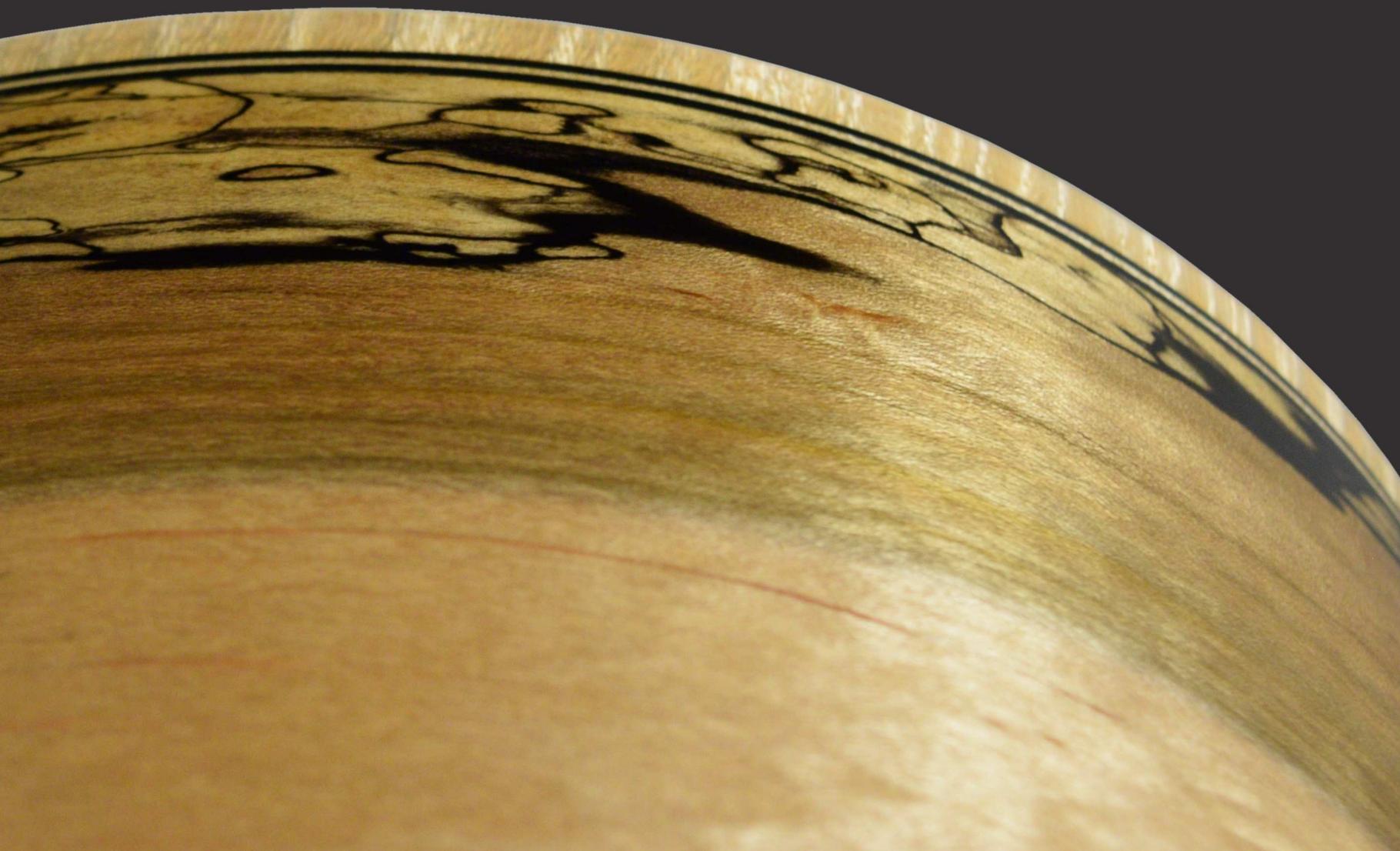
Even the highest tension strings feel somewhat normal on a 630 scale. There is an inherent sweetness and sprightly but warm personality that these guitar have which place them in a class alone.



Extasia

The ultimate expression of artistic rapture. No expense of money or time is spared in their creation. Having an optimized design and materials of the rarest beauty, each of these guitars will have a story and aesthetic that stays in a class by itself, being equally at home in the concert hall and in your display case.







Chaos & Order

It was the primordial void that first gave birth to the chaos that is so abundant throughout mother nature. We humans bring some order to this world through our institutions and endeavors, but despite the "thin veneer" of civilization we create for ourselves, we shall always be submerged within the void of chaos.

This guitar taps into that void and tries to organize its infinite complexity of wood from which every guitar emerges.

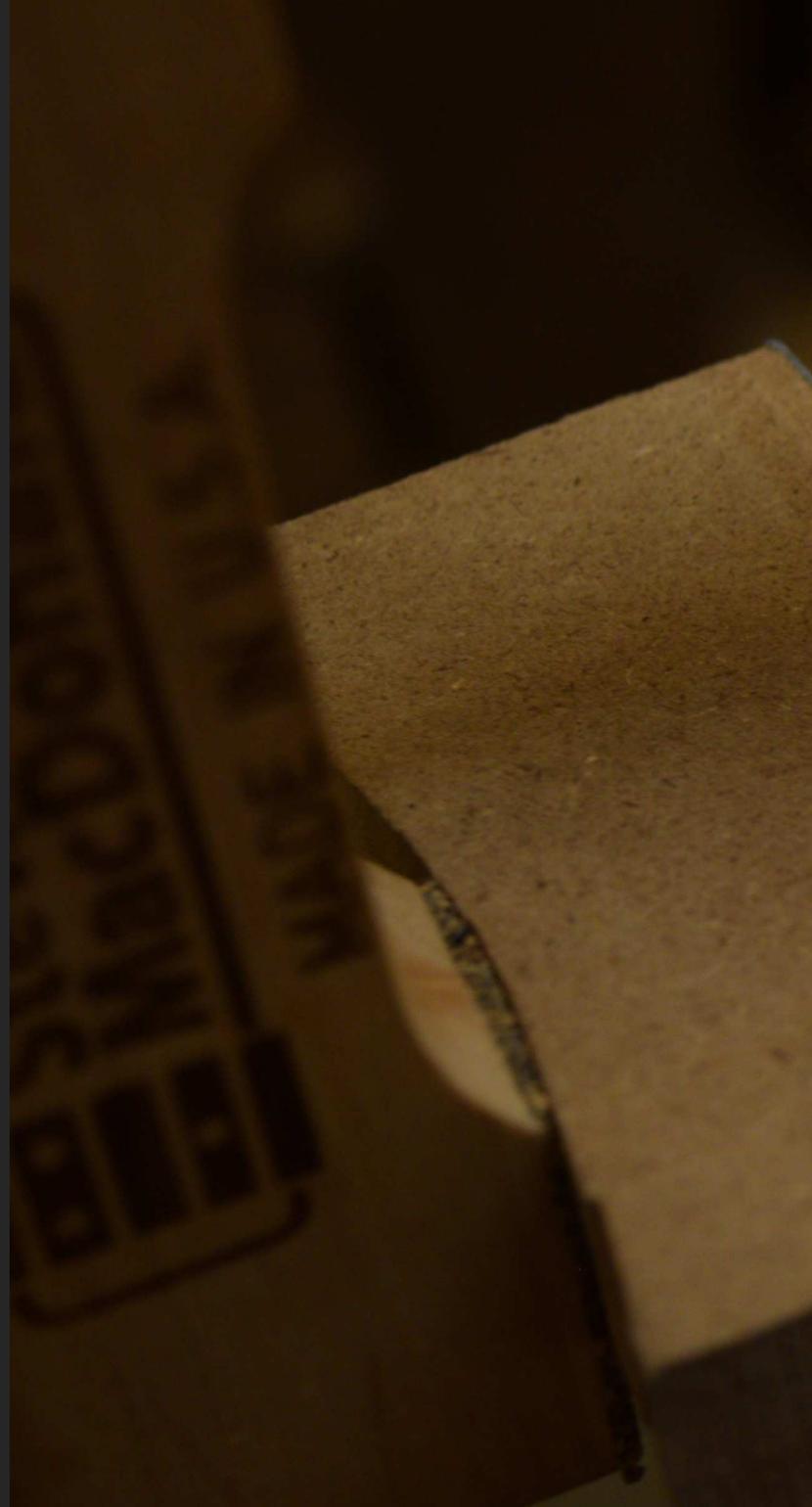




This guitar was a project spanning about 3 years. It started when a young man that worked at a local hardwood supplier gave me an enthusiastic invitation to see a board of maple. This particular guy sees enough wood in his job to be completely sick of it, so the fact that there was one piece of wood out of the thousands in that warehouse that made him blush peaked my curiosity.

Creating Value

We create it in collaboration with nature. This maple guitar project would not have been possible if the wood didn't exist. The wood inspired a three year pursuit in maximizing the beauty of a classical guitar without creating something garish and showy. Achieving this was due mostly to the inspiration that is drawn from the spalted red maple. The rest of the work was a combination of letting the wood speak for itself and ensuring the guitar's sound justified the investment of time required to complete the project.







Normally I don't paste pictures of my bracing design all over the world. I believe that doing so devalues all the hard work of trial and error that is represented in it. Mostly because the shape and structure of bracing is, while important, merely an obscure representation of what makes a particular guitar's sound.

This bracing of this guitar is important because the length of time in which I took to create the guitar was largely dependent on the successful development of a soundboard structure that was both unique to my guitars and accomplishing the goals I had set out to achieve.

The period of time this guitar was in development was probably the most turbulent and vital - kind of like a transition in a Beethoven Symphony.









Graf Tuners

One of the most striking details of this guitar was created by Jorg Graf. Many thanks to him for being patient in turning my crazy ideas into a reality.

The resulting tuners are an iteration of his embossed leaf design using in this instance a green leaf and a copper plate with a black pattern engraving that creates a sort of dark evanescence when viewed from different angles.

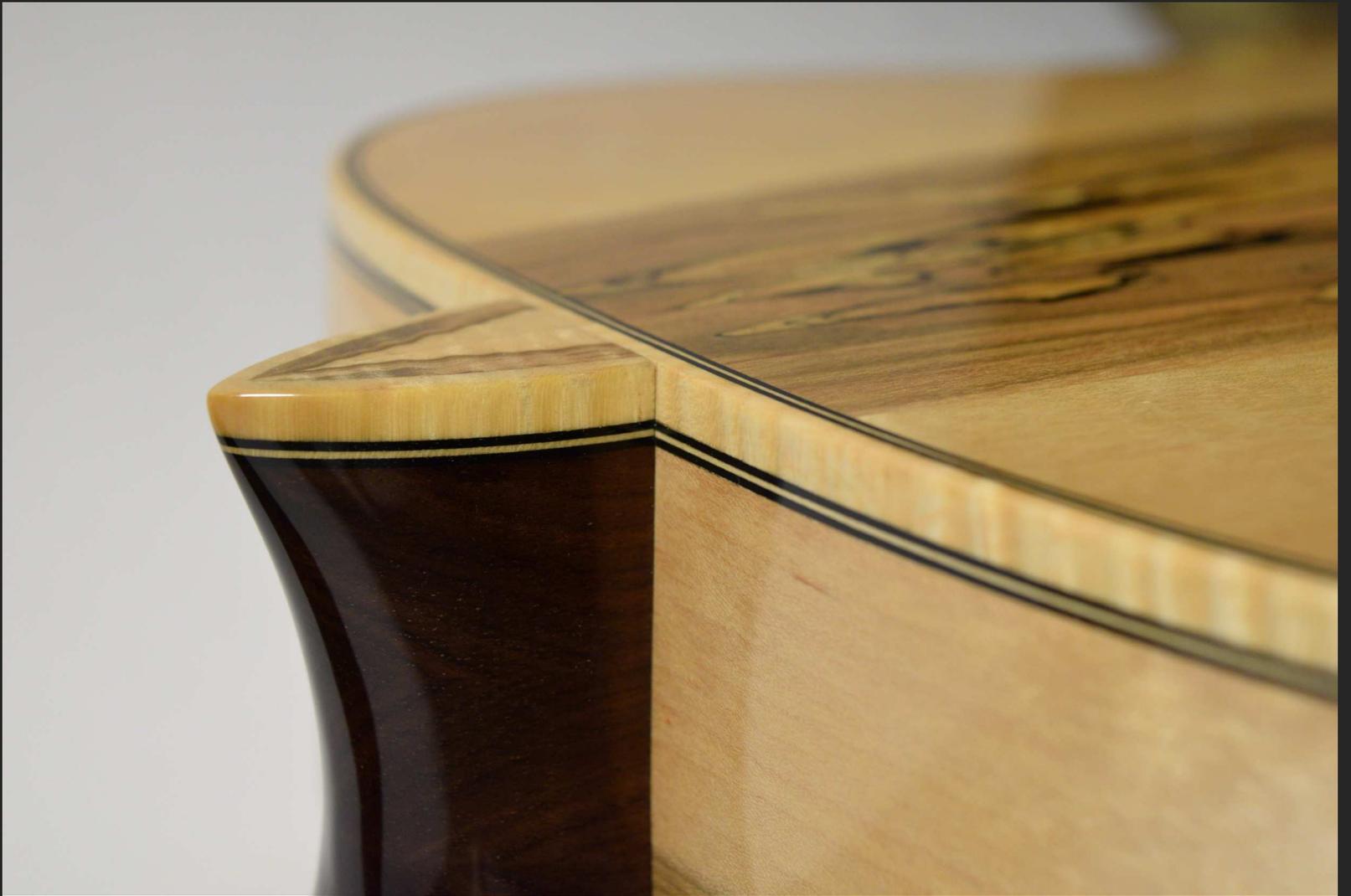
While the black pearl buttons were originally going to be a turquoise stone with black matrix, I am glad with the way they turned out.





The neck is made from tropical walnut. This wood is very similar in density to Spanish Cedar and inherits much of the same scent that we in North America associate with our native black walnut. Of course, I had to add maple binding to the fretboard. Absolutely.











Special Projects

Lucky No. 13



This is my contrarian reaction to an order I received upon which was the request to, if at all possible, avoid attributing to it the number 13. This was my first encounter with the phenomenon referred to as triskaidekaphobia - the mortal fear of the number 13. Of course, I relented to designating their order as the 12th guitar and proceeded with doing something a bit out of the ordinary for no. 13. The guitar pairs a padauk back and sides with an Engelmann spruce top.





Brazilian

This commission for a Brazilian Rosewood guitar was completed for a gentleman in Hong Kong. It was the last Brazilian guitar I made and it could very well stay that way given the restrictions placed on moving the wood over borders.





Tropical Walnut

This is the 24th guitar and the 2nd instrument that incorporated tropical walnut as the back and sides. While it's a very untraditional and peculiar choice of wood for a guitar, every instrument in which I have used it possesses a very personable, velvety response.





Sharp Edges

This is a distinctive 640mm scale guitar, customized to exclude the elevated fingerboard. It was made in the first batch of octagonal rosettes - an aesthetic choice that some people adore and others loath. I have since migrated to a very uncontroversial rosette design for my main option, but this is a choice that reflects my meddlesome, contrarian nature.





Oribe's Cocobola

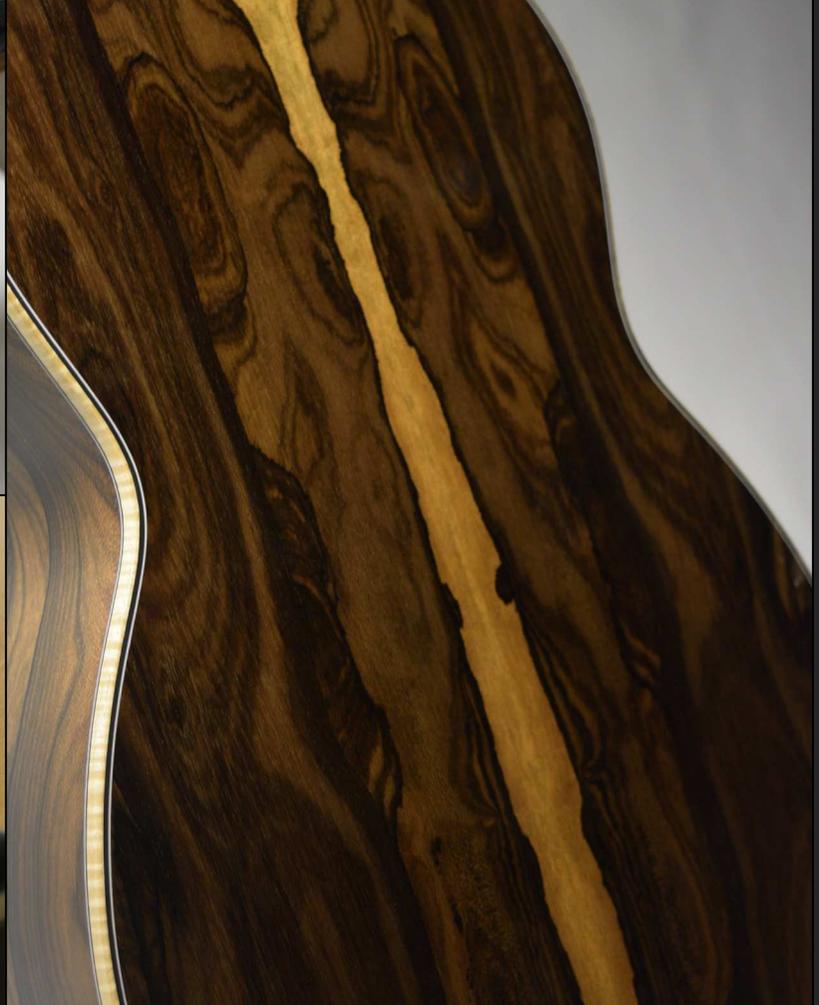
This guitar was the display guitar for the 2016 Guitar Foundation Convention in Fullerton, CA. It hosts a beautiful set of Cocobola that found its way to me from the remnants of Jose Oribe's wood inventory and also has the second generation of my octagonal rosette design.





Cordia Dodecandra

The scientific name categorizing the tree from which this Ziricote wood was harvested is found through central America and the Caribbean. While it's brainy textured grain is striking, no less distinctive is the tree's presence as it hosts its bright orange flowers and tasty fruits. This is a Ziricote custom guitar using spalted chestnut oak segments in the rosette.



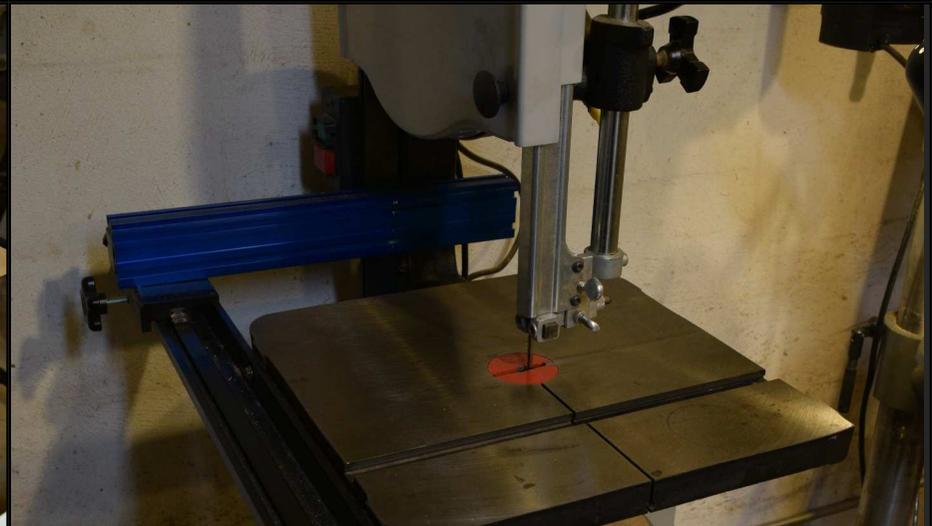
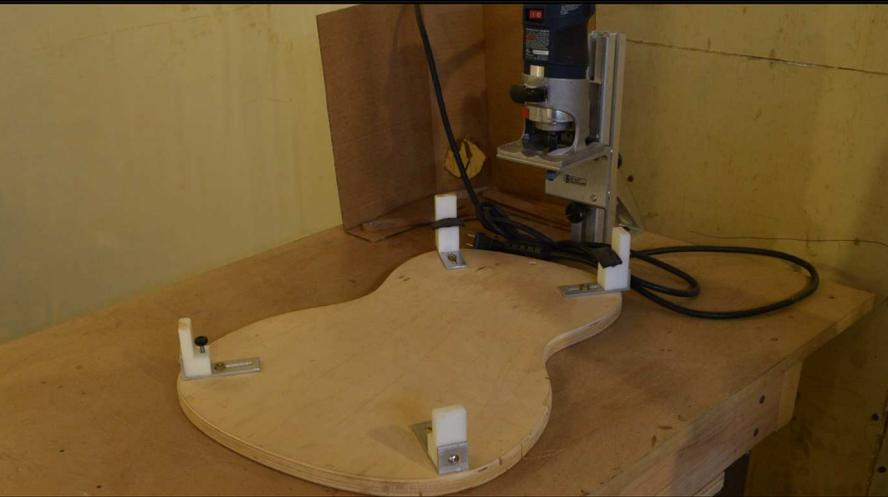




THE SHOP



Building guitars requires a mix of traditional woodworking machinery and specialized fixtures. Some of the tools here I made, such as the router table below, the disc sander at bottom left and the soundboard vacuum press system on the left. Evolving the process and inventing the machinery to implement it is one of the great pleasures of this endeavor.











Special Thanks

To all those past and present who have found use for my work. With the combination of luck, skill and the abundant generosity and talents of my clientèle, I will continue to build guitars that are worthy of all the hard work and dedication they devote to this art every day.



View from my home above Alpine, TN

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