

GUITARMAKER

The Journal of Stringed Instrument Construction & Repair



Issue 78

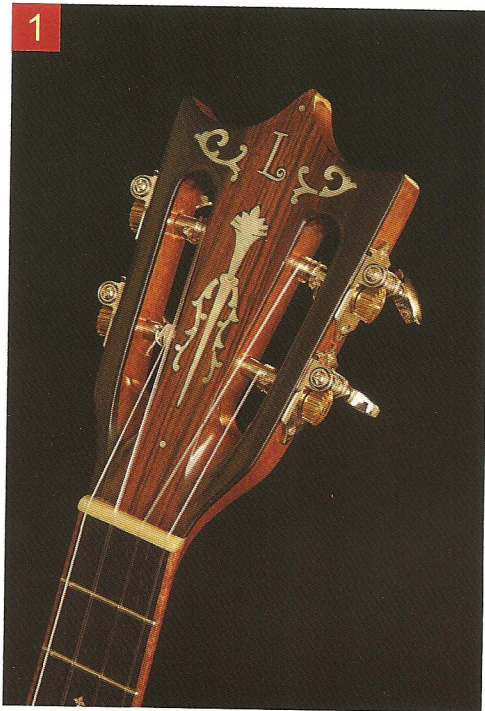
Winter 2011

LUTHIER SPOTLIGHT II

NEW LUTHIER ON THE BLOCK

By Jay Lichty

It is always fascinating to me to learn how different luthiers find their way to the craft. My story is one of trying to make the best of hard times. Lichty Guitars came about as a direct result of the down economy. I am in residential construction, or at least I was. When the housing market crashed I found myself with time on my hands and questions about the future.



In my downtime I decided to try my hand at building a ukulele, just for fun mind you. (Image 1 – Lichty Ukuleles came before Lichty Guitars) I've been a musician most of my life and had recently discovered ukuleles. Building one quickly led to another and another and then the perfect opportunity presented itself in my community.

Renowned luthier Wayne Henderson, along with Don Wilson were giving a guitar-building workshop just down the road from my home. Though it was filled before I even heard about it, I knew one way or another I would be in that workshop. Fate lent a hand and I had the amazing good fortune to spend ten days with Wayne and

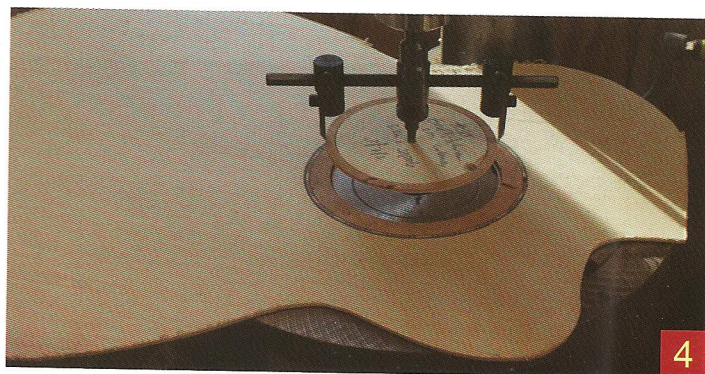


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Don building my first guitar. (Image 2 – no caption needed) It was immediately apparent that my years as a carpenter and contractor and my love for music could come together naturally for this work. I hung up my contractor tools, got my luthier shop in order and officially began Lichty Guitars just months after the workshop.



Corrie, my wife, saw my enthusiasm, or rather addiction, to the craft and figured that, if she ever wanted to see me, she'd better



get involved as well. She is a wizard at marketing, promotion and customer service. Our web site, www.lichtyguitars.com, and all of our photography is a result of her work. Together we make a great team. I often tell folks that if it were not for what she does, I'd simply be an old dusty guy surrounded by piles of guitars and ukuleles because no one would know Lichty Guitars even existed.

We've gotten off to a fantastic start with enthusiastic media coverage, by being the overall winner of the Made in the South Awards and most importantly because we've got great customers. Since that launch in November of 2009 I have built 39 guitars, over a dozen ukuleles (most have been custom orders) and we've got a nice stack of orders in the queue. Our customers are a mix of casual musicians and pros. Some of the folks on tour include brothers Tom and Mike Gossin (Gloriana), (Image 3 – Gloriana's Tom Gossin and his custom Lichty Guitar – a Cocobolo Dreadnought with a Sinker Redwood top) Geoff Achison (Australian musician who has recently commissioned a Lichty for his US tours), Doug Lancio (Nashville producer and lead



guitarist for John Hyatt and Patty Griffin), Jody Porter (Fountains of Wayne), Haley Dreis, and Jonathan Gray. We are so fortunate to have such talented musicians playing and praising Lichy Guitars.

I currently build dreadnought, orchestra (OM), and parlor guitars, (all available as cutaways) as well as tenor and baritone size ukuleles. I can

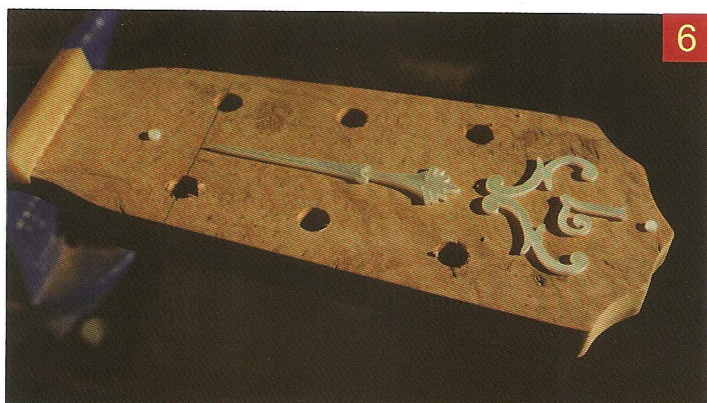
build other sizes as well upon request. On the horizon are left-handed models, a bass guitar and so much more. (Image 4 – Custom cutaway with a burl rosette built for Geoff Achison)



and acoustically. (Image 5 – Custom Brazilian rosewood tenor ukulele with a sinker redwood top)

I experiment with the wood selections, rosettes, and bindings to make these “one of a kind” instruments. (Image 6 – Burl headplate with custom inlay) I’ve never been one to do things the same way too many times in a row and this has translated

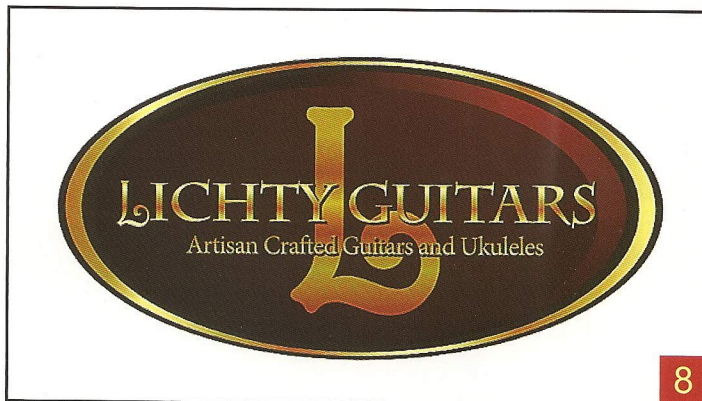
quite nicely into a unique selection of guitars and ukuleles that for some reason all have a similar, and fortunately desirable, quality to their tone.

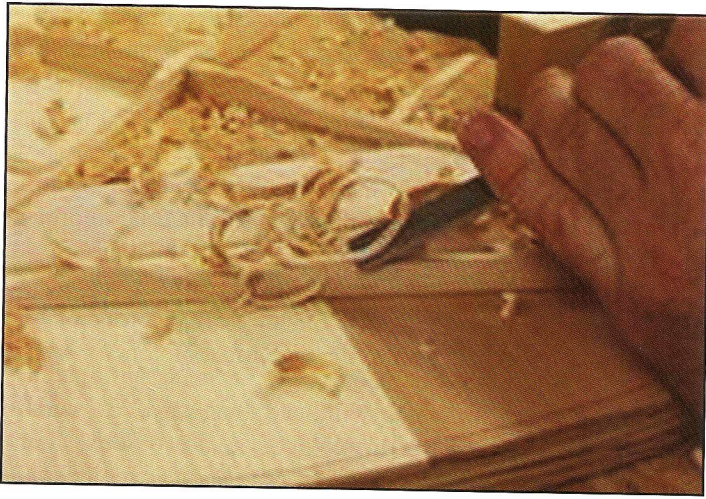


Given we have such a broad selection, folks often ask what’s my favorite wood to work with? I really just go board by board, set by set. This may sound a bit flakey but I ask the wood as

When thinking in terms of what makes Lichy Guitars unique and what draws our customers in, one thing I do a bit differently from others is that I don’t offer a “standard Lichy Guitar.” My goal as a builder is to craft the best sounding and balanced, most responsive instruments while maintaining something uniquely Lichy about each. If

someone wants a Martin D-18 replica I can accommodate, no problem, but my passion is more towards working with an extensive range of domestic and exotic woods, with each new instrument as a unique design in and of itself. While my guitars are all braced in the basic 1937 Martin style, each guitar is different and for custom orders the buyer drives that design process. I get the customer involved right from the start. We discuss body style, width of neck and basic design ideas. Then they choose their specific piece of tone wood from our collection. The entire process of my custom work is to build an instrument that fits the customer perfectly in all ways: visually, esthetically





I begin each instrument. I tap on it to hear its tone. I look at it and smell it. It's about inspiration. Corrie and I have collected an enviable supply of exotic and domestic woods. I'm a firm believer that, even though we've been taught that wood is inert or that it has no intelligence, it really does. Some of this wood really wants to become a guitar...and some doesn't. The trick is in listening and paying attention. Back to the question, What's my favorite wood? I love Brazilian Rosewood. Beyond its incredible tone and variation in color and figure, what an amazing smell. We have many incredible sets and strive to buy from reliable sellers, given current import laws and international regulations protecting the species. I'm also really enamored with Mahogany, Cocobolo, Pau Ferro and Ancient Kauri. The list goes on and on. For top tone wood I use Sitka, Englemann and Red Spruce, along with several other species and I really love the sound and looks of Sinker Redwood. I love the story behind the wood, as well, that it is centuries old trees that are reclaimed from river bottoms.

Perhaps one of the most interesting guitars I've built was a custom-order Patchwork Parlor Guitar. The body was built from seven species of wood and they all came together to make a truly harmonious sound. (Image 7 – Custom Patchwork Parlor Guitar)

I'd like to point out that in business terms I think it would be challenging to be both the luthier and the promoter. Each requires such different skill sets and honestly, who has time? I once read that the best way to market your luthier business is to marry someone who is good at it. I got lucky. Corrie has lots of experience in marketing and promotion. She does the obvious things, like keeping our website current with good content and sending out press releases, and the not so obvious, like spreading the word about people/businesses whose work we admire. (Image 8 – Lichy Guitars Logo) As a result of Corrie handling the marketing, I am able to stay focused in the shop and build more instruments.

In looking ahead we've got some really cool projects lined up. One example is a collaborative project with artist Clark Hipolito. We met Clark when Mike Gossin commissioned a Lichy Guitar and wanted Clark to paint a special design on the soundboard. (Image 9 – Custom Dreadnought for Gloriana's

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Mike Gossin, artwork by Clark Hipolito) It turned out incredible and we had so much fun working together we've launched a Lichy/Hipolito collaboration. I have built four instruments (a dreadnought, a OM and a parlor guitar and a tenor ukulele). Clark is painting each with a unique design of his creation. These four instruments will be the cornerstone of a show we'll be doing in the summer of 2011 featuring Lichy guitars and ukuleles and Clark's artwork.

While we have a steady stream of custom orders coming in, I also like to take time to ensure I am learning new skills. Regarding continuing education Wayne Henderson continues to be a great source of inspiration and knowledge and I'll be attending an advanced guitar-building workshop with Charles Fox in 2011. Another way I advance my skills and techniques is by teaching my own one-on-one guitar-building workshops to students.

On the learning front I'd be missing something important if I did not credit much of my ongoing learning to member contributions to such organizations as A.S.I.A. I scour multiple publications each month for the latest tips and advice, have gleaned some real gems from places like YouTube and am so grateful for the generous spirit of sharing within the luthier community. □

