

STRINGED THINGS

Acoustic guitar dream

Every few years or so I get this urge to build an acoustic guitar. The urge has its roots in my electric guitar building. For years, I thought an acoustic would be too difficult for me to do. Then, about eight years ago, I found a book on acoustic guitar building that seemed to de-mystify the process.

So, I plunged into it, but it was not to be. I bought several tools and materials to do the project. However, it seemed the more I got into it, the more tools and other items that I needed. It was something I could not justify. So, I sold off most of the acoustic guitar-building items that I had accumulated.

The “beast” lay dormant for a few years. A couple of years ago a nearby Woodcraft store held a seminar on guitar building, possibly as a prelude to offering a full-blown course. I attended and became excited again. I even sold several guitars to raise the money for the course.

However, the course never materialized. So, I used the money from the sale of the guitars to replace the ones I had sold. Unfortunately, I was not able to replace them with guitars as nice as the ones I had sold. This was not a good experience.

For some reason, the beast has reared its ugly head again. However, I have a different strategy this time – build it bit by bit over a period of years. Whether this will work, I don’t know.

I took inventory of what was left over from the previous project. To my surprise, I found two tops – one sitka spruce, one Engelmann spruce. There also was a solid walnut rosette, a string-through bridge, brace wood, kerning, and a few other things.

I also had some pieces of wood that were the beginning of a guitar mold. Hmm. Maybe there were some possibilities here

Now, if one wants to build just any guitar, there are inexpensive kits on ebay. These don’t appeal to me – too much of the work already is done for you and in the case of the lower-priced ones, the materials are not of very good quality.

So, I asked myself, just what is it I hope to accomplish with this acoustic guitar building project? The first thing is, hopefully, fun. I like the problem-solving process of building something. I like to look at the finished product and know that I put some work into it. Also, I hope I would have a decent guitar when all was said and done.

For the money I will have to invest on this over the long term, I could buy a very nice acoustic guitar. But where’s the

fun in that? In building my own guitar, I could customize it by wood choices and other options, such as the string-through bridge, which I much prefer to bridge pins.

As I researched the process again, I realized that instead of building the guitar, I could end up acting as a general contractor. Many of the tasks in building were not feasible to do at home. Take bending sides, for example. There’s no way I’m going to buy a side bending machine for \$600 and ruin several pieces of wood learning how to use it. Obviously, having the sides pre-bent for \$50 is the better option.

Making the wood the correct thickness is another issue. I could try to get my collection of planes to work and use a caliper to check thickness. This may yet be an option. Of course, I could have that work done as well. Joining the top and sides could be difficult, but I have a method I think might work.

Inlaying the rosette would be another challenge. I saw a video in which an old-school guitar maker literally chiseled out the rosette without anything to guide him. That’s old-world craftsmanship!

I could have this done, but I plan to make an attempt to do it. First, though, I will practice. The Engelmann spruce top could be the guinea pig for my efforts. The top would not be expensive to replace if I messed it up.

A major obstacle that concerned me was routing the binding channels. Much of what I researched pointed to buying some kind of \$300-\$400 jig and a trim router to go with it. The videos showed it working well and quickly. However, I figured this might not be an option either. Then, I discovered the Schneider Gramil. This is a hand tool that can be used to score the borders of the binding routing. Then, one could chisel away the routing. The hazard to this would be that this step occurs after a lot of work is done on the body. I would hate to ruin the project at this point!

Another option for all of this is to seek help from an area luthier. There are no shortage of them in Nashville, which isn’t far from the town in which I live. I don’t know how such an arrangement could be worked out. I’d need to pay the luthier for his/her help. That might be a deal-breaker on the project. On the other hand, it could save a lot of money by preventing a disastrous mistake.

So, there I am. I want to tame this beast without going bankrupt or crazy. It could be years. I just may work on it sporadically. Who knows? But maybe at some point, I’ll have a acoustic guitar that I more or less built. Hopefully, it will be worth it.