

# STRINGED THINGS

## Discovering chisels



I must admit that even though I've been battling wood off and on for many years, I only recently have begun to appreciate the value of good, old-fashioned chisels.

My guitar building and mod adventures generally have relied on power tools and sandpaper. Chisels rarely were mentioned in any of the solid-body guitar building books that I read over the years. So, I didn't put much stock in them.

Now, the acoustic guitar building books I read had plenty of mention of chisels, with them being used to carve the body's braces, shape up the neck-body joint, and do a bunch of other real skillful, "craftsmen" type things.

Being a solid-body builder, though, I didn't find much use for chisels. When I was gearing up for my aborted acoustic guitar build several years ago, I sprung for a Luthiers Mercantile International chisel, probably thinking I would use it for shaping braces. Until I wrote this, I literally had let it sit for several years and had never used it.

I have three chisels that I consider to be "good" chisels.



They are pictured at the beginning of this article. The business ends of the chisels are shown at the picture at the end of the left column. They are, from left, the LMII chisel; a "Swiss-made" chisel that I can't remember buying; and the one-eighth inch chisel I bought to clear out a nut slot in a Fender-style neck. (See the article "Better Lucky Than Good.")

I whipped out the three of them tonight in part for this blog, but also for a problem with a solid-body bass that's in my building queue. I messed up the area where the nut sits. I'm using an unusual nut – one that I cut for a bass that I built in the early 1990s. The neck of the bass has twisted beyond repair, so this bass project was intended to use hardware from that bass. That hasn't exactly been how it turned out, but that's a story for another blog.

Anyway, I wanted to make that area flat so I can possibly get the nut to sit there or rebuild a slot for the nut. Power tools clearly were not an option. So, out came the chisels.

Now, here's a bit about the LMII chisel. Luthier's Mercantile International, Inc., really is proud of the chisels it sells. Here are a few words from their web site:

"Our chisels, with beautifully designed hardwood handles, are as good as can be found anywhere in the world."

Except for the larger chisels, LMII currently charges \$44.15 for one of these cutting wonders.

I had considered selling my unused, "good as can be found anywhere in the world" LMII chisel, but I decided I should hang on to what allegedly is a great tool.

So, to clean up the nut area, I pulled out the LMII chisel, ran it down the sharpening stone a few times, and went to work. It didn't take long to clean up the area beautifully. Maybe there is something to these chisels!



The one-eighth chisel was purchased recently to clear out a nut slot in a Fender-style neck. It worked great. The third chisel has the words “Swiss-Made” stamped. This is the mystery chisel. I do not remember how I came to be in possession of it. However, it’s a good one – I tested it on some hardwood and it cut very well. It’s a 6mm chisel (about one-fourth of an inch). It stands ready for whatever guitar or other hobby task that I can come up with.

So, when problems need to be solved in my various woodworking projects, I will first decide if a chisel can do the job, as opposed to some other method. I don’t know why it’s taken me so long to figure this out. I guess it just shows that one is never too old to learn.