AN HISTORIC - HERMENEUTIC CRITIQUE OF LUTHIERY WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN GUITAR BUILDERS

by

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SUMMARY

This study uses a general historical overview of luthiery that provides the reader with a basic understanding of construction techniques and terminology as a point of departure. From the outset the lack of consensus over an ideal or desired construction technique is highlighted. However, Torres is credited with the establishing of a perceived Spanish tradition of guitar construction and acknowledged as the "father" of the modern guitar. This will serve as a basic framework in which a discussion of six prominent past and present international luthiers can occur. These luthiers, namely Antonio de Torres, Hermann Hauser, Robert Bouchet, Daniel Friederich, Jose Romanillos and Greg Smallman are included in this study by virtue of their influence on the South African luthiers that are featured here. It is noted that these six luthiers, with the exception of Greg Smallman, all adhere to the "Spanish tradition" of guitar construction. Smallman can be considered a foremost proponent of a more recent "modern" school of guitar construction characterized by various innovative construction techniques. These are a result of new demands placed on the guitar as performance instrument because of larger concert venues and more collaboration with different instruments, resulting in a need for a stronger tone and more projection and penetration in sound. These two "poles" of luthiery are then manifested in the discussion on the seven featured South African luthiers. Alistair Thompson, Colin Cleveland, Mervyn Davis, Garth Pickard, Marc Maingard, Rodney Stedall and Hans van den Berg are discussed with special mention made of the features of their instruments, woods used and thoughts on luthiery, against the backdrop of their biographies. The four South African luthiers who build within the "Spanish tradition" (Pickard, Maingard, Stedall and Van den Berg) are distinguished from the three who build outside this so-called tradition (Thompson, Cleveland, Davis). South African luthiery is therefore shown to be an accurate microcosm of luthiery in global terms with styles of construction ranging from very "traditional" to very "modern".

The critical reflection on the information contained in this study appears in the form of a hermeneutic critique on luthiery that occurs within the parameters of the thought of two prominent hermeneutic thinkers, Martin Heidegger and his student, Hans-Georg

Gadamer. It is shown that the collaboration that often occurs between guitar makers and performers can be related back to Gadamer and his analysis of Heidegger's notion of the the hermeneutic circle. It is also argued that luthiery as practiced by the international and South African luthiers featured in this study can be seen both as art and technology in ancient Greek terms in that they are both a mode of revealing. Finally, it is shown how luthiery in its entirety can be viewed as a tradition and that different luthiers respond and add to this tradition in various ways.

KEY WORDS

Alistair Thompson; Colin Cleveland; Mervyn Davis; Garth Pickard; Marc Maingard; Rodney Stedall; Hans van den Berg; South African Luthiery; Guitar

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INTRODUCTION

1. AIM OF THIS RESEARCH

As a performing classical guitarist, I have always been intrigued by the many peculiarities of the construction of the classical guitar, especially when compared with more 'developed' instruments such as the violin. Evans and Evans agree that 'the guitar is unlike the violin in that the exact way in which it produces sound, and the best way of releasing tone and volume from the instrument, are still in dispute' (1977: 58). Preliminary investigation into this topic exposed a multi-faceted instrument with a constructional heritage as colourful and varied as the prominent figures that permeate much of its history. In addition, not enough is known about the excellent guitars built by South African luthiers. The aim of this research is therefore to identify those issues of guitar construction 'in dispute', and to show how these have been addressed in the work of a number of this country's finest luthiers. In this regard some terminological clarification is also required from the outset: although guitar builders are traditionally referred to as luthiers, the term luthier in its generic sense refers to makers of all stringed instruments.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING AND METHODOLOGY

There are three distinct sections to this thesis, Sections A, B and C. The first of these engages with the existing body of knowledge in the field of guitar construction, the second is an empirical study of selected South African luthiers, and the third provides critical reflection on a number of pertinent issues that emerge from the first two. At the risk of having to sacrifice some continuity and coherence from start to finish, my decision to present these three sections to the reader so distinctly is largely the result of the scholarly position or 'methodological paradigm' I have assumed in this thesis, one that is essentially qualitative in its intentions, and one that may be described in part as phenomenological, and in part as interpretivist or hermeneutic. The aim of qualitative research is to provide the insider's "emic" perspective (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 53), which requires the researcher to allow the subject of his/her research to speak with its own voice and in its own terms. Thus 'the insistence on an interpretive … understanding of the meanings and self-descriptions of the individual, requires a methodology which emphasizes the following: unstructured observation

and open interviewing; idiographic descriptions; qualitative data analysis … and objectivity understood as the inter-subjective attitude of the insider' (Ibid: 33). For this reason the reader will note that I have deliberately assumed a different writerly voice in the different sections of this thesis, presenting these as 'idiographic descriptions' in order to best articulate the nature of the scholarly enquiry involved in each case as 'the inter-subjective attitude of the insider'.

In Section A I engage with the existing body of knowledge in the field of guitar construction. A thorough international literature search yielded a surprisingly small body of relevant, reliable and recent information, a factor that in itself motivates the need for a research project of this nature. This is true both as regards the literature pertaining to chapter 1, which provides the reader with a basic understanding of terminology relevant to luthiery and constructs a basic frame of reference wherein an inquiry into luthiery can occur, and the literature pertaining to chapter 2, where the lives, work and contribution of six influential international luthiers are featured. The work of these luthiers points to two poles of guitar construction. The first is heavily influenced by the so-called Spanish tradition of guitar construction, and the second veers away from this perceived tradition. However, the notion of 'tradition' is used with caution throughout this thesis and is ultimately more fully interrogated in chapter 5. Section B of this thesis features the work of seven South African luthiers. It is based entirely on the open-ended interviews I conducted with the luthiers in question during 2004 and 2005, and as such it deliberately assumes a narrative idiom in order to preserve the discursive element of the phenomenological encounter through which this data was obtained. These interviews are included in this thesis in the form of the attached Appendices. As far as possible, the Appendices contain verbatim transcriptions of our discussions, the only omissions being statements that respondents specifically requested me to omit and/or statements on totally unrelated topics that inevitably occur in any one-on-one conversation. Chapter 5 constitutes the third and final section of this thesis. It offers a critical reflection on various issues that emerge from the previous four chapters. This includes an inquiry into the guitar builder and guitar player collaboration, the ontological nature of luthiery in relation to its artistic and technological character and the role of tradition as encountered in luthiery. This reflection occurs within the parameters of the writings of two hermeneutic thinkers, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

3. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

A number of limitations have been imposed in this study. The first of these involves my decision in chapter 1 to begin a genealogy of the guitar in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, with what I describe as a period of transition between the modern guitar and its many forbears. In so doing I do not deny that a detailed historical account of the origins of the guitar may have required a different strategy, but since such an account is somewhat peripheral to the aims of this study, it is not dealt with in detail here. The second limitation is imposed in chapter 2, where I have chosen to focus on only six international luthiers, not because these luthiers are by any means representative of luthiery in its entire international and historical manifestation – such a venture would far outweigh the scope and purpose of this chapter – but because their work has influenced in some way or other the South African luthiers who form the focal point of this study, as evidenced in my interviews with them. Thirdly, my selection of the seven South African luthiers discussed in Section B of this thesis must not be taken as an attempt to represent all the luthiers of South Africa. There are many luthiers in this country, but simple practicalities prevent my providing the reader with a detailed account of them all. In addition, luthiers that mainly build steel-string or other guitars have been disregarded since the focus of this study is on the classical guitar. Although the rationale for the selection of these seven luthiers therefore rests on my treating them as a type of South African community case study (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 281), those selected must not be considered a sample of a larger universe, and I do not claim any validity for the data I have gathered beyond my research subjects themselves. In this regard, Babbie and Mouton stress that in a qualitative study such as this one, 'the obligation for demonstrating transferability rests on those who wish to apply it to the receiving context (the reader of the study)' (Ibid: 277). Finally, my decision to provide a critique of the emergent themes of this dissertation through the writings of Gadamer and Heidegger is in no way intended to deny that a number of other critical lenses may present themselves as equally apt to the luthier's world. Amongst others, these include a greater critical engagement with the interviews transcribed in the Appendices by way of a Foucauldian analysis of the fascinating discursive formations that emerge from them, as well as a Lyotardian poststructuralist critique of contemporary artistic practice. For the moment, however, these must remain as the subjects of future research exercises.

SECTION A

LUTHIERY: AN HISTORICAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER 1
TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF THE MODERN CLASSICAL GUITAR

Any scholarly study of the guitar inevitably exposes its many interesting peculiarities. This is true not only of its development and construction, but also and perhaps especially, of its perceived status as concert instrument and its vast range of "traditions" and styles. Scholars of the guitar are also often faced with the dilemma of trying to assimilate and plot the seemingly abstract qualities of the instrument. Thus for Wade 'the guitar is caught frequently between Scylla and Charybdis in a difficult voyage of self-exploration' (1980: 215).

In this thesis I shall attempt to map for the reader the 'voyage of self-exploration' on which several prominent South African luthiers have embarked. In order to fully understand the routes on which this voyage has taken them, however, an introductory discussion and explanation pertaining to the classical guitar in general is warranted. Therefore, this chapter will focus mainly on matters of guitar development, construction and sound production and a discussion of the basic construction technique.

1 THE TRANSITIONAL GUITAR AND EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN INSTRUMENT

In the development of the guitar, the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century constitute a period of transition. Evans and Evans state that 'during this time, the changes from five to six courses, from double to single strings, to modern tuning and modern construction techniques, occurred differently in different parts of Europe'(1977: 40). This chapter constitutes a historical overview in which such changes as

- number of strings,
- double courses to single strings,

- tuning,
- construction techniques,
- notation and
- unusual guitars

will be examined. The main development centers of Italy, Germany, France and Spain in particular will be looked at in terms of their contributions.

1.1 Number of Strings

It needs to be understood that before the late 1700's and early 1800's, the guitar was essentially a five-course instrument and its construction, form and tuning saw little change for centuries. It is only during this crucial period in the guitar's history and development that we see 'definite currents, happenings, tidal pulls' of development 'under the apparently placid surface…' (Wade 1980: 95). This gradual emergence of the modern six-string instrument was the result of many experiments with varying degrees of success. However, these experiments do not present a single line of development. Turnbull writes that 'in some centres the five-course guitar acquired a further course before the strings became single, while in others it appears that the five-course instrument lost its double strings before the sixth string was added'. Furthermore, the six-string guitar did not simply imply the addition of a sixth string a fourth below the fifth string. The tuning as a whole differed in fact to that of the standard five course guitar (1991: 62-63). 'The various trends taken by the guitar in the preceding centuries can, in retrospect, be viewed as so many roads and byways that led to one destination - the six-single string guitar' (Bellow 1970: 157). The fact that these developments were not mutually exclusive or even separate from one another complicates the systematic breakdown of the emergence of the modern guitar.

1.2 Double Courses to Single Strings

In France and Italy single six-string guitars came into use before it did so in Spain, where the six-course guitar persisted. In Spain we see the transition to six single strings

occurring via the intermediary step of a double-strung six-course guitar (Evans and Evans 1977: 40). Turnbull draws attention to Federico Moretti's *Principios para tocar la guitarra de seis ordenes* (1799) which states that the reasons for the change to single strings were both musical and practical in nature. He quotes A. Lemoine from his *Nouvelle Methode* (Paris, 1790) to this effect:

> With this method it is rare to play accurately (juste) and to hear the harmony in all its purity, as (the sounds of) the two strings [of the lower courses, tuned at the octave] strike the ear in such a way that the higher sounds are heard before the lower… Besides…one can rarely find strings for the unison g's and b's that are of the same size and perfectly true (1991: 63).

Wade points out that the courses imposed on the guitar a timbre perpetually looking back to lute textures and that it only served to deaden the instrument's resonant qualities. Furthermore the guitar 'operates best as a vibrating medium with the fewest possible strings' (1980: 97). The famous nineteenth-century guitarist Simon Molitor echoed these sentiments and identified several disadvantages pertaining to double-course instruments. They include the difficulties involved in keeping strings in unison in tune throughout a piece and lack in clarity of sound (Bellow 1970: 171).

1.3 Tuning

Very few conclusive arguments can be made as to the emergence of the modern six-string instrument with reference to centers of development, apart from the fact that that the 'guitar with six single strings tuned in the modern interval pattern emerged somewhere outside Spain in either France or Italy' (Turnbull 1991: 64). Turnbull goes on to explain that the great musical benefit presented by the addition of a further string a fourth lower was the 'avoidance of inverted chords that had plagued the earlier instruments' (1991: 64). He quotes Thomas Heck who suggests that this addition may have had something to do with a response to tonal music's language of the time:

> Was this not the minimum improvement necessary to achieve the roots I, IV and V in the lowest three strings (in several keys), while at the same time allowing for triadic, melodic and ornamental use of the upper three strings? The low E completed the double-octave with the first string, e', as well, thereby giving the classic guitar a kind of perfection which the five-course baroque guitar had resisted for about 200 years (Heck in Turnbull 1991: 64).

Wade documents the existence of seven-string, eight-string, ten-string, eleven-string and even twenty-string instruments during this period, but these instruments proved to be of little lasting value and it was only in Russia that the seven-string instrument took root (1980: 98).

1.4 Construction Techniques

Even though the 'French and Italians were the first to adopt the six single string guitar with the modern pattern of tuning….', it is the Spaniards who were responsible for the most significant innovations and advances in terms of construction techniques, with Cadiz and to a lesser extent Seville acting as the most important centers of luthiery (Evans and Evans 1977: 40). Evans and Evans further identify important features shared by guitars of the luthiers of southern Spain. They include:

- elegant body shapes
- the use of either Rosewood or Spanish Cypress for the bodies
- the conservative use of decoration
- the use of tied bridges
- unadorned peg heads featuring plain wooden pegs
- "internal slipper foot" and "external heel" junction to the body
- six or eight-fret fingerboards set level with the table
- the use of thin, rectangular metal frets extending over the table (Evans and Evans 1977: 40).

However, by far the most important constructional contribution made by Spanish luthiers was the introduction of the fan bracing system. Fan bracing or fan strutting 'is the term

used for the strips of wood attached in a particular manner to the back of the soundboard of the guitar' (Summerfield 1996: 12). These strips serve a dual function in that they facilitate distribution of sound waves along the soundboard while reinforcing the soundboard. The commonly used method before the advent of fan strutting or fan bracing was that of supporting the top with transverse bars only. These were positioned in such a way as to withstand the tension of the strings, but they had the undesired effect of reducing the flexibility of the top which in turn became less effective in transmitting sound (Turnbull 1991: 66). The system of fan struts, on the other hand, successfully frees the top because of its closer proximity to the grain while still giving adequate support. Fan strutting is peculiar to the guitar and for this reason Turnbull marks its appearance as the guitar's 'emancipation from the influence of the lute' (1991: 66). This 'emancipation' he sees as confirmed and complete by the adoption of the following:

- a separate fingerboard extending to the soundhole
- the use of machine heads which simplified tuning
- the positioning of the twelfth fret over the end of the body
- a new type of bridge where the strings pass over a saddle[1]
- the upper and lower bouts became wider and the waist narrower (Turnbull 1991: 67).

1.5 Notation

Another important breakthrough came in the change of notation in guitar music from tablature to staff notation. Wade states:

> Michel Corrette's Les Dons d'Apollon: Methode pour apprendre facilement a jouer de la Guitarre (1763) is a milestone in the liberation of the guitar from its private means of notation - the tablature. Corrette included tablature and staff notation, with the remarkable step of using the treble clef with the music written an octave higher than actual pitch; the device proved to be of lasting benefit to the guitar and its players (1980: 96).

[1] See figures 1.1 and 1.2.

Wade further argues that the demise of the 'tyranny of tablature' emancipated the guitar from its 'small backroom of musical culture into environs where many composers, and not just players, would exploit the timbres of guitar sound' and that 'there could be no possibility of leading the guitar out of the prison of narrow preoccupation until it could share the same musical literacy as other instruments' (1980: 96).

1.6 Unusual Guitars

Most sources that trace the development of the guitar agree that after the emergence of what we call the modern instrument around 1800, described above, there followed a period wherein a number of "unusual guitars" began to emerge. This period is characterized by a vast number of different guitar-like instruments, the result of an array of different experiments. These include guitars with additional strings, movable frets, different kinds of tuning, and unusual body shapes. Turnbull argues that the reason for this is the fact that the first so-called modern instruments were at first not well received. Instead they 'failed to win a place among the instruments worthy of pursuit' (1991: 71). Thus the rise of "unusual guitars" was indicative of the dissatisfaction with the modern instrument. None of these experiments had a lasting influence on the development of the guitar however, as most construction practice was rendered obsolete by Antonio de Torres' amendments and subsequent accepted standardization of the modern instrument around the 1850's (Evans and Evans 1977: 42).

2 CONSTRUCTION AND SOUND PRODUCTION

For Taylor the fact that 'the guitar is simple in its construction' is an especially attractive feature 'in an increasingly mechanized and uniform world' (1978: 5). Similarly, Brosnac argues that 'the classic guitar is currently not seriously involved in evolution' (1978: 26). This view might well be seen as somewhat contentious to scholars in this field who consider the subject of guitar construction as a complex and unresolved one. In this regard Evans and Evans make a statement that will form the underlying motivation of this study, namely, 'the guitar is unlike the violin in that the exact way in which it produces

sound, and the best way of releasing tone and volume from the instrument, are still in dispute' (1977: 58). Even so, Evans and Evans do go on to provide a general discussion on the basic construction principles, techniques and materials generally used. In so far as their discussion represents a useful overview or compendium of the uncontested body of knowledge within the field in this regard, I shall not attempt to recreate such an exercise here. Instead my discussion will provide a mere synopsis of the more detailed information the reader may gain from sources such as Evans and Evans[1](1977).

2.1 Woods

For Evans and Evans 'the luthier's most important skill is his knowledge of wood and the way each piece can be worked to the best advantage' (1977: 75). Especially critical in this regard is the choice of timber for the soundboard. Two types of Spruce predominate in instrument building. They are Alpine from Germany and Switzerland, and Sitka Spruce from North America. Of these two, only European Spruce is used for top quality classical guitars. One of the most common criteria according to which the suitability of a piece of wood is judged is the closeness and the evenness of the grain. 'As a general principle, the closer the grain, the more resilient the plank and the brighter the sound it can be made to produce - although, as with all general rules, there are many qualifying factors. The luthier's choice of timber is ultimately subject to individual preference. In assessing the suitability of a thin board of Spruce he will not only examine the grain, but will also flex the board to judge its resilience, and tap it to hear its "ring"'(Evans and Evans 1977: 77).

Another wood favoured by many luthiers and performers is Western Red Cedar because of its greater responsiveness to low-frequency resonances. This often results in a sweet and mellow sound as opposed to the more firm and clear tone of Spruce. Some sources suggest that the Cedar top has less capacity for tonal improvement during the guitar's playing life. The sides and back of classical guitars are almost always built of Rosewood.

[1] In addition to Evans and Evans, the reader may also refer in this regard to Cumpiano and Natelson (1993) and Courtnall (1993) referred to in the sources.

‘Here again there is a choice, between the East Indian and Brazilian varieties. Brazilian rosewood is more expensive and traditionally the first choice, though once again there is disagreement about the respective merits’ (Evans and Evans1977: 77-78).

Logically, the woods used for the sound-producing body timbers are chosen for their acoustic qualities. Structural considerations however guide the selection of timber for the neck and fingerboard because of the constant stress applied by the strings. ‘The necessary combination of strength, stability and lightness is found in mahogany and in Honduras cedar’ (Evan and Evans 1977: 78). Ebony is generally the wood of choice for fingerboards because of its hardness and subsequent ability to withstand years of playing. Woods that are quarter-sawn (cut along the radius of the log) are crucial as the grain forces causing planks to warp are kept to a minimum. It is also imperative that the wood is properly seasoned. This further decreases it tendency to warp as well as giving the wood greater strength and tonal response. For this, air drying is the generally preferred method, as it allows time for chemical changes which “cure” the wood.

2.2 Design

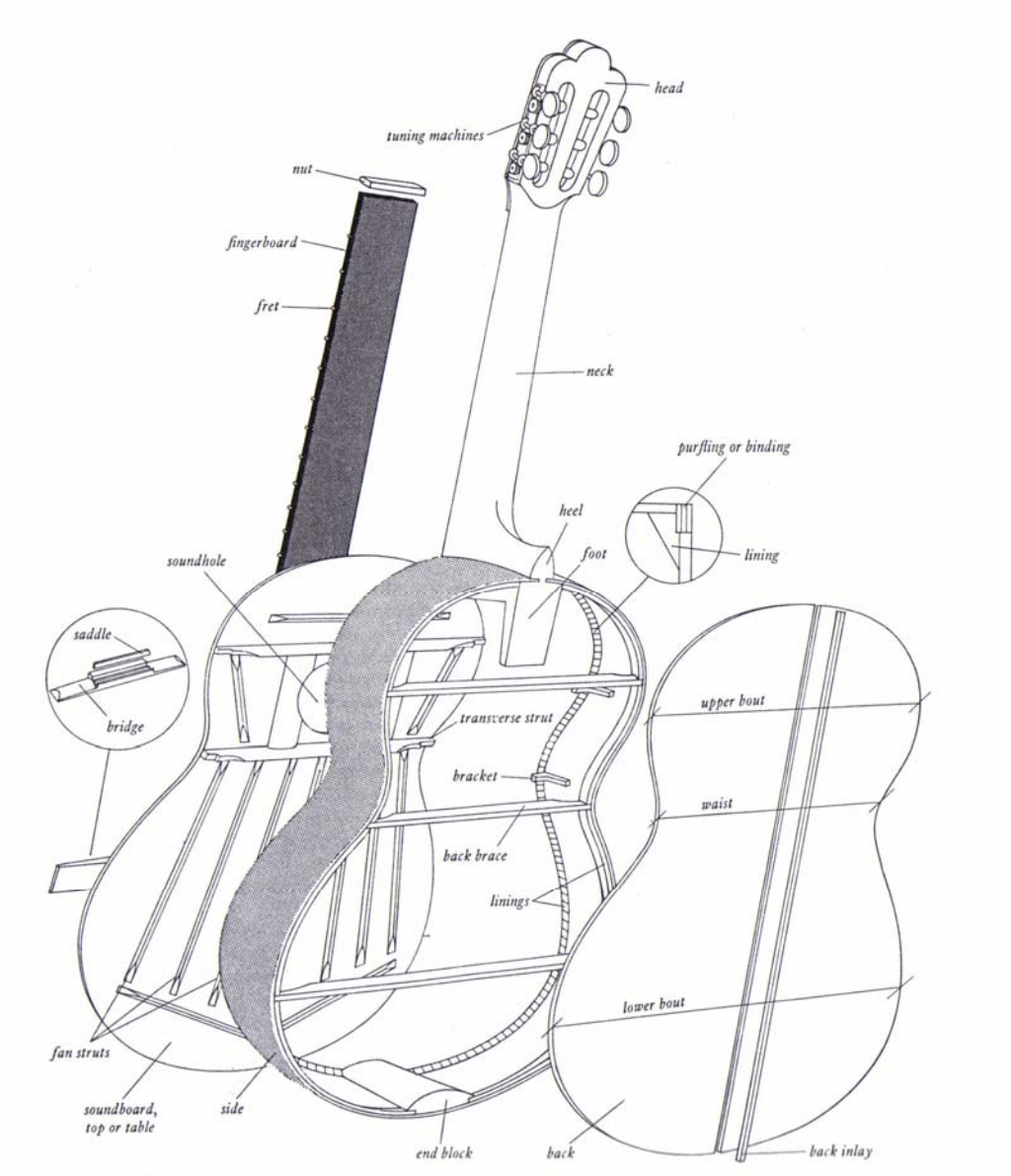

Figure 1.1 An exploded view of the classical guitar displaying the different parts.
(From: Evans and Evans 1977:76)

It needs to be noted that in this thesis *plantilla* refers to the outline shape of the guitar body and *solera* the workboard on which the struts are fixed to the soundboard.

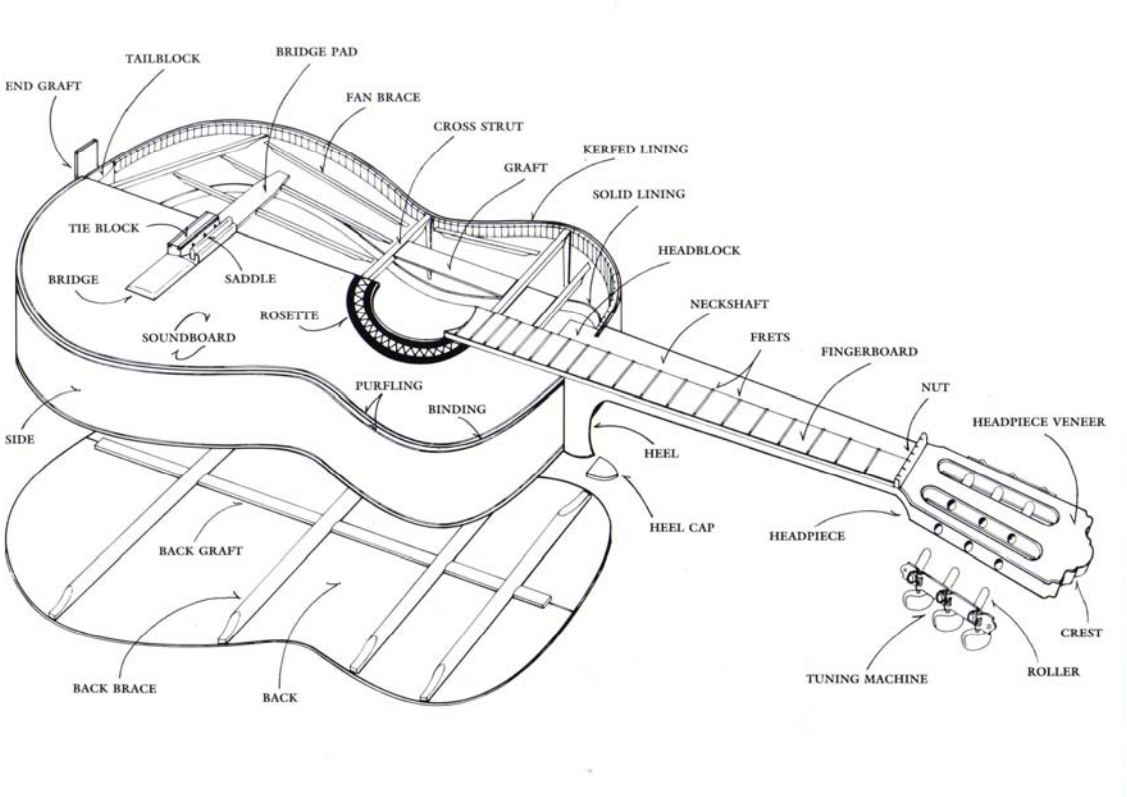

Figure 1.2 An exploded view of the classical guitar. (From: Cumpiano and Natelson 1993: 11)

Evans and Evans dissect the assembly of the classical guitar in the following manner:

> The assembly of a classical guitar is determined by the instrument's dual nature: it is both a physical and musical structure, and satisfying the requirements for both strength and responsiveness is not easy. The modern guitar has evolved to a point where it is sturdy enough to resist the pull of the strings on the neck and body without distortion, yet light and flexible enough to respond to the slightest musical vibrations (1977: 78-79).

They further identify a major inherent disadvantage in the design of the guitar[1], the fact that the body is in essence a 'flat box, and must be braced if it is to have any real strength. The full tension of the strings is transmitted directly to the flat top by the bridge. The top must resist the pull without distorting, but it must still be able to vibrate as a diaphragm. The difficulties created by this conflict have been further increased by the growth in size

[1] These 'inherent disadvantages' form the major motivating factor among luthiers and players that drives the developments and experiments discussed in this thesis.

of the modern instrument' (1977:79). They identify two solutions to this problem in the guitar's design:

1) The conformation of the heel, foot, sides (sliding into the foot), front and back that provides the guitar with a sturdy connection between the major components at the point of greatest stress using a minimum of material and giving the instrument a center of stability (1977: 79).

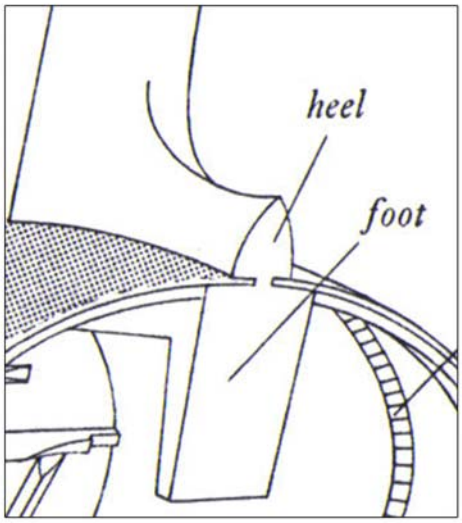

Figure 1.3 A diagram showing the sturdy connection between the major components at the point of greatest stress. (From: Evans and Evans 1977:76)

2) A highly developed system of strutting under the soundboard. The struts brace the soundboard against the pull of the strings as well as controlling its movement as diaphragm. 'This allows the top to be thinned down for responsiveness … By his adjustments to the thickness of the top and subtle placement of the strutting bars the skilled luthier can "tune" the response of the top to the whole range of frequencies in order to get his desired sound' (1977: 79).

Although the soundboard or top is by far the most important acoustic part of the guitar, the back and sides also play a role. The vibrating string sets the top in motion which in

turn projects sound waves both outward and inward with equal intensity. The inwardly projected waves are 'focused by the body before being projected out through the soundhole. They must not conflict with the waves emerging directly from the top, and every part of the body space must be fully activated' (Evans and Evans 1977: 79). A perfect balance is striven for between various physical dimensions such as body size, location and size of the soundhole, depth of the sides, and vibration characteristics of the front and back of the instrument. Evans and Evans stress however, that 'the interplay of variables is so complex that no exact rules can be formulated; the luthier must work for the most part by experience and intuition' (1977: 79). They also draw attention to the uncertain relationship between the size of the guitar and the volume it produces. The reason for this is that a larger-bodied guitar might in theory yield more volume in terms of decibels, but lack the penetration of sound in a large hall that could be produced by a smaller-bodied guitar with good balance and separation of notes (1977: 79).

3 CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUE AND ASSEMBLY

Continuing their discussion on guitar construction, design and assembly, Evans and Evans state that 'the procedures of the traditional Spanish method remain the basis of classical guitar construction' (1977: 79). They go on to list a breakdown of steps and general procedures that a luthier follows when constructing and assembling a guitar, reminding the reader of the fact that the individual nature of luthiers determines that operations and order of this process might vary.

The first step is to prepare the sides. This is done by planing and scraping them by hand until they reach a thickness of around 2mm or a little less. They are then bent to shape, usually by working the timber round a heated bending iron, consisting of an oval metal pipe. The heated timber becomes malleable and can be worked wet or dry[1] to form the correct curve. Most luthiers work freehand and once the sides have acquired their shape, they are put aside for a day or two to allow them to settle.

[1] Wet timber bends more easily, but dry timber undergoes fewer sudden changes of humidity, therefore saving time when used.

As mentioned earlier the neck is cut from Honduras Mahogany or Cedar and the extra thickness of timber required for the heel and foot can be laminated in layers. The neck itself is usually left rough and unshaped until it has been fitted to the body. The head of the guitar often consists of the same piece of timber as the neck and connected by a splice joint which provides the correct angle between the head and neck.

The head of the guitar is typically veneered, often with Rosewood, visually complementing the bridge. The distinctive carving of the top often forms a personal signature of the luthier. The soundboard and back are usually worked together, allowing the luthier to tune their resonant characteristics simultaneously and in reference to each other. 'Two thin, matched planks are glued together along a long edge which has been prepared smooth and flat, and the center inlay of the back is incorporated at this stage. It is usual, though not universal practice, to glue the timbers for the top so that the narrowest – and therefore stiffest – grain is in the center' (Evans and Evans 1977: 80). The reason for this is that the centre transmits the critical initial vibrations. Next the top will be glued and then planed before the rosette is inserted.

The rosette consists of a mosaic of little slivers of wood, less than 1mm square. These slivers are cut to the same length, sorted for colour and glued into small square logs. This process results in a specific pattern being formed on the end grain of the log. The logs are then tapered, causing them to fit together and form a circular ring of the correct radius of the rosette. Next, slices of around 3mm in thickness are cut from the ends of the logs. 'The slices will now fit together to form a many sided polygon which closely approximates the final circle of the rosette' (1977:81). The other parts of the rosette design consist of thin strips of veneer, cut to length and bent to form continuous perfect circles of the required size.

After the rosette has been inlaid, the top can be trimmed to its outline, planed and scraped to the desired thickness and the strutting can be fitted. This step is critical to the final outcome in terms of the sound of the guitar. Care must be taken to avoid having one aspect of the sound dominate the others, but that the full spectrum of frequencies comes

to the fore equally. Evans and Evans list the variables the luthier works with as 1) the thickness of the top, and 2) the number, layout, size and thickness of the struts, and stress that the number of possible combinations is enormous (1977: 81).

3.1 Thickness of the Top

After assessing the capabilities of the top, the luthier must make a judgment as to its potential sound qualities and path in realizing its full potential. A stiff board is more likely to have a good treble response. For Evans and Evans 'there is general agreement that it is not too difficult to achieve a good, rich bass. The real problem lies in getting a clear treble, one that has no "missing notes" and will stand up to the weight of the basses and ring through clearly' (1977: 81). A number of the strutting patterns experimented with through the years have been designed to stiffen up the treble side of the soundboard and thus boost the high frequency responses.

3.2 Number, Layout, Size and Thickness of the Struts

Apart from a number of acoustically critical fan bars, the underside of the soundboard also consists of cross braces providing stability at the waist and upper bout. Furthermore, stiffeners around the edge of the soundhole and a stiffening pad under the end of the fingerboard are sometimes found, helping to stop unwanted flutter in the top part of the soundboard. The various strutting patterns that have been employed are almost innumerable.

The top is clamped to a workboard while the struts are fixed and shaped. They are almost always made of the same wood as the top and must be thoroughly glued. The curves characteristic of the cross braces gives the table a very shallow arch. Because arching increases the strength of the instrument and prevents the formation of standing waves,[1] the back is also slightly arched. It is during the shaping of the struts that the luthier applies his specific tuning. Techniques for doing this vary greatly. Some luthiers tune the top to a specific note by tapping it while others listen for patterns of harmonics.

[1] Vibrations that can build up between two flat surfaces, causing them to amplify until they dominate.

The back consists of three cross struts as well as a centre fillet over the joint between the two halves and is also tuned in the same manner as the top. It is important for the top and back to be acoustically compatible. However, there is no consensus as to the way in which to achieve this.

3.3 Assembly of the Neck and Body

The next step is to glue the neck and body assembly together. To make this process easier, the glue area between the sides and the top is increased by using small triangular blocks, placed close together all around the junction, or by using a solid wooden lining. The back is attached to the sides in a similar way. Once the neck, top and sides are together, the back can be glued in its place and then trimmed to size. Attention must be paid during this process as to the correct alignment of the neck and its tilt relative to the body as this greatly affects the action of the guitar. The luthier can now inlay the purflings at the junctions between top and sides as well as sides and back. Apart from enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the guitar, they seal off the end grain of sides, top and back, thus inhibiting the absorption of moisture. The head can at this stage be veneered, carved and slotted for machines. The fingerboard needs to be shaped and fitted next. The underside extends along the neck and over the neck to the edge of the soundhole. The top of the fingerboard is usually tapered from nut to soundhole to accommodate the pattern of the vibrating string. Also, the bass strings vibrate with a larger displacement than the trebles, hence the saddle may be raised on the bass string side or the fingerboard tapered away. In fretting the guitar, consideration of the scale length[1] is of utmost importance. The frets must me marked out and positioned with great accuracy, insuring a guitar that will be in tune at all points. The musical scale in use today almost to the exclusion of all others is that of equal temperament. This scale divides the octave into twelve perfectly equal semitones. This necessitates the use of a mathematical equation, namely that of F.L = constant, where F is frequency and L is string length, to determine the fretting calculations. The frets themselves are made of T-shaped pieces of nickel silver wire cut from a role. To fit the frets, grooves are cut at appropriate places in the fingerboard with a fine blade saw resulting in a pressure fit without the use of glue. This is done by

[1] The standard scale length as used by Torres being 650 mm.

hammering individual pieces slightly longer than needed into slots and then trimmed to length and filed smooth. Now the neck can be given its final shaping, the bridge and nut fitted and the neck and heel carved to shape. The bridge, consisting of a rectangular block of Rosewood, is glued to the top and sometimes inlaid with mosaic matching the rosette. The exact positioning of the bridge is as critical as the positioning of the frets to ensure a guitar perfectly in tune. This includes compensating for the increased tension of a stopped string which means that luthier must add about 2mm to the actual scale length resulting in a nominal scale length. The saddle and nut are made from ivory, mainly because it retains its beauty where as bone yellows with age (Evans and Evans 1977: 84-86).

Finally, the guitar is polished. Evans and Evans are of the opinion that, provided that the varnish is applied in normal quantities, the effect it has on the sound is slight (1977: 86). The entire guitar with the exception of the fingerboard is first sealed with a thin coat of shellac. After this, the Rosewood body and the Cedar or Mahogany neck is worked over with filler to fill their open pore system. This filler must be dried before the varnish or polish can be applied. The whole guitar receives varnish or polish, save the fingerboard which remains in its natural state. Of theses finishes, French polish, oil and spirit varnishes and lacquers are most commonly used. French polish is however the traditional finish for the best guitars because of its aesthetic appeal and acoustic properties, but entails a difficult and time-consuming process. It involves applying shellac polish with a cloth in progressively thinner layers finally glossed to perfection by using pure alcohol to remove excess oil. Oil varnishes are more flexible and slower-drying. Both nitrocellulose and acrylic spray are also sometimes used. Lacquers again are very durable and easy to apply and they work up to a very hard gloss (Evans and Evans 1977: 87).

Once the varnish has hardened, and is dried and polished, the machine heads can be fitted and the guitar strung. It is important for the gears of the machine heads to be free of play and turn easily and smoothly.

At this stage the completed guitar is ready to be played in. This is done to allow the wood to optimally respond to all required frequencies and is done by the player, playing all the

pitches at his/her disposal often enough for the guitar to increasingly respond to all their frequencies. The length of this 'playing in' stage varies greatly from one guitar to another.

Having now arrived at a greater understanding of what the guitar construction process entails, a clearer idea of comparative differences in style of particular prominent luthiers emerges.

CHAPTER 2

PROMINENT INTERNATIONAL LUTHIERS, PAST AND PRESENT

Summerfield points to a parallel development and growth of the guitarist as performer and the instrument itself. This relationship between player and builder is not unique to the guitar, but does form a very prominent and characteristic feature of the development of the guitar. He identifies the collaboration between Sor and Panormo, Carulli and Lacote, Tarrega and Torres and states that 'it was the joint efforts of these great guitar figures that led to the ideas that contributed to the development of the guitar as we know it today' (1996: 329). More recently the guitar has seen similar collaborations such as Segovia and Hauser, Bream and Romanillos, and Williams and Smallman. In this chapter I shall seek to highlight and explain some of these collaborations[1], but more importantly, I will look at the innovations and trademark features of those luthiers who have gained international renown. An in-depth, exhaustive study of all the important luthiers the world has seen will serve no purpose in this study. I will attempt instead to feature some important figures in luthiery that have been selected by virtue of the fact that they have influenced, in one way or another, South African luthiers, as became clear in the interviews I conducted with them. The place each occupies within a larger context of world luthiery is succinctly shown in Summerfield's diagram, reproduced here as figure 2.1. In addition, the selected luthiers also show the different national manifestations of luthiery, as they represent luthiery in Spain, Germany, England, France and Australia. Against this context we might consider the extent to which it may be possible to consider a South African manifestation alongside these.

[1] In the next two chapters of this thesis I shall consider similar collaborations amongst South African luthiers and guitarists.

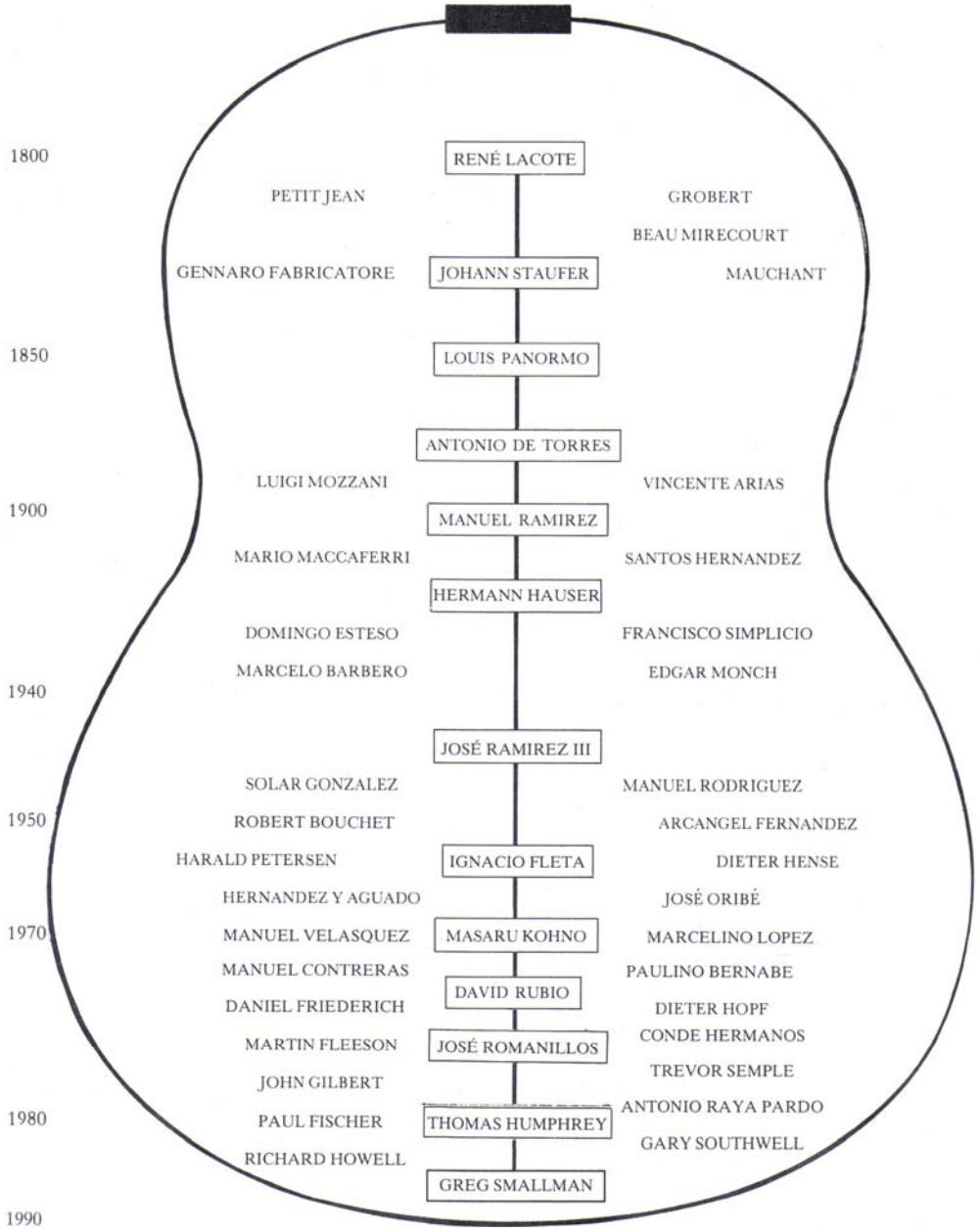

Figure 2.1 A diagram plotting the most influential luthiers in historical perspective.
(From: Summerfield 1996: 328)

1 ANTONIO DE TORRES (1817 – 92)

Torres is without a doubt one of the landmark luthiers and one of the most important figures in the history and development of the guitar. Summerfield calls him 'the man to whom we owe the modern concert guitar' (1996: 332). Wade makes a similar observation in saying that 'Torres was one of the most inventive luthiers in the guitar's history and, in a sense, created the modern guitar as we know it' and his instruments 'established themselves as prototypes for all subsequent guitar makers of distinction' (1980: 133). Courtnall takes a more balanced stance in assimilating Torres, stating that 'his followers are convinced that the Torres contribution to guitar design is paramount, and that his reputation is more than justified. His critics view Torres much more as being one maker amongst many, and not all contemporary makers would acknowledge him as a major influence on their work' (1993: 29). Courtnall's reason for saying this becomes clear in his next statement:

> This is especially true of the most recent experimenters in guitar design, who are attempting to discard virtually all preconceived ideas in the hope of making radically new instruments. They are utilizing scientific data as their major source, rather than any historical or intuitive references' (1993: 29).

In this statement we can see Courtnall making a clear distinction between a more "traditional school" of luthiery and a "modern approach". I shall return to interrogate this distinction in greater detail in the next chapter of this thesis.

1.1 The Life of Torres

Antonio Torres was born on 13 June, 1817 in La Caňada de San Urbano. His father, Juan Ramon de Torres, was at this stage in his fifties and his wife and Torres' mother, Maria del Carmen Jurado, in her mid-fourties. In his teens, Torres and his family moved to *Vera* where he probably attended one of the two primary schools and served an apprenticeship as a carpenter. In 1834 he was called up for military service despite his father's best efforts to prevent this and settled in a town called Lorca. On 16 February 1835, soon after

his discharge, he married thirteen-year-old Juana Maria Lopez who was a native of *Vera* and daughter of the local shopkeeper. At this stage Torres was a qualified carpenter belonging to the local guild of carpenters. In 1845 his wife, at the age of twenty three, died of tuberculosis. Torres then moved to the royal city of Sevilla for reasons not altogether clear. This city contained 'six guitar making shops, more than seventy carpenters and cabinet makers, dozens of chair makers and other woodworkers' (Romanillos 1987: 13).

Although Torres made his first guitar in Grenada between 1836 and 1842, by 1854 he was building guitars in Sevilla and it was there that he started building guitars on a full-time basis and where he must have come into contact with some of the leading eighteenth-century guitar makers such as Sanguino, Pages, Benedid and Perez. He started his professional career as guitar maker in Sevilla round about 1850 on the advice of Julián Arcas, a prominent guitarist who played on Torres instruments until his death. Arcas' continued advice and motivation had a lasting influence on Torres, to such an extent that Romanillos views his contact with Arcas in the early 1850's as one of two landmarks in his career, the second being the bronze medal he won at the Sevilla guitar exhibition in 1858. His reputation as the leading guitar maker of that era was now confirmed (Romanillos 1987: 21). In 1868, he married Josefa Martin Rosado, with whom he had a son in 1860. It was not long after this second marriage that Tarrega visited Torres in Sevilla. Tarrega was accompanied by his patron of that period, Canesa Mendayas. They had traveled from Barcelona to obtain a Torres guitar similar in quality to the one Arcas used in a concert attended by some of Tarrega's friends. The young Tarrega, still in his teens, was taken to Sevilla to choose his own guitar because of his great talent. Interestingly, Torres initially offered the young Tarrega one of the cheaper guitars, but after hearing him play, he fetched his favourite guitar he made for himself in 1864 (Romanillos 1987: 22). This guitar Tarrega played for more than twenty years, and it always remained his favourite, even after acquiring two more Torres instruments at a later stage. At this stage, as observed by Romanillos, Tarrega's career as a guitarist went from strength to strength, but that of Torres as a guitar maker came to a temporary halt (1987: 22).

After deciding that the guitar-making business was no longer commercially viable, Torres decided to move and return to the province of Almería, where he opened a china shop in the capital of the same name. Romanillos is of the opinion that Torres must have discussed the financial viability of being a full time guitar builder with Arcas, and that it is 'more than a coincidence that they both returned to their past activities after a few years but they both died almost in poverty' (1987: 23). During this time Torres did however train an apprentice guitar maker and by 1875, he was once again making his own instruments. We therefore identify two epochs in the work of Torres. The first one lasted from 1852 to 1869, and second from1875 to 1892. We can also draw a definite distinction between two kinds of instruments he produced. The cheaper ones he built for ordinary clients, and the superior instruments he built for performers. Arcas, who had opened a cereal business, made a return to the stage in 1876. In 1881, at the age of sixty four, Torres acquired his first house in a suburb of Almería, but did not occupy it until 1883, just a few weeks before the death of his second wife due to cancerous growths. This was also the year he decided to dedicate himself seriously to the making of guitars. 'Until 1883, he had produced on average six guitars each year; but from 1883 until 1892, the average number of instruments made annually rose to twelve' (Romanillos 1987: 28). We also witness a new-found enthusiasm for guitar making in Torres, possibly due to Tarrega's commission of a second guitar. However, he struggled greatly to recapture the quality of sound he had achieved in the earlier guitars of Sevilla. A sojourn to Barcelona in 1885 that lasted several months proved to be invaluable because of the stimulation he received from his meeting with builders and players there.

In 1887 he befriended a young parish priest, Juan Martínez Sirvent and this friendship lasted until Torres' death. Sirvent was to Torres a spiritual confidant, but also someone who helped him in his work as a guitar maker, particularly in the gluing of the backs, ribs and soundboards of his instruments, since Torres, now aged seventy, lacked the steadiness of hand crucial for work of precision required in many processes in guitar building.

Torres died at 4 p.m. on 19 November 1892 in Almería. His death certificate lists the cause of death as 'acute intestinal catarrh' (Romanillos 1987: 35).

1.2 Features of the Torres Instruments

1.2.1 Woods

Romanillos states that 'Cypress, rosewood and maple are the three main types of wood Torres used for the ribs and backs of his guitars' (1987: 63). He further suspects, in considering the evidence at our disposal today, that Rosewood was his first choice. The variety used by Torres is the *Delbergia niââgra* variety originating from Brazil. Romanillos draws a further important conclusion in that 'Cedar, ebony, rosewood, maple, walnut and cypress were all used in the eighteenth century for guitar making, but it was not until the work of Torres became well known from the mid-nineteenth century onwards that rosewood was universally accepted as the best wood for classical instruments' (1987: 64). He goes further in saying that:

> …the selection of wood for guitar making in Torres' case was governed by the type of instrument desired and the availability of woods. At least eight types of woods are known to have been used by Torres and also an experimental guitar made of papier mâché. This papier mâché guitar was made to prove Torres' belief that the soundboard was the fundamental part of the guitar and responsible for the overall sound quality of the guitar (1987: 65).

Thus, Torres' criterion in selecting woods used for the body of the guitar was based on aesthetics or availability, rather than the acoustic properties of the wood.

In studying the woods used for the soundboards of the guitar, Romanillos observes that 'he did not acquire them as matched sets of tonewood' (1987: 69). In fact, very few soundboards of the existing Torres guitars feature book-matched halves. Thus Torres placed greater importance in using wood that was quarter-sawn containing fibres that were parallel to the surface of the wood than using book-matched with even annual rings.

Romanillos summarizes the soundboards Torres made in saying that they were made with:

(a) 'wood fibres parallel to the soundboard;
(b) quarter-sawn wood, that is with annual growth rings perpendicular to the soundboard;
(c) the closest annual rings in the centre of the soundboard' (1987: 70).

These requirements meant that Torres did not always have a steady supply of suitable woods to use as tops, and was sometimes forced to make soundboards consisting of more than two pieces, although he always preferred the two-piece soundboard with the joint in the centre. Pine wood was also used by Torres for the transverse bars of the cheaper guitars as well as the occasional superior guitars (Romanillos 1987: 73).

Torres mainly used Cedar of the *Cedrela spp* variety for the necks of his guitars and, on occasion, transverse bars in the backs, linings, end-block and supporting rib block. The main reasons for his use thereof for the necks, were their availability and intrinsic qualities such as lightness, stability and easiness of working (Romanillos 1987: 73). Romanillos further notes that 'the heads of Torres' guitars are faced with a rosewood veneer for the better instruments and walnut for the cheaper ones' (1987: 74).

1.2.2 Soundboard Patterns

The first Torres instruments emanating from the 1850's are significant in that they are larger bodied instruments than those representing the first part of the nineteenth century and in this, we see the first important structural feature significantly influenced by Torres. Romanillos explains his influence in the following way: 'In a few years Torres was able to overthrow the traditions of past centuries, introduce and establish a new instrument. Several factors were involved in this new development – for example, the use of radial struts, soundboard arching and different wood thickness – but the new *plantilla* was a major contributory factor in achieving this notable change' (1987: 75). He goes on to identify a 10:13 ratio between upper and lower bouts and the waist at approximately two fifths of the body length and corresponding to the lower radius of the soundhole (1987:

78). Furthermore, Romanillos identifies the relocation of the bridge from the lower bout position to coincide roughly with the epicenter of the lower bout, which acts as a diaphragm, as an important step in the design of the modern concert guitar, 'and arguably the most significant step in evolving a new sonority' (1987: 79). The importance of this step cannot be underestimated as this radically altered the character of the sound away from the lute-like resonance of the smaller-bodied guitars. In practical terms, this change of bridge position meant that the:

> … domed soundboard gained a true diaphragmatic motion rather than a lopsided one and accordingly the stresses upon the soundboard were more evenly distributed. This relocation of the bridge brought about a new range of subtleties of sound and increased the resonance which was marked particularly in the depth of the bass notes thus helping to lessen the percussional effect so apparent in earlier instruments and bringing a uniformly sustained sound to the instrument (Romanillos 1987: 79).

In this regard, Torres also made a contribution to the later separate development of the flamenco guitar, but that is another matter entirely. The particular physical dimensions and strutting patterns of two selected Torres guitars, one represented from each epoch, is shown in figures 2.2 to 2.5. These illustrations provide a clear basis for comparison of the different stylistic traits.

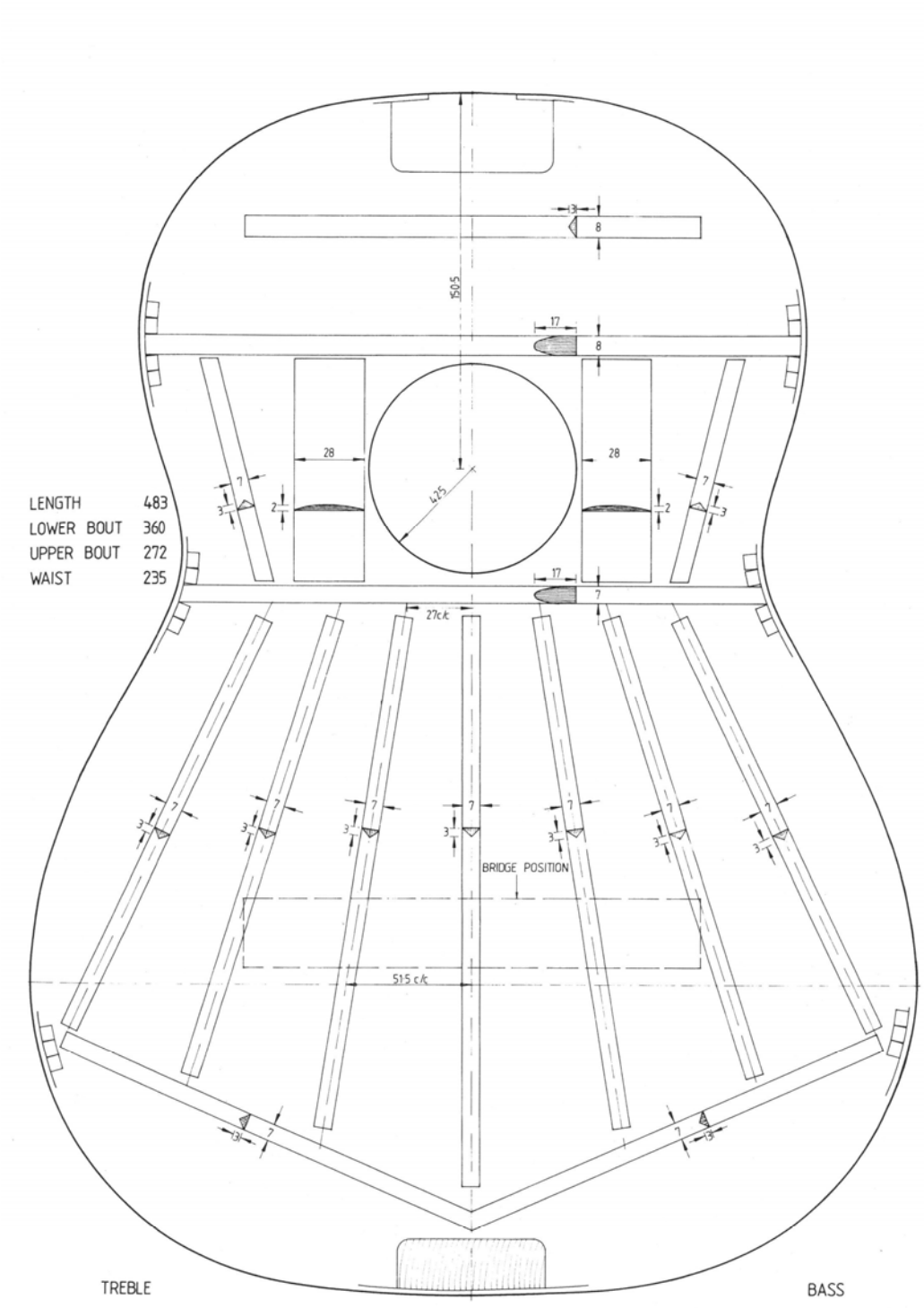

Figure 2.2 The soundboard and strutting pattern of a larger-bodied guitar developed by Torres. (From: Courtnall 1993: 37)

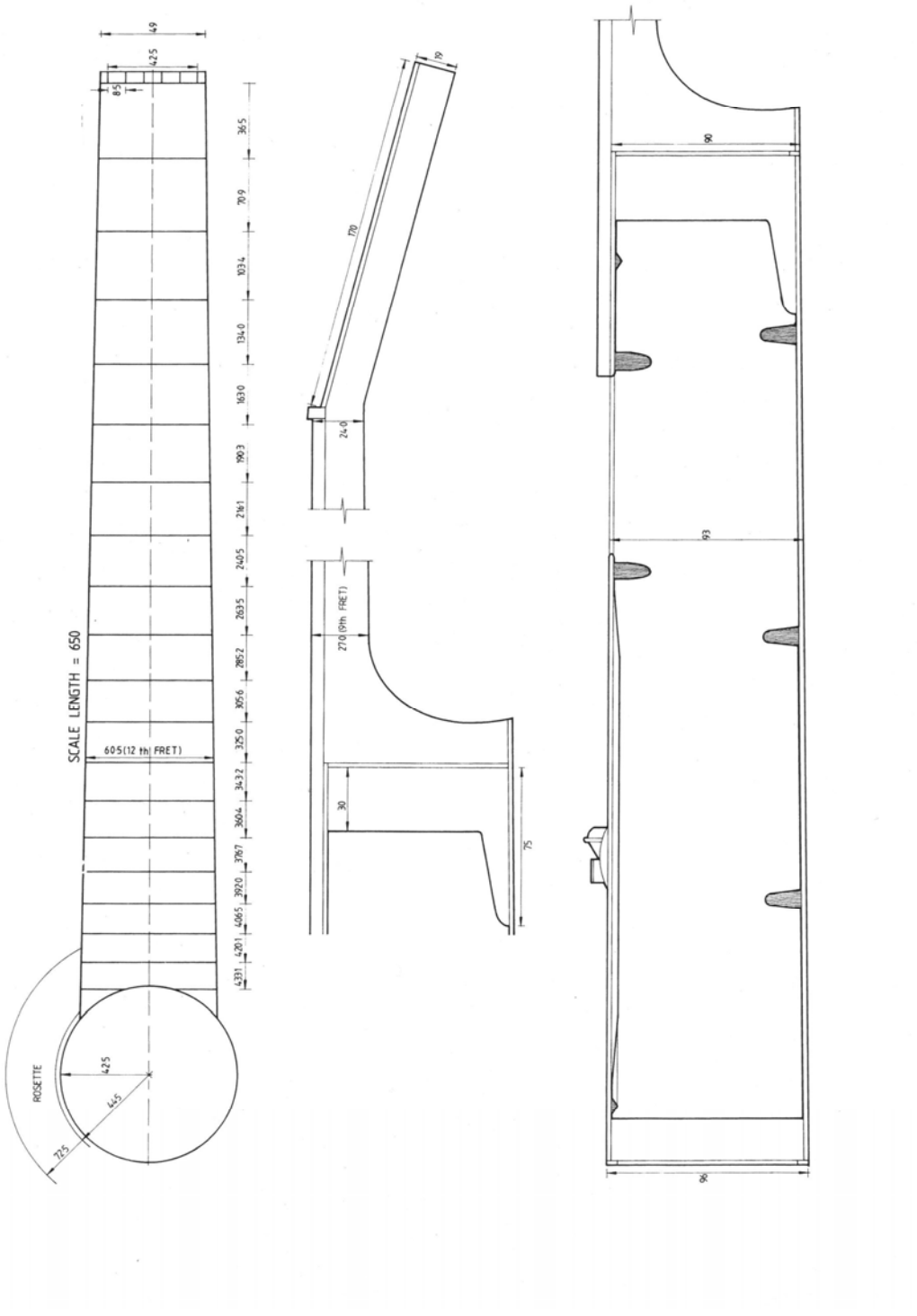

Figure 2.3 The physical dimensions of the Torres guitar featured in figure 2.2.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 38)

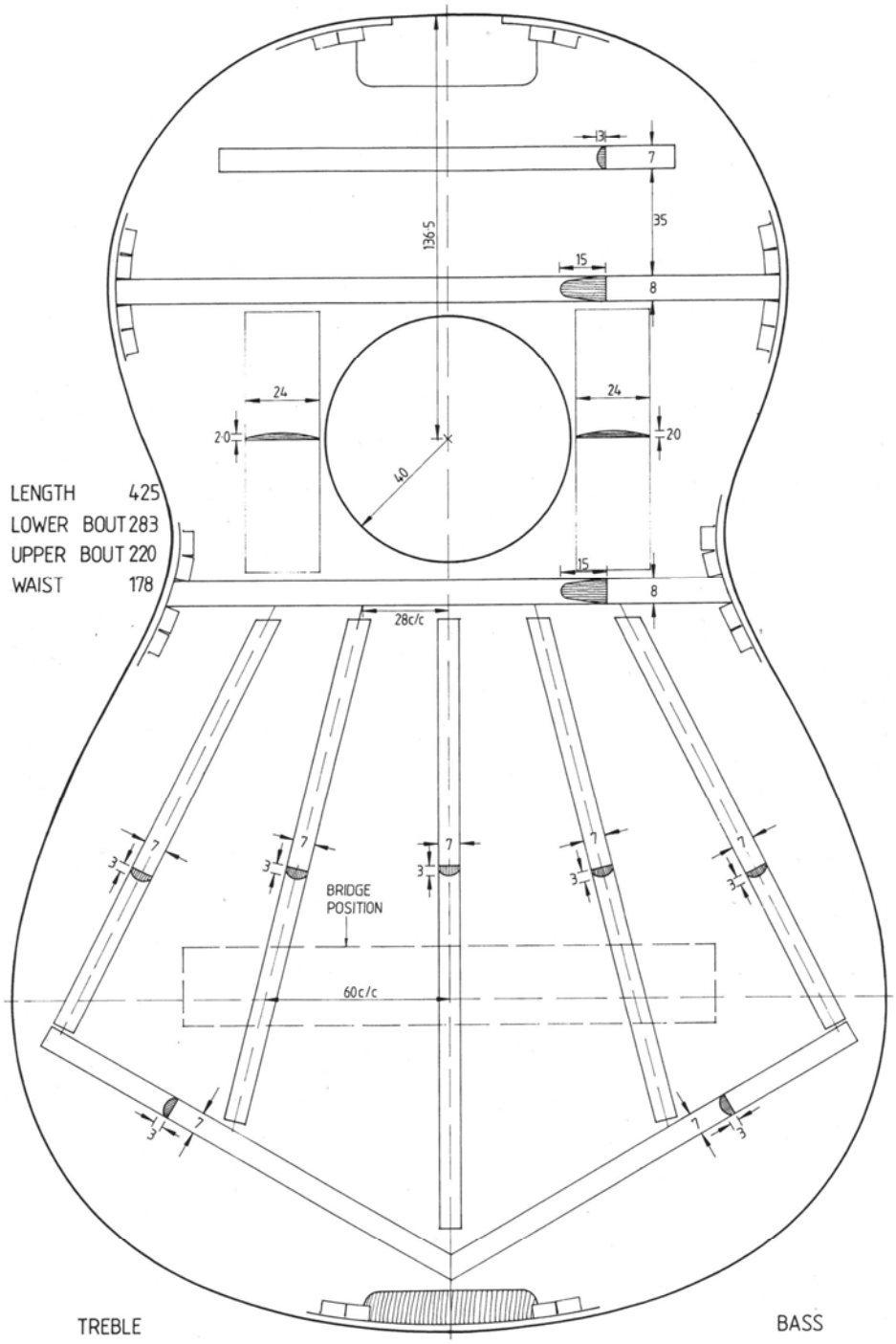

Figure 2.4 The soundboard and strutting pattern of a smaller-bodied Torres guitar.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 44)

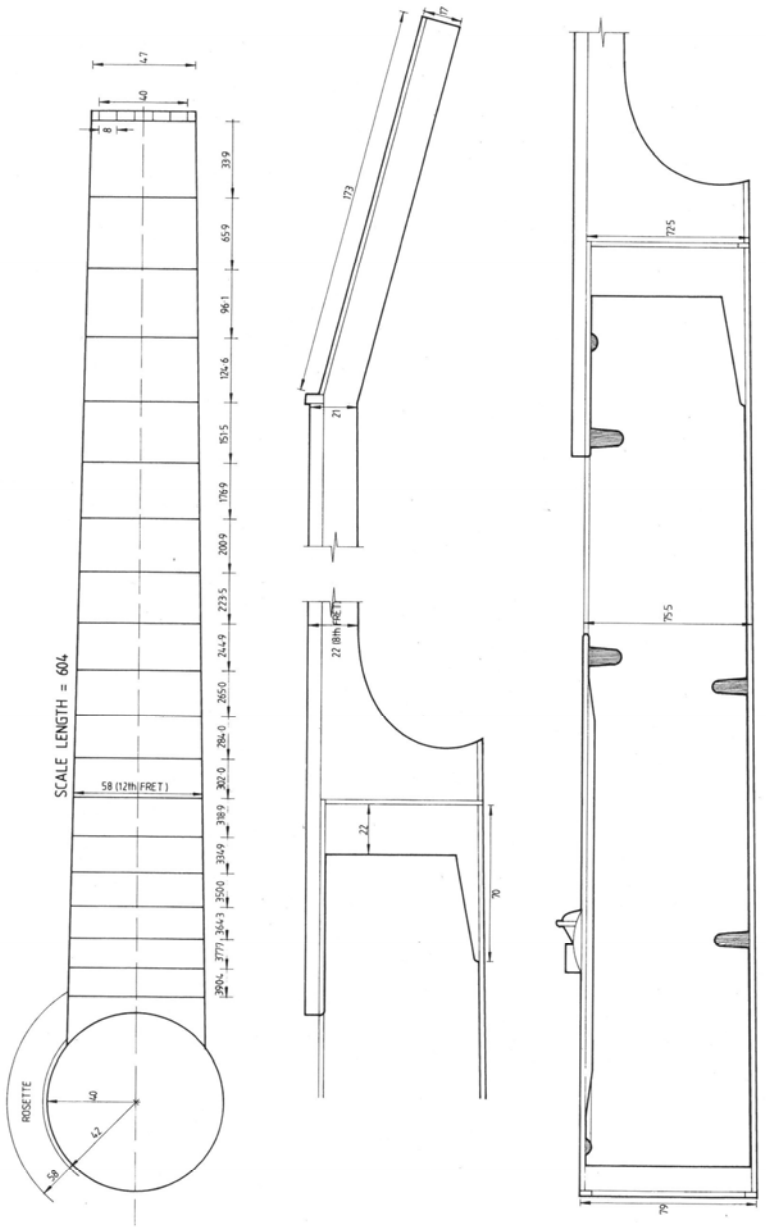

Figure 2.5 The physical dimensions of the Torres guitar featured in figure 2.4.

(From: Courtnall 1993: 45)

1.2.3 Construction Techniques

For Romanillos, Torres' 'emphasis in achieving a light-structured guitar is indicative of his intuitive understanding for the laws of vibrating bodies, for although his guitars were larger in size than those of his contemporaries, they do not show a corresponding increase in weight' (1987: 86). He cites the fact that the doming visible from the guitars of his first epoch indicates that Torres was introducing new structural and acoustical ideas that can not be seen in other guitars of the same period. 'He realized that it is easier to get a lighter guitar into vibration than a heavier one, and that vibrations are energy which in turn produces the sound we hear' (Romanillos 1987: 86). Romanillos goes further in summarizing Torres' skill as luthier:

> He knew, just as it is known today, that the sound-quality of a guitar did not depend on a single particular facet but that there had to be a total integration of all the factors involved, the unification of size and shape of the guitar; the string length in relation to body size in order to find the right tessitura of the sound; the distribution and assessing of the final thickness (of the soundboard in particular) and finally in the method of assembly to achieve the unification (1987: 86).

How Torres achieved this unification remained a mystery and wonder to those who knew his work. When once asked about his "secret" in this regard, he is quoted as saying that 'this will go to the tomb with me for it is the result of the feel of the tips of the thumb and forefinger communicating to my intellect whether the soundboard is properly worked out to correspond with the guitar maker's concept of the sound required of the instrument' (Romanillos 1987: 87).

As mentioned earlier, Torres considered the soundboard the only real critical part of the guitar in terms of sound production. It is therefore important to note that his conception of the soundboards differed to those of his contemporaries. He realized the basic differences between the guitar and an instrument such as the violin. Bowed instruments derive duration of the sound through continuous energizing of the bow, whereas the plucked guitar cannot rely on the same method of creating energy. Torres therefore

produced a ‘neutralized membrane to respond selectively to the musical notes of the range of the guitar’ (Romanillos 1987: 91).

Torres domed the soundboards by holding them face down onto the scooped-out *solera.* The correctly cut struts he glued straight onto the soundboard, thus forcing both soundboard and struts onto the curvature of the *solera* during the gluing process. The final shaping of the struts would then be done after they were glued onto the soundboard. Torres would make use of his fingers to arrive at a final optimum point of flexibility of the soundboard by controlling the height of the struts (Romanillos 1987: 92).

‘He used three systems of strutting; the main one used for his best guitars … had seven radial struts plus the two diagonal ones; another type had five radial struts and the two diagonal struts, and the simplest of all types had only five radial struts’ (Romanillos 1987: 92). Interestingly, while other contemporary guitar makers were continually experimenting with different strut combinations, Torres stuck to the same pattern throughout his career. He maintained, from the onset of his career, ‘the same number of radial struts, either five or seven, with the same symmetrical lay-out, and the only variation in forty years was the extending of some of the struts to run under the harmonic bar through the apertures opened for that purpose’ (Romanillos 1987: 100). It is clear that Torres assembled his guitars in the “traditional” way. This was done with the guitar face down on the *solera*, having already cut the *plantilla* to shape. The neck and end-block were glued onto the soundboard. This formed the basis for assembling the ribs and the back. He was also acutely aware of the effect that humidity had on the assembly of a guitar, especially after having worked in Sevilla where the variations in relative humidity could vary from 50% to 80% (Romanillos 1987: 105). Torres used at least six different types of bridges in his guitars. Romanillos says when referring to bridges that the ‘bridge of the guitar as we know it today is a relatively modern invention consolidated by Torres although he was not the inventor’ (1987: 111). He invariably used Rosewood for his bridges, with some mother-of-pearl or ivory dots ornamentation in his finest guitars. Torres decorated his guitars according to status requirements of the guitar. The use of wood mosaic inlays is therefore limited to the finer instruments. The cheaper instruments

feature modest decorations consisting of simple patterns around the soundholes. For the more expensive guitars, the most commonly used patterns were the herring-bone motif, the meander pattern and the lozenge effect.

In terms of the rosette patterns used for his guitars, Torres made each one up separately from guitar to guitar, resulting in the fact that no two identical rosettes have been found in all his surviving guitars. The purflings of his guitars are also divided into two distinct groups. The finer instruments feature the herring-bone motif enhanced by strips of coloured woods decorating the borders. The purflings of the cheaper instruments are made up of dark and light strips inserted in the soundboard only (Romanillos 1987: 138).

In terms of tuning devices, Torres made use of one of two types. Either the individual wooden pegs used for the cheaper guitars, or the mechanical system (known as machine heads) for his better instruments. The scale length of 650mm became standardized by Torres, although it was in use before his time. He also made use of two types of frets. Firstly the traditional t-shaped wire fret used in his better instruments, and secondly, a square one that he used in his cheaper instruments (Romanillos 1987: 118).

In the time spanning the two epochs of Torres' career, he built an estimated total of 320 guitars of which only about 70 have survived.

1.2.4 Torres' Sound

Romanillos writes that the Torres guitars in the hands of Arcas, Tarrega and others, produced an intrinsically Spanish sound with an emphasis on the sensual and romantic character of the sound. This he attributes to the lighter weight of the Torres guitar that allowed it to respond to the virtuosic approach of Arcas. 'Time and again reviewers remarked on the range of sonorities and effects that he was able to cajole from his guitar' (1987: 162).It was at a recital given by Arcas in 1862 that Tarrega first encountered the sound of the Torres instrument in concert, and which resulted in his acquiring his first Torres guitar in 1869. In this regard Romanillos writes:

There was something special about the Torres sound that won the hearts of learned musicians and laborers alike; even those inexpensive guitars that Torres made for neighbors, friends and family with clear, distinctive and appealing sound took on legendary proportions (1987: 165).

2 HERMANN HAUSER (1882 – 1952)

According to Courtnall, Hermann Hauser can be regarded as the finest German guitar maker and can be classed along with Torres as having influenced many twentieth-century luthiers. Hauser's rise as a luthier came at a time when guitar making in Spain was experiencing a serious decline. Romanillos writes that 'Spain was sadly lacking the great craftsmen to replace the older generations' (1987: 54). Courtnall suggests that although some feel that he did not capture the 'true Spanish sound', many see his instruments as superior to those of Torres and identifies Julian Bream and Andres Segovia as but two guitarists who consistently played on Hausers (1993: 61).

2.1 The Life of Hauser

Hermann Hauser's father, Joseph Hauser, first introduced his son to instrument making, also being a talented composer and zither player. He won many medals and presentations from the German state for his achievements in music. Hermann extended his father's instrument-making profession, building a vast range of stringed instruments at the beginning of his career. The first guitars he built were based on the small-bodied mid-nineteenth century French guitars (Summerfield 1996: 333).

In 1924, the influential figure of Segovia visited Germany where Hauser had the opportunity to meet him. At one occasion Segovia attended a concert in Munich where a group of musicians played on Hauser instruments. Their conversations during this time resulted in the turning point of Hauser's career. Before this, Hauser was making guitars that did not resemble the so-called Spanish method of construction, as they were primarily smaller instruments, drawing on the baroque German tradition. Their features included fingerboards and soundboards on the same plane, narrow and elongated *plantillas* and soundholes that followed the lute tradition of including an elaborately carved rose. Courtnall quotes Segovia in his recollection of his impressions on viewing the Hauser instruments after hearing them in concert the previous evening:

> I examined them all and immediately foresaw the potential of this superb artisan if only his mastery might be applied to the construction of the guitar in the Spanish pattern as immutably fixed by Torres and Ramirez as the violin had been fixed by Stradivarius and Guarnerius (1993: 61).

Segovia in turn introduced Hauser to a 1912 Hernandes guitar made in the Ramirez workshop that belonged to him. This afforded Hauser the opportunity to asses the measurements and character of the guitar, and allowed him to work towards a more specific goal. In 1937, over twelve years later, he produced a guitar governed by Segovia's criteria which Segovia described as 'the greatest guitar of our epoch' (Courtnall 1993: 62). From this, it is evident that Hauser's initial influence came from his understanding of the Ramirez/Hernandes design. However, he did also have extended access to Torres guitars through his friend and recitalist, Miguel Llobet who played on Torres instruments. This resulted in Hauser's work showing close resemblance to that of Torres from 1940 onwards (Courtnall 1993: 62).

2.2 Features of the Hauser Instruments

Hauser developed his ideas concerning strutting over a long period, making it difficult to describe any one design as typical. Some of his guitars do however show a seven-radiating strut pattern closely resembling that of Torres. He did not always include the two short diagonal struts at the base of the soundboard and, from 1930, experimented with open harmonic bars. His later instruments show a very close resemblance to the Torres pattern in that the struts are laid out in relation to a theoretical apex on the fingerboard. He also shaped the fan struts like gable-ends, with a definite ridge on the top. Another strong Torres-influenced feature of the Hauser instruments is the dome in the soundboard which gives an inherent strength to the soundboard, enabling the wood to be worked quite thin. Hauser's strutting also show a preference for struts in the central area (below the bridge) to be quite tall, whereas the outer struts become more squat. He also included a flat Spruce plate on the inside of the soundboard, directly below the bridge in order to balance the bridge, resulting in a more even quality of sound across all the strings (Courtnall 1993: 63).

Hauser further used a *plantilla* with dimensions within the range and shapes developed by Torres and Ramirez. He used the "traditional Spanish" method of joining the ribs into slots cut in the neck, whilst the head section was attached with the use of a 'V' joint. Hauser also based many of his head designs on those of Torres. This consists of a large central arch, flanked by two smaller arches. Some instruments' heads also feature intricate relief carving in the veneer. Most of the rosette designs feature simple patterns and natural colours. The majority of motifs are based on patterns used by Torres where Hauser makes use of a standard 650mm scale length (Courtnall 1993: 63).

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 show the physical dimensions and strutting pattern employed by Hermann Hauser which displays the strong Torres influence.

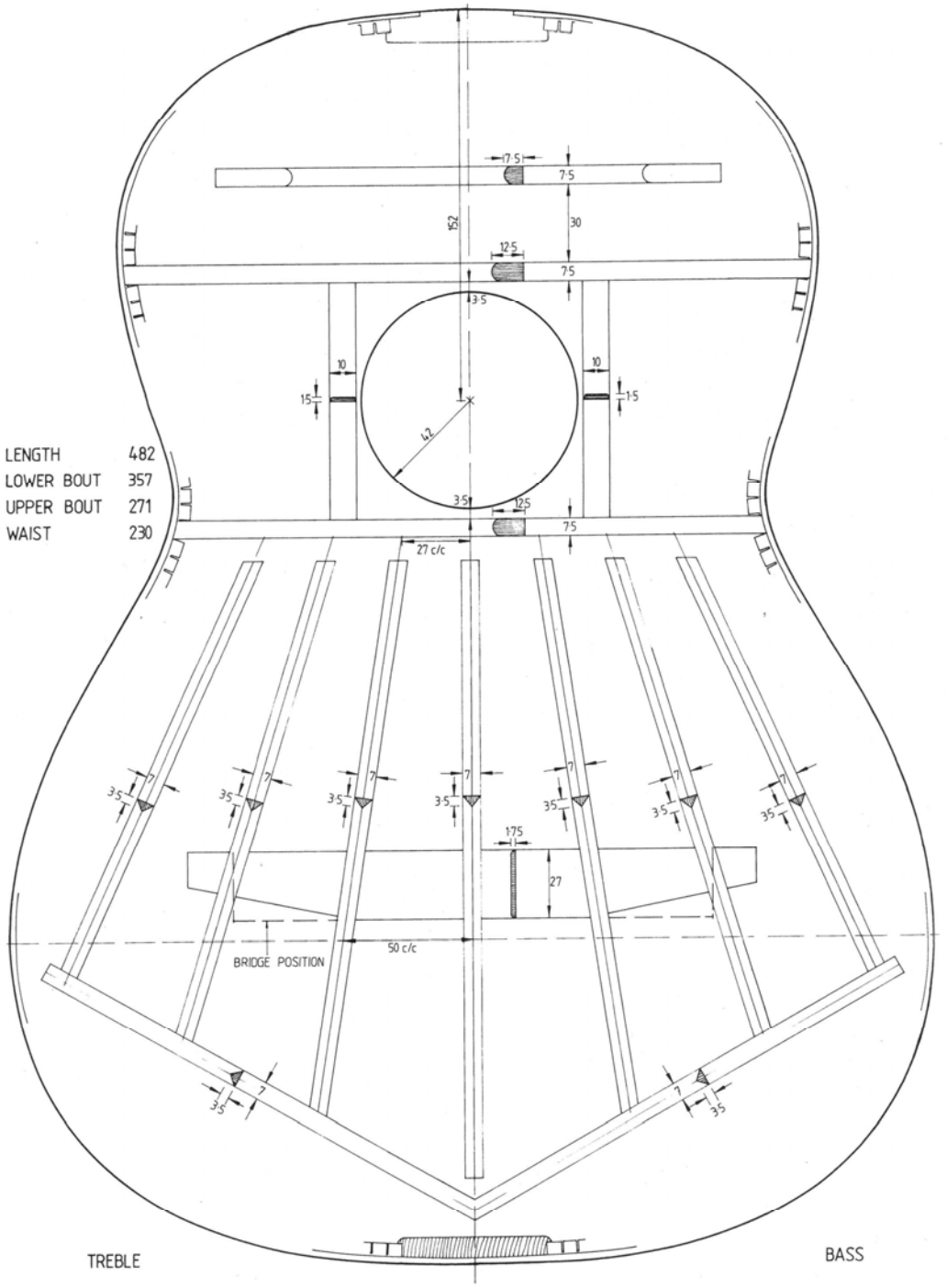

Figure 2.6 The soundboard and strutting pattern of a Hauser instrument.

(From: Courtnall 1993: 66)

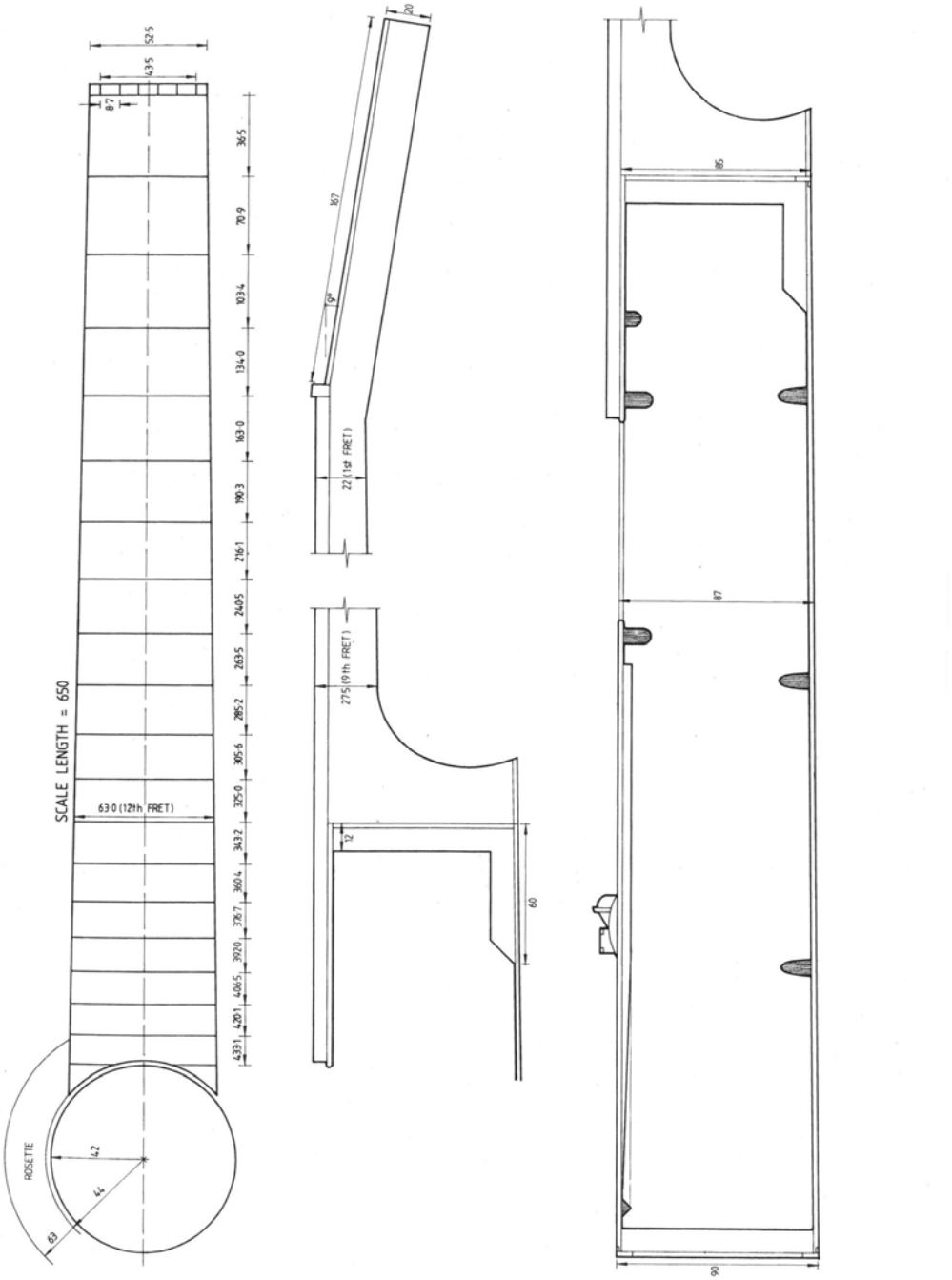

Figure 2.7 The physical dimensions of the Hauser guitar featured in figure 2.6.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 67)

3 ROBERT BOUCHET (1898 – 1986)

A unique feature of Bouchet as luthier, is the fact that he was primarily an artist who painted in a neo-Impressionist style. The fact that he is also considered one of the prominent figures in the history of luthiery is testimony to his versatility as craftsman and artist.

3.1 The Life of Bouchet

Robert Bouchet was born on 10 April 1898 in Paris. It was in this city that he was trained as a painter, and that he also learned to play the guitar in 1932. He took to guitar making fairly late in his life, making his first instrument in 1946 after losing the guitar he had owned until then. This instrument he kept for the rest of his life. He was introduced to guitar making by a close friend and Paris-based luthier called Julian Gomez Ramirez. He belonged to "Les Amis de la Guitare", a classical guitar society in Paris, and it was here that his instruments gained their first public exposure (Courtnall 1993: 96).

Because he did not have any formal training, Bouchet was forced to develop his own style. He was however always guided by his admiration for Torres. His resourcefulness as luthier resulted in him making great use of his own home-made tools and jigs[1]. He especially enjoyed building elaborate jigs and devices to assist his construction process. These included cauls that could glue all the fan struts simultaneously, jigs that were used to glue on the bridge, as well as pull-through thickness shapers for preparing strips of veneers used in purfling and rosettes. Bouchet had a very fastidious approach to guitar building and built very slowly, owing to the fact that he did not regard himself as being under commercial pressure. He built only 150 instruments during his career spanning 35 years, but these instruments became highly sought after and have been played by many prominent international guitarists like Alexandre Lagoya, Emilio Pujol and Julian Bream (Courtnall 1993: 96). Bouchet also had a close friendship with Jose Romanillos with whom he had regular correspondence.

[1] A jig is a device that allows the builder to repeat a specific action on different pieces of wood without having to measure again.

3.2 Features of the Bouchet Instruments

Courtnall concludes that Bouchet built in the "traditional Spanish" method. In his discussion of these Spanish traits he observes that:

> …the neck was attached to the strutted soundboard, and the ribs then let in the pre-cut slots in the neck. He then glued small blocks of wood to secure the soundboard to the ribs, these being in a continuous line, without any gaps. A long kerfed lining was glued to the other edge of the ribs, ready to receive the back. He used animal glue throughout, and made his own French polish with which to finish the instruments (1993: 97).

Bouchet experimented a great deal during his guitar making career. This includes changes he introduced to both the *plantilla* and the strutting. His guitars are noted for their considerable volume and excellent sustain as well as their aesthetic beauty.

Bouchet's wood of choice for soundboards was Spruce. As mentioned earlier, he drew much of his inspiration and ideas from Torres which can be seen in his trade-mark use of a lower harmonic bar with two cut out arches which allow the fan struts to pass through. This specific feature he took from a 1883 Torres guitar that he repaired. Another Torres feature he often implemented was the use of two short struts in the upper bout area which splayed out, following the angle of the *plantilla.* He usually employed a system of seven symmetrically spaced fan struts with an open harmonic bar. Later in his career he reduced the amount of struts to five, still symmetrically placed, leaving larger areas of the soundboard unsupported. This design also featured a substantial transverse bridge bar beneath the bridge saddle. He relied on the principle of adjusting the dimensions of the struts, rather than varying the thickness of the soundboard in achieving the desired sound. The thickness of the soundboards he used remained fairly constant throughout his career, placing great value on the direction of the grain in the struts used. Bouchet also made use of a domed soundboard (Courtnall 1993: 98).

His *plantillas* were initially copied from Torres but became more uniquely his own through his career, showing increasing evidence of his own aesthetic wishes. This is shown in figure 2.8. The necks of the Bouchet guitars are constructed in the "traditional

Spanish" method and the fingerboards are absolutely flat across its width and fairly narrow as illustrated in figure 2.9. Bouchet preferred fairly wide rosettes consisting largely of extremely thin lines forming the borders with a central repeating end grain motif (Courtnall 1993: 99).

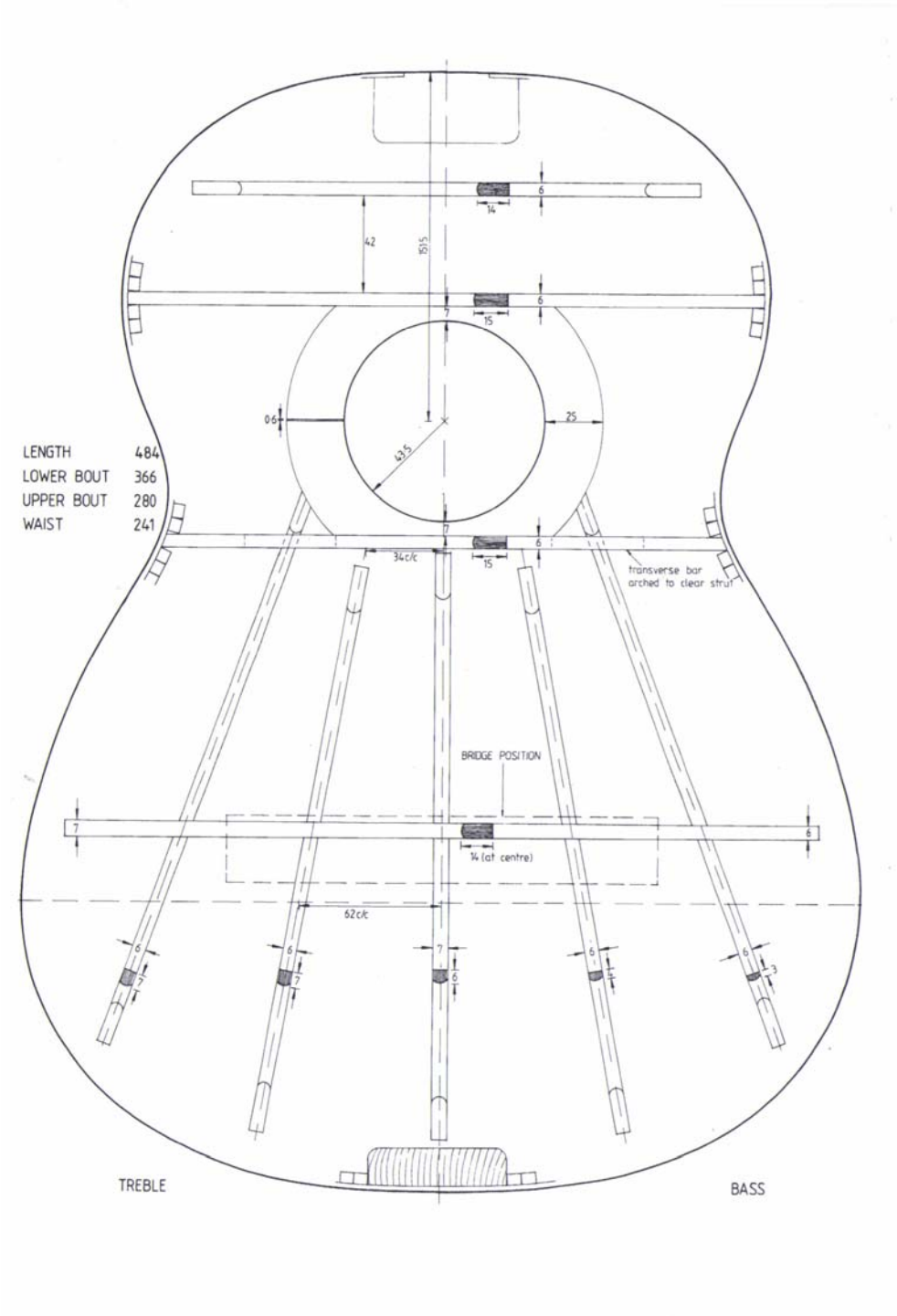

Figure 2.8 The soundboard and strutting pattern of a Bouchet guitar. (From: Courtnall 1993: 102)

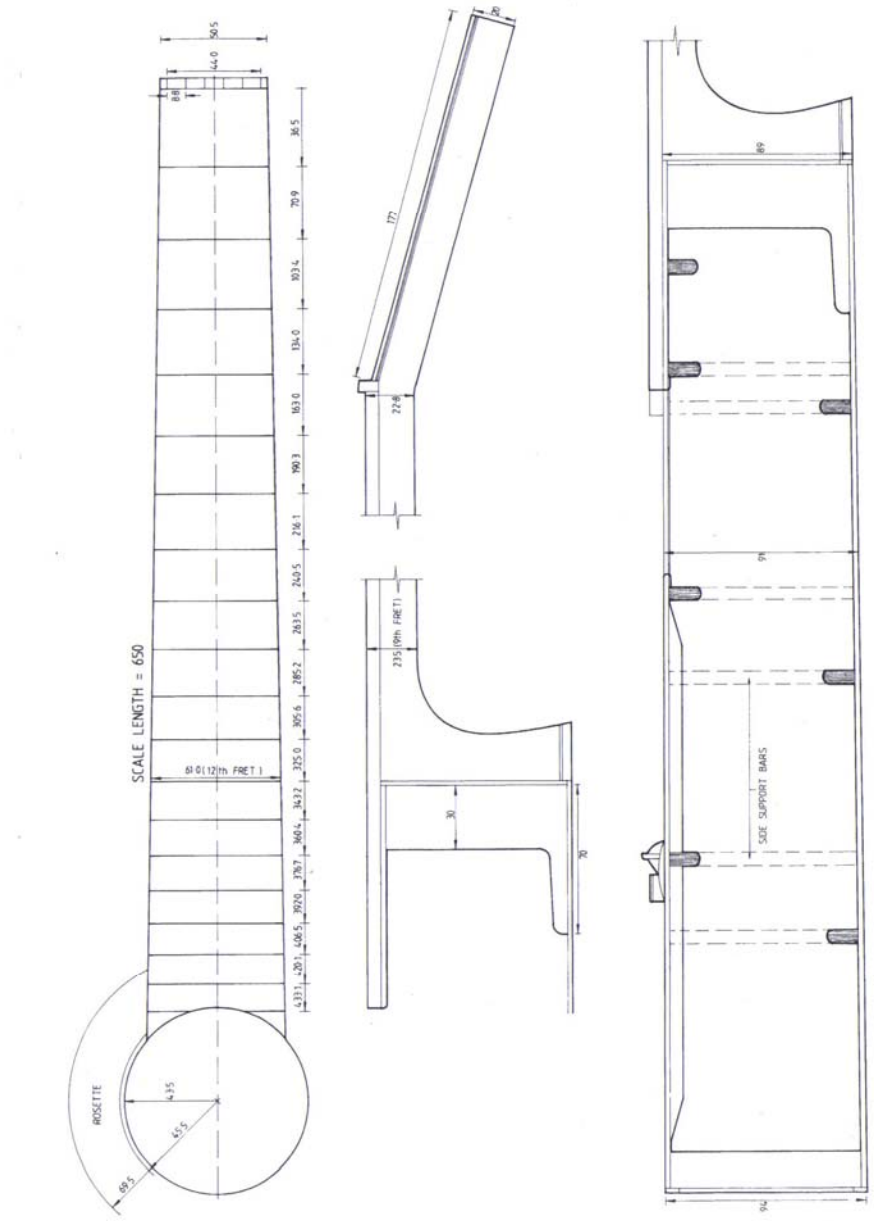

Figure 2.9 The physical dimensions of the Bouchet guitar featured in figure 2.8.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 103)

4 DANIEL FRIEDERICH (1932 -)

Courtnall (1993: 108) calls Friederich 'the most respected French maker of recent times'. He has made instruments for a great number of international guitarists, notably Alexandre Logoya and Ida Presti.

4.1 The Life of Friederich

Daniel Friederich was born in Paris, France, in 1932. His family has a long and rich tradition of cabinet making and Friederich followed in this tradition by starting his apprenticeship as a cabinet maker in 1945, working in this capacity until 1955. In 1954 he began studying the guitar and, not being able to afford to buy a good guitar, he decided to attempt making one. He established himself as a full-time luthier in the early 1960's. Bouchet, also in Paris, was a great guide and influence on him initially. Later in his career though, Friederich started implementing his own unique tools and techniques. He shows a particularly keen interest in musical acoustics and its relation to the technical aspects of guitar construction. Throughout his career he has received great encouragement by well-known recitalists Alexandre Lagoya and Ida Presti. Lagoya in particular had a significant influence on Friederich, both in terms of his students who ordered guitars from Friederich on a regular basis, and his personal input in his capacity as solo recitalist and member of the Presti-Lagoya duet. In 1967 Friederich entered the Liege Guitar-making competition where he won a gold medal for the quality of his craftsmanship and a silver medal for the sound his instrument produced. Friederich is continually experimenting with the construction and sound of his guitars. In 1977 he presented a lecture called 'The History and Function of the Guitar' at the University of Paris (Courtnall 1993: 108-109).

4.2 Features of the Friederich Instruments

Friederich has conducted many technical experiments throughout his career as mentioned earlier, and from these, three distinct strutting designs have emerged. Friederich describes these three designs in the following manner:

> …one is completely symmetrical, the second is asymmetrical and complex – I use this for most of my standard guitars, and the third layout is for soundboards that are exceptionally flexible longitudinally (Friederich in Courtnall 1993: 113).

These strutting systems are chosen to suit both the physical qualities of the timber used and the requirements of the customer. Although he has worked with Spruce and Cedar, it is his Cedar guitars especially that have gained wide-spread appeal and repute. Courtnall quotes Friederich with reference to his use of woods in sound tops accordingly:

> The cedar is often lighter than spruce and this interests me. The disadvantage with cedar is that it is very fragile. It is vital for me to work as long as possible with soundboards from the same tree – each tree possesses very different mechanical and physical properties. I do not use sound-boards for aesthetic reasons of because the wood is extremely regular and has close annual rings – this has nothing to do with sonority (Friederich in Courtnall 1993: 113).

Friederich uses a *plantilla* that features an extremely elegant body shape with a full upper body region. His neck to rib join is done in the "Spanish method" while the fingerboard features average dimensions. A fairly unique feature is the neck, consisting of a uniform thickness from the nut to the 10^{th} fret. Another distinctive Friederich feature is the geometrically designed head. His ribs are constructed in an unusual way in that they have been laminated from two layers of wood glued together. He has used a number of rosette designs during the course of his career, all intricately constructed using thin veneers. This same rosette design is then also used on the tie-block of the bridge. These typical features of Friederich's guitars are shown in figures 2.10 and 2.11.

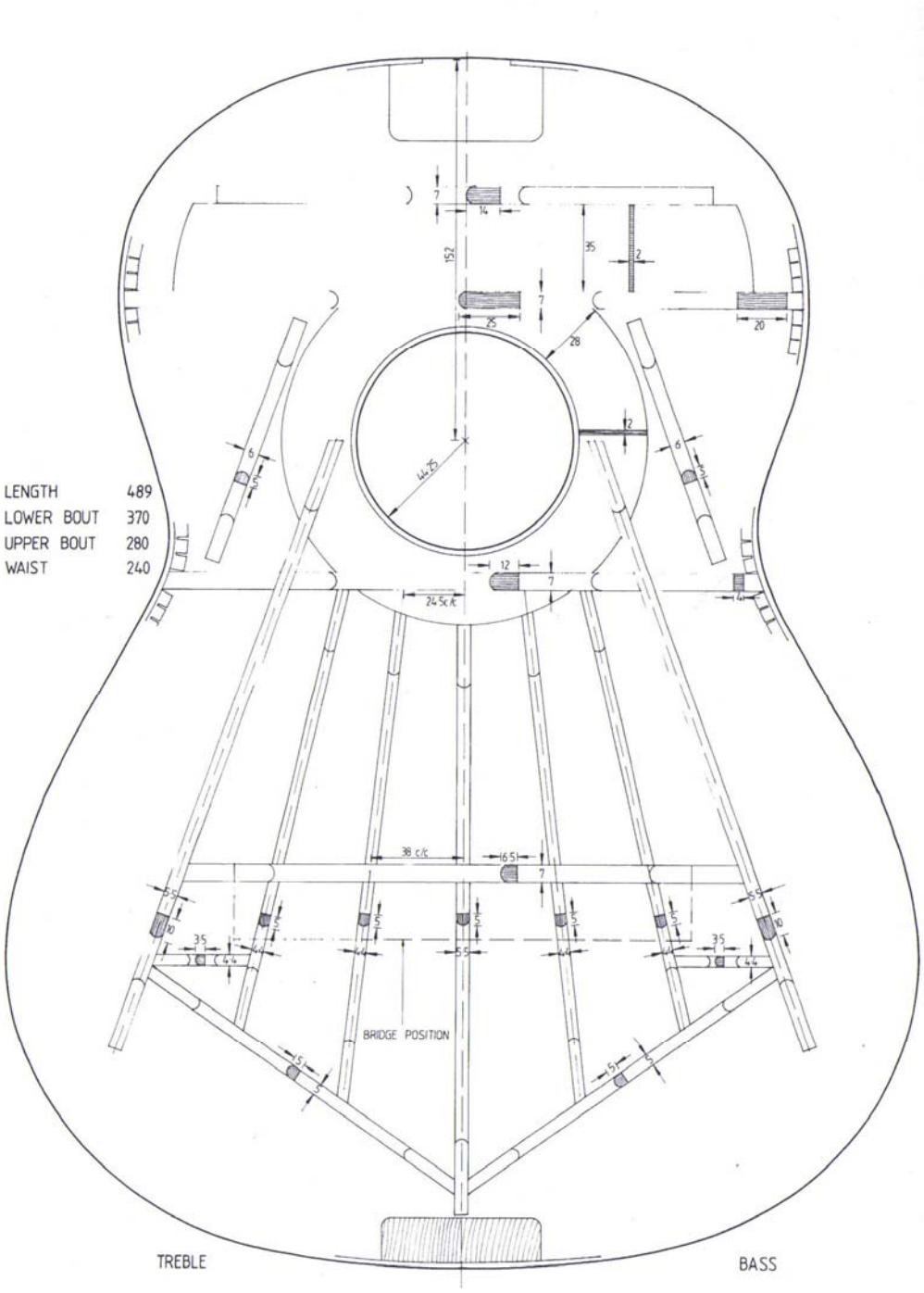

Figure 2.10 The soundboard and strutting pattern of a Friederich guitar.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 116)

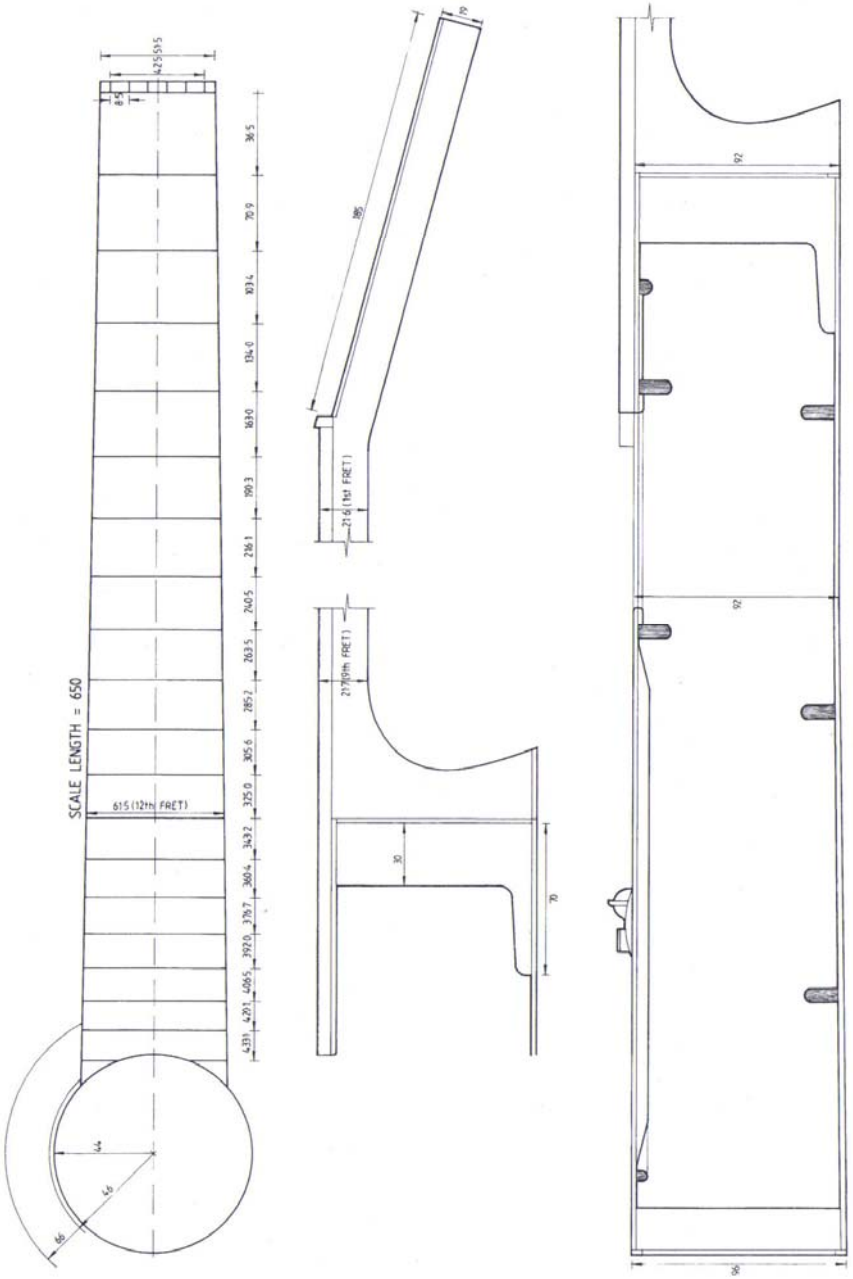

Figure 2.11 The physical dimensions of the Friederich guitar featured in figure 2.10.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 117)

5 JOSE ROMANILLOS (1932 -)

Courtnall (1993: 122) describes Jose Luis Romanillos as 'the foremost guitar maker currently working in England'. Romanillos describes his own place within a so-called tradition of luthiery as follows:

> There are two luthiers I revere: one is Hauser, who died in 1952, the other is Torres. These two are my guiding lights. I haven't heard any guitars which sound like Hauser anywhere. Torres sounds very good, but of course they are very old now and you can't make a true assessment of some of the sound qualities (Romanillos in Evans and Evans 1977: 88).

5.1 The Life of Romanillos

Romanillos was born in Madrid on 17 June 1932. When he was thirteen years of age he was apprenticed to a cabinet maker. Before he moved to England, he was interested in the guitar only in his capacity as player. He was a woodworker by profession and only became interested in guitar building through repairs he later did to guitars for his friends. In 1956 he moved to England where he worked as an assistant nurse in a mental hospital. Not being in a position to buy a guitar, he decided to build one. With the help of a guitarist friend, this first guitar was completed in six months. The reaction of his friends to this first attempt encouraged him to develop his skills as luthier by building more guitars. In 1959 he married his English wife, Marian Harris Winspear. They had three sons, one of whom, Liam, would later become a full partner with his father. He returned to Spain for three years in 1964 and in this time, built several more guitars, two of which he brought back to England on his return in 1967. These he showed to both Carlos Bonell[1] and Gilbert Biberian[2], who were very impressed with his craftsmanship and sound. This caused Romanillos to suspend his regular vocation as cabinet maker to pursue guitar building on a full-time basis. In 1970 he showed one of his guitars to Julian Bream. So impressed was Bream with this and later guitars, that he helped Romanillos set up a workshop near his home in Semley, Dorset (Summerfield 1996: 341).

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[1] Carlos Bonell is a leading international recitalist who lectured at the Royal School of Music in London.
[2] Gilbert Biberian is a highly sought-after performer and teacher and was Professor of Guitar at the Trinity College of Music, London, between 1988 and 1996.

Early in 1970 therefore, Romanillos moved to his new workshop and started building his first four guitars there, one of which Bream acquired for his own use. This friendship between Bream and Romanillos still continues with the guitar always at its centre. A constant exchange of ideas about the instrument and how it can be improved permeates their relationship. Bream has regularly performed on Romanillos instruments in performances and recordings through the years. Bream had already owned a 1936 Hauser which had a small crack in the back, which he asked Romanillos to repair. This allowed Romanillos to examine the interior of this instrument in great detail, given that he had to remove its back. This was an important step in his development as guitar builder and Hauser was to become one of the greatest influences in his career. Romanillos builds guitars in the "traditional Spanish" method and strives for the typical, characteristic Spanish sound. He produces an average of fifteen guitars annually, but his guitars are in such high demand that the waiting time can be as much as ten to fifteen years (Courtnall 1993: 123).

5.2 Features of the Romanillos Instruments

Romanillos uses only the finest Spruce for his soundboards, believing that this is the most critical component of the good instrument. He uses a strutting system based on Torres, although he prefers to spread out the fan struts more than those found on most Torres guitars and the seven fan struts are much closer to being parallel than with Torres. He uses two thin closing struts diagonally, very close to the end-block area. Sometimes he includes two thin bars on each side of the soundhole, acting as additional bracing. Another important distinguishing feature is the use of three open harmonic bars with apertures formed so that the soundboard is not very rigidly held, allowing it to move more freely (Courtnall 1993: 123).

His research into Torres and Hauser has resulted in him making use of *plantillas* following both these patterns, although his own design has evolved to a certain extent. This design features an upper bout that is slightly flatter as it leaves the waist. He also makes use of a soundhole with an 87mm diameter, which is larger than most other

makers. Romanillos always uses a ‘V’ joint to connect the neck to the joint while the shape of the heel is based on a Torres design. The ribs are secured into the neck with a variation on the “Spanish method”. The rosette of Romanillos’ instruments is his most recognizable and unique feature and he uses a variety of methods to produce his very famous arch design. This idea is inspired by the architecture of the mosque at Cordoba in southern Spain. He makes use of natural woods only, which includes Cedar, Satinwood, Sycamore and Yew. The 24 mm Rosette consists of two blocks prepared separately, the first representing the column, the second representing the arch which is placed above the column. The bridge is inlaid with a section of the rosette motif and bordered with two strips of ivory and he uses the standard scale length of 650mm. (Courtnall 1993: 124). Figures 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14 illustrate the typical features of the Romanillos guitar.

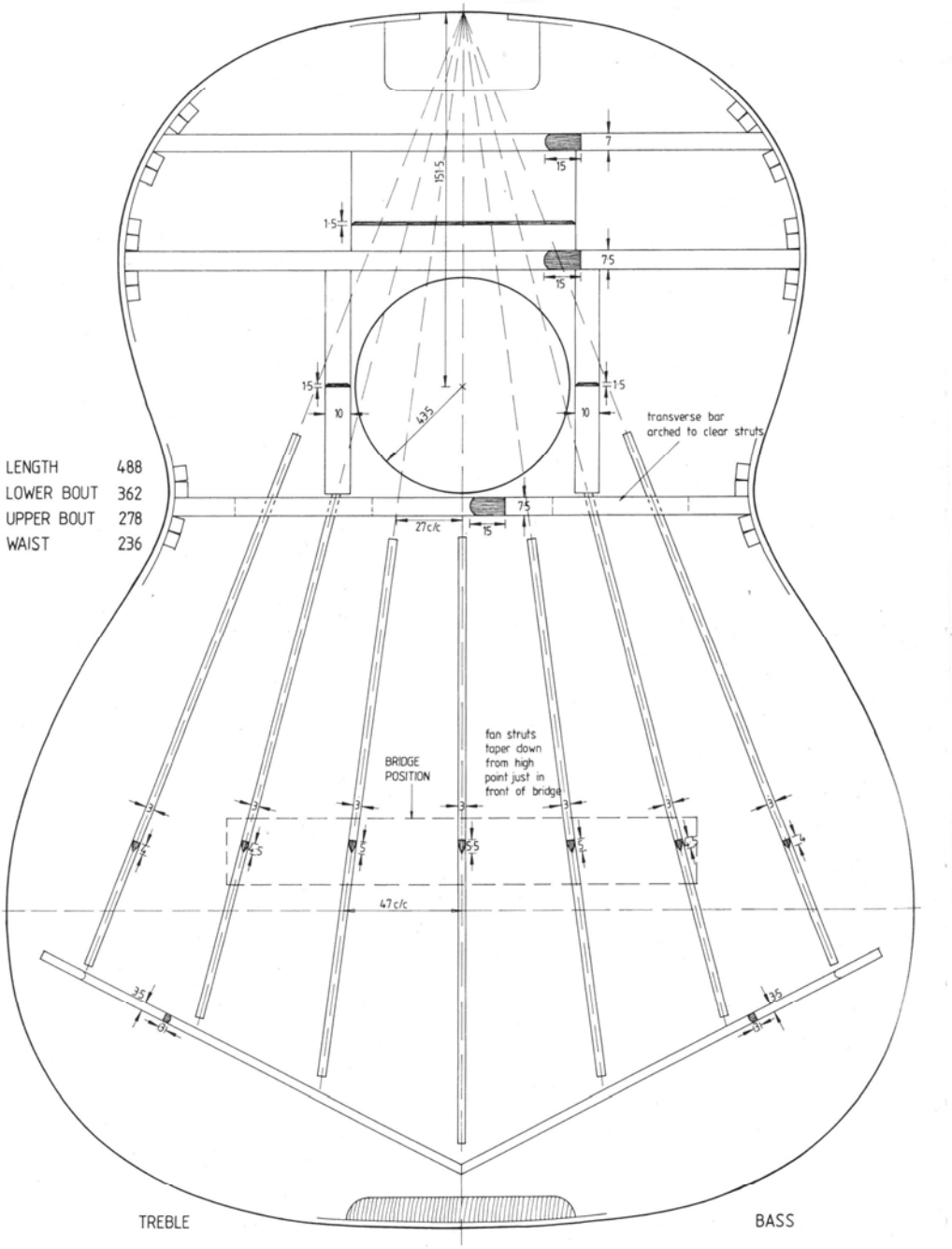

Figure 2.12 The soundboard and strutting pattern of the famous Julian Bream guitar built by Romanillos. (From: Courtnall 1993: 132)

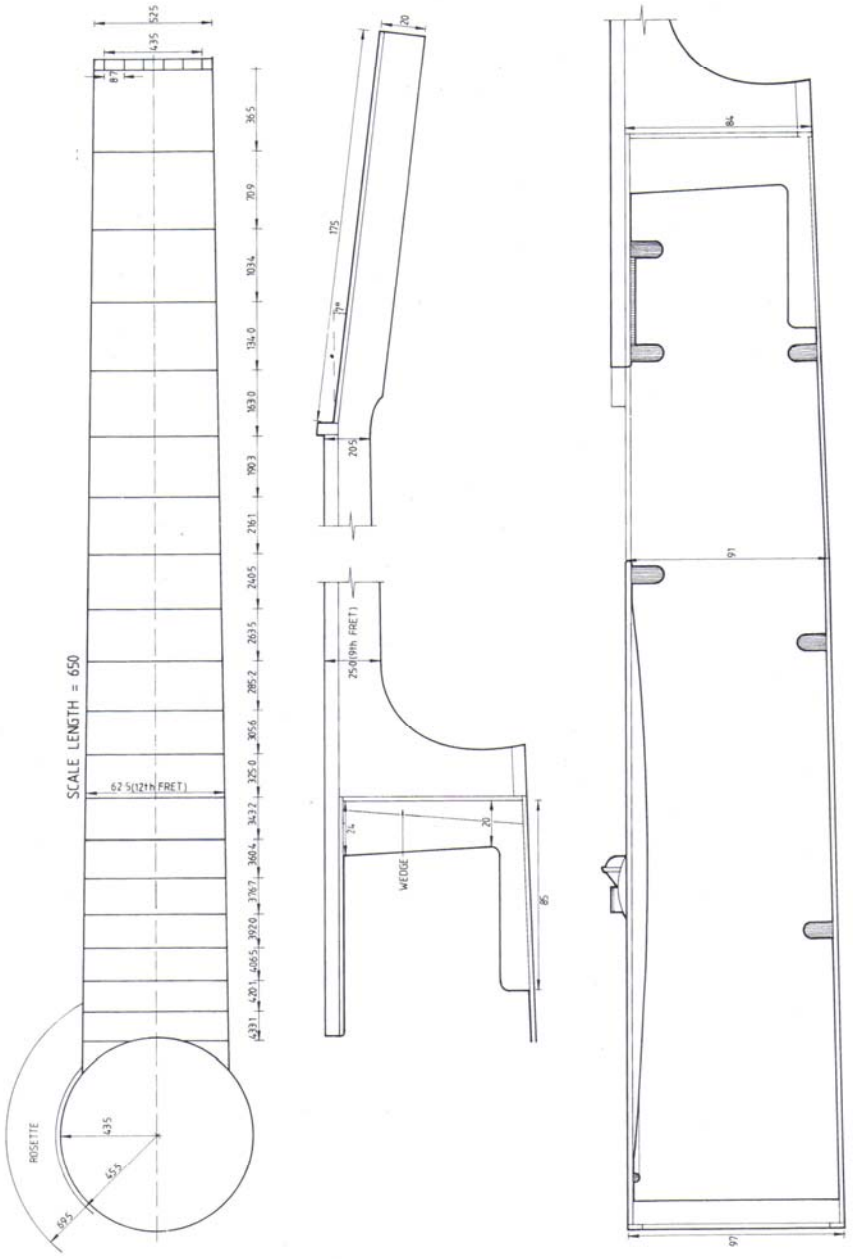

Figure 2.13 The physical dimension of the Bream instrument featured in figure 2.12.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 134)

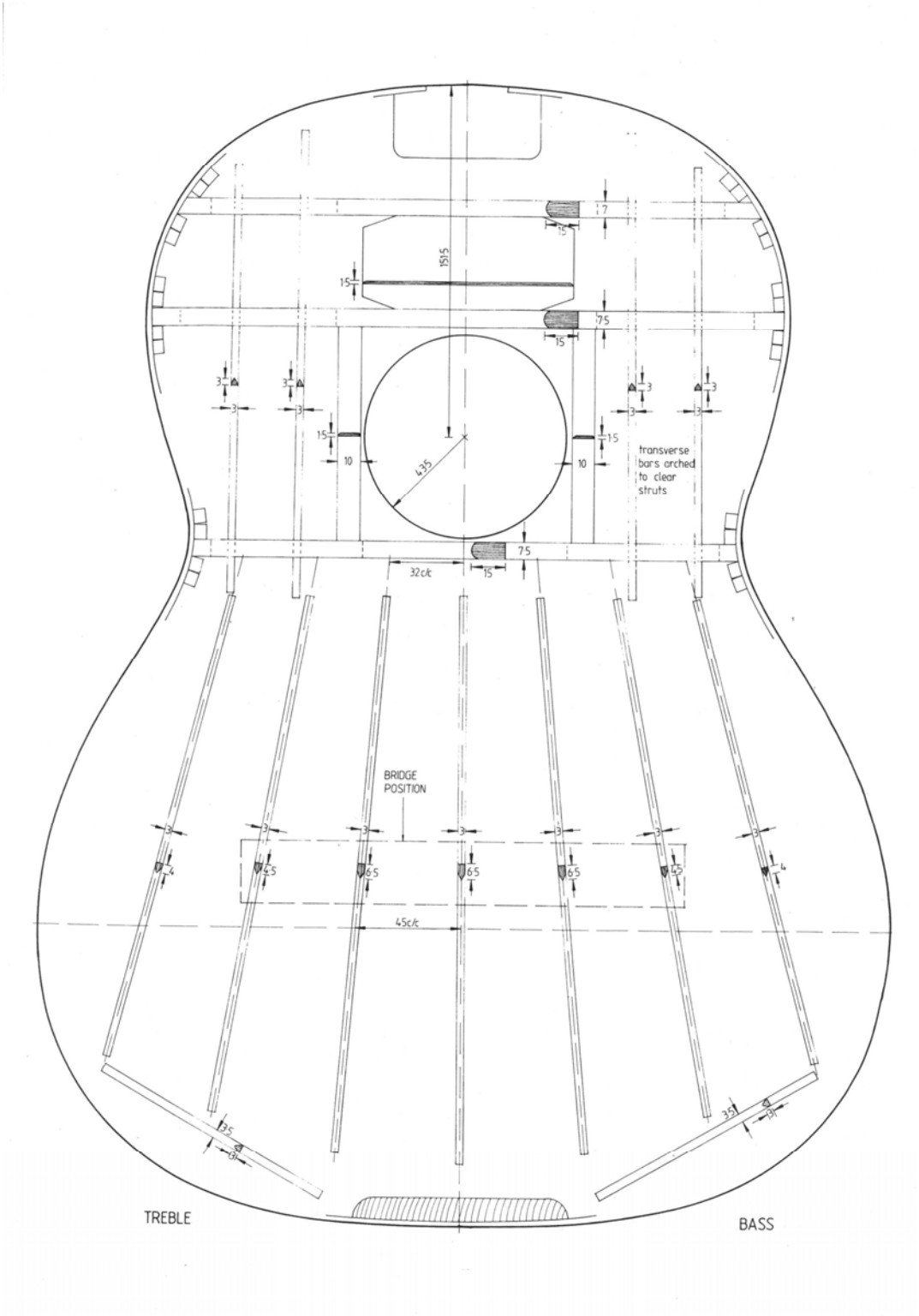

Figure 2.14 The soundboard and strutting pattern of another Romanillos design.
(From: Courtnall 1993: 133)

5.3 Romanillos' thoughts on Luthiery

Romanillos identifies a few important differences between the "Spanish school" of guitar making and the broader "European school". For him the Spanish guitar is more lightly built and the strutting is different. Fan struts allow a lower pitch as opposed to transverse bars used to tighten European guitars. Furthermore:

> The Spanish method is to get the soundboard, and then the air in the cavity, to vibrate at its optimum. A lot of central European guitars of the nineteenth century are 'tight'; they may have nice trebles, but the basses are restricted. They have no vibrancy. Hauser had to forget the German tradition, and revert to the Spanish prototype, in order to produce the kind of sound that Segovia was looking for (Romanillos in Courtnall 1993: 125-6).

His own preference is for the Spanish guitar, which is very vibrant and free and very bright. He also summarizes the differences between his aim and those of other prominent luthiers in the following way:

> I want to capture the essence of the Spanish character. I'm not sure if I can, but that's what I'm trying to do. I'm working on different principles. Friederich is somewhere between Bouchet and Fleta, an amalgamation of the two, but he has a scientific approach to design. His spruce guitars are, in my view, the better ones. They are well made, but he works by trial and error like the rest of us. The essence of guitar making today, if we consider the Spanish classical guitar, is still based on this Spanish instrument developed by Torres. There are people changing things, like Smallman, but that's a different type of instrument altogether (Romanillos in Courtnall 1993: 126).

Romanillos does not lean on scientific measuring and construction techniques and states that he relies on his intuition, and on the experience of what he has done before. He also believes the principle of the guitar to be very simple:

> The structure has to respond to the whole set of resonances in the guitar. This is not possible to achieve, but it can be aimed at. That's the principle – the soundboard has to in fact be 'dead' – it must not show any favoritism for one particular note (Romanillos in Courtnall 1993: 126).

6 GREG SMALLMAN (1947 -)

Greg Smallman is regarded as one of the most talented and influential luthiers in the history of the guitar and certainly one of the most revered of modern day luthiers. Summerfield comments that his talents as a guitar maker of unique ability became known internationally through John Williams, who has played Smallman guitars almost exclusively in recent years.

6.1 The Life of Smallman

Greg Smallman was born in Cronulla, New South Wales, Australia on 19 June 1947. He grew up in the country and spent a great deal of his childhood building model aeroplanes, and played the piano and trumpet at school. The skills he refined in building these planes he sees as an important step in his initial learning as it gave him an appreciation for small, light things. 'After building them, you always have to change them to make them work properly' (Saba 2006: 23). He started making guitars in 1972 after receiving the A. P. Sharpe book on guitar making[1] from his partner Robbie's father. At that stage Smallman was a Teachers College student studying woodwork with a love of flamenco guitar music. His initial guitars were based on the traditional Fleta[2] design and featured Spruce or Cedar tops. Smallman was awarded a grant from the Crafts Board of the Australian Arts Council in 1974. The fact that he was a then unknown, self-taught guitar maker who built guitars that were no different from the "traditional" guitars from Europe resulted in him struggling to sell his instruments. This led him to believe that the only way for him to make a career of guitar building was to break with "tradition" and experiment with different soundboard construction techniques, thereby addressing aspects of construction he believed could be improved upon. He built his first lattice-braced guitar in 1974. This was one of many bracing patterns he experimented with during that time. Because the first one he built was unsuccessful in many ways, he only built his second in 1980. In the

[1] Sharpe, A.P. 1957. Make your own Spanish Guitar London: Cliford Essex Music.
[2] Ignacio Fleta was born on 31 July 1897 in Spain and is regarded by many as the greatest guitar maker of the 20th century.

late 70's he combined forces with another fine luthier in the guise of Peter Biffin and together, they produced many experimental instruments. It was John Williams who first gave the Smallman guitars international exposure when he bought a Smallman instrument in 1981. At their first meeting Smallman inquired from Williams whether there are any improvements that he would make to his Fleta guitar, given the chance. Williams responded by saying that he perceived the 1st – 5th frets of the first string to be a little percussive in nature. Smallman agreed and set about experimenting with possible construction solutions (Saba 2006: 20).

6.2 Development of the Smallman Design

Some of Smallman's first experiments included putting a guitar string on a lute. He noticed that this produced a big sound. This indicated to him that the weight of the soundboard could well be an influential factor in guitar construction. He concluded that the weight of the soundboard is of more importance than the bracing pattern. In 1978 he was building guitars featuring Cedar fan struts and heavy plywood back and sides. In 1979 Smallman started using parallel, diagonal struts with a soundboard measuring 1.8 mm. The next step in the Smallman design evolution came in the form of a guitar featuring carbon fibre lattice and a frame under the soundboard. Throughout the next ten years he would continuously experiment with different soundboards, often attaching one to many different back and side sets. Smallman states that his initial guitars only featured strong volume with little tonal colour and beauty. It was John Williams's recordings of the Bach lute suites on his Fleta guitar that influenced him to search for a less percussive and more musical sound. Smallman's two sons, Kym and Damon, have followed their father's example in terms of experimental designs and inquisitive thinking. It was Damon in particular who was influential in developing the new fingerboards, making use of a mixture of carbon fibre and epoxy resin instead of ebony. This increases the stability of the neck under humidity changes. In 1999 the label changed to Smallman and Sons Damon and Kym. Damon and Kym have been working with their father since 1994 (Saba 2006: 22).

6.3 Features of the Smallman Instruments

It was early in 1980 that Smallman designed the now famous lattice bracing system. This was done by using balsa wood and carbon fibre struts which allowed him to use a much thinner and lighter Cedar soundboard than would be possible with a conventional guitar. He meticulously weighs the soundboard as he sees the weight thereof as crucial. The Smallman soundboard only weighs 65g whereas a Torres type soundboard weighs around 110g. This resulted in a guitar with increased frequency response and volume as well as less percussive sound. This design further made use of a ridged arched back and sides that are laminated in three layers. It features a Hoop Pine[1] layer between west Australian Jarrah on the inside and Brazilian Rosewood on the outside. This makes the guitar as a whole much heavier than "traditional" guitars. A Torres type guitar weighs around 1.5 kg as opposed to the 2.8 kg Smallman guitar. From 1990 onwards, a truss rod similar to those used in steel string guitars was added. Another recent feature is a bridge made from *Padauk* as opposed to Rosewood, thereby reducing the weight of the soundboard (Saba 2006: 23).

Smallman is constantly experimenting with new designs which have resulted in various experimental and "non-traditional" or "modern" features, evident in two guitars he produced in 1998 with no neck heels and the addition of an adjustable neck in 2001. The current Smallman guitars feature a small armrest, first introduced in 1999, protruding about 6 mm from the binding on the bass side lower bout which stops the player's arm from touching the soundboard and thereby hampering its vibration and energy. This feature is shown in figure 2.15 and 2.17. In 2002 Smallman and Sons relocated to Melbourne, Victoria. The label they use can be seen in figure 2.16.

[1] An Australian coastal Pine similar to Spruce.

Figure 2.15 A frontal view of a Smallman guitar.

Figure 2.16 The rosette and label of the Smallman guitar.

(From: www.guitarcentre.com.au/greg_smallman.html. Accessed on 8 October 2007)

Figure 2.17 A player's view of the Smallman guitar, showing the location of the armrest.

(From: www.guitarcentre.com.au/greg_smallman.html. Accessed on 8 October 2007)

6.4 Smallman's thoughts on Luthiery

Greg Smallman draws a similar distinction between the construction of the guitar as opposed to that of the violin than the one made at the beginning of this thesis, saying:

> Violin making hasn't changed in 300 – 400 years. This is because violins are really very good. If the guitar was in the same highly developed state, it wouldn't be possible to make such worthwhile changes that are accepted by guitarists at the highest level. The guitar, as we know it, started only 150 years ago with Torres and his large-bodied guitar. Guitar makers in general have been using the same system ever since' (Smallman in Saba 2006: 20).

Although the outside of his guitars appear very conventional for the most part, the inside of his guitars are completely different. His only real design philosophy is to make the soundboard light and the lattice-brace design is merely a practical method enabling the support of such a thin top. He further believes that the selection of a design is easy, but the application of the design is hard, given the fact that no design works well automatically. Smallman further believes that there is nothing wrong with traditional Torres fan strutting and that it is the best bracing system to use on a normal thickness soundboard of 2.0 – 2.5mm. The challenge he says is to optimize whatever system you choose to implement. Initially Smallman did not measure all the parts of the guitar during construction, but through the experience of teaching his two sons, he has become more consistent. "Smallman and sons" currently produces 14 guitars per annum, most of which are built by Damon and Kym (Saba 2006: 22).

Smallman overcomes the considerable challenge of building two guitars with the same sound by building the guitar so that he can change it later when comparing it to a reference guitar. These changes include tightening the top, removing part of the carbon fibre braces and removing part of the frame that supports the soundboard that he intentionally builds a little larger than required. He prefers Cedar to Spruce stating that 'Cedar guitars on average put out more sound than spruce ones, mostly because cedar is lighter' (Saba 2006: 23).

Although he employs soundboards that are extremely light compared to perceived traditional guitars, he prefers the necks of his guitars to be as heavy as possible, up to twice as heavy as a normal neck. On the considerable weight of his guitars, Smallman comments by stating that ‘the heavy back, sides and neck vibrates less. However, although you feel less vibration, you hear more from the combination of the light top and the heavy back and sides’ (Saba 2006: 23).

He has also spent al lot of time experimenting on the bridge of the guitar and describes the guitar bridge as the most important strut on the soundboard, even though a lot of people ignore this fact. He prefers a bridge that is smaller and lighter than most guitars, rather putting more weight into the struts, similar in concept to that of Fleta.

SECTION B

LUTHIERY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN GUILD OF LUTHIERS

For many years, luthiery has remained a solitary pursuit in South Africa. Individual luthiers have had to rely on books written by authors elsewhere in the world, and on their own resourcefulness to a large extent. The recent establishing of the South African Guild of Luthiers has brought about much-needed interaction and an exchange of ideas between local luthiers.

It was in 1998 that Alistair Thomson and another local luthier, Francois Kellerman, initiated the Guild. Together with Garth Pickard, they started to organize informal gatherings. Logistical problems in terms of the setting up of bank accounts and voting-in of office bearers initially hampered the launch of the Guild. It was then decided that the most effective alternative would be an "e-guild" where luthiers could use the internet as a forum for the free exchange of ideas and thoughts at minimal cost. This process was initiated by Rodney Stedall who currently fulfills the role of Guild coordinator. The only requirement for members is an e-mail address, so that no annual membership fees are required. All who so wish can join, and the Guild consists of first-time guitar builders as well as professional luthiers. A unique feature of the Guild is its large number of guitarist members. Of the approximately 50 members, less than one third are actual guitar and violin makers, the balance being made up of players and general guitar enthusiasts.

Stedall comments on the guild in the following way:

> The purpose of the guild is to encourage a free exchange of ideas amongst the members in an attempt to advance the craft. We regard the opinions of our members as equally important and do not give preference to any one guitar/instrument design or philosophy over another (2003: 106).

The Guild holds a biannual function that forms the mainstay of the luthiers' gatherings. This function runs over a full weekend and features a workshop for luthiers, a public exhibition of instruments, as well as a concert with guest speakers and performers. Figures B1 to B6 below were taken at the 2005 conference of the South African Guild of Luthiers in Pretoria.

Figure B1 Rodney Stedall, Hans van den Berg, Mervyn Davis, Alistair Thomson and Garth Pickard.

Figure B2 Guest speaker Otto Vowinkel conducting a French polishing workshop.

Figure B3 The author and Mervyn Davis during the presentation of a Davis lecture.

Figure B4 Mervyn Davis and Hans van den Berg discussing the merits of different bracing patterns.

Figure B5 Charl Lamprecht (left) performing with a friend.

Figure B6 Abri Jordaan showcasing a guitar.

In the following two chapters special focus will fall on seven prominent South African luthiers, five of which are pictured in Figure B1. Special attention will be given to their lives, instruments, woods used and thoughts on luthiery in South Africa. The purpose of these chapters is to introduce these luthiers to the reader by way of their instruments, not neglecting to regard their distinctly different personalities as crucial to this process. They will be divided into two groups: those who build in the perceived "traditional Spanish method" of guitar construction, and those who build in the so-called "modern" school of guitar construction. In this regard South African luthiers form a microcosm of luthiery in the broader international scene with representatives from both the "traditional" and the "modern". As mentioned earlier, the terms "traditional" and "modern" are used here for purposes of convenience and with some caution, but will be scrutinized and investigated in chapter 5 of this study.

CHAPTER 3

SOUTH AFRICAN LUTHIERS WHO BUILD GUITARS IN THE "TRADITIONAL SPANISH METHOD"

Earlier reference was made to the seemingly abstract qualities of the guitar in its historical context and its varying traditions. In fact, it could be argued that before the advent of Torres the absence of a recognized tradition in terms of construction constituted a tradition in itself. This is evident in the staggering array of "unusual guitars"[1] that permeated the pre-Torres era. Torres' influence saw a funneling effect on the then different methods of construction, standardizing and establishing what is today referred to as the "Spanish tradition"[2] of guitar construction. Reference is made to this perceived tradition throughout this thesis. Since Torres, luthiers have been inevitably classified in reference to, or in relation to this "tradition" and all the prominent international luthiers featured in chapter 2 of this thesis, with the exception of Greg Smallman, built or builds within its parameters. In recent years though, international luthiery has increasingly seen a movement away from this "tradition", driven by new demands on the guitar as concert instrument, often required to play in larger venues and ensembles where increased volume, sustain and projection are paramount. This has seen a polarization in luthiery and the construction techniques that characterize it, giving rise to a new "modern" approach, characterized more by its lack of dependence on the perceived "Spanish tradition" than by any specific constructional feature.

In this chapter I will focus attention on the South African luthiers building within the parameters of this so-called tradition.

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[1] See page 10 of this thesis.

[2] A more in-depth discussion of the characteristics of this school of construction is given at point 3 of the first chapter of this thesis.

1 GARTH PICKARD (1951-)[1]

Figure 3.1 A photograph of Garth Pickard in his workshop in Pretoria taken on 26 June 2005.

1.1 Biography

Garth Pickard is a Pretoria-based luthier who was born in that city on 30 May 1951. He received both his primary and secondary schooling there, after which he enrolled for a B.Sc degree in building science at the University of Pretoria. His first influence towards the guitar came from his brother, a competent flamenco player who started out as a blues musician. These two genres happen to be two of which Pickard himself is also quite fond. He is quick in identifying the similarity between the two in that they are both folk styles that are closely interwoven with the voice of the people. Expansion of his interests from blues to flamenco occurred when he heard a Ramirez[2] being played that in his own words

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interviews conducted with Pickard contained in Appendix C. All quotes are taken from this source.

[2] Ramirez guitars have long been among the most sought-after instruments. The Ramirez dynasty stretches back to the 2nd half of the 19th century, to Jose Ramirez. This workshop is now being run by 4th generation members of the Ramirez family. Today this workshop can more accurately be described as a 'factory', with approximately thirty craftsmen in fulltime employ, resulting in a massive yearly output of a large array of

'contained a whole lot of Spanishness in the playing and sound and suddenly it clicked'. Pickard's own less successful pursuits as guitarist led to his starting a collection of guitars. The first collector's item he bought happened to be a Gibson Les Paul[1] of which the head was broken. His interest in restoring the guitar in question is what led to him meeting other guitar makers such as Alistair Thomson and, a few years later, Mervyn Davis. Their work and pursuit fascinated Pickard. 'It was meeting them that made me decide that I want to build a guitar'. He ended up building three guitars before actually fixing the original Les Paul's broken head.

Pickard is not a full-time luthier and has an annual output of three to five instruments. He currently only works on guitars, but has strong ambitions of expanding into other members of the lute family, even going back to vihuelas and baroque guitars. Pickard is totally self-taught although he gained much of his initial information from books on the subject. On this matter he comments that 'a book can tell you so much, but after that you have to do it for yourself'. He attributes his first knowledge and inspiration to the quarterly publication of the American Guild of Luthiers[2]. This publication's flexible approach to luthiery appealed to Pickard unlike some other more rigid texts he consulted such as the publications by Sloane[3], Cumpiano and Natelson[4] and Courtnall[5]. His biggest inspiration as luthier is master Spanish guitar maker Torres[6], and to a lesser extent the other turn-of-the-century luthiers like Manuel Ramirez, Santos Hernandez and Marcelo Barbero. 'If I don't know what to do, then I go look at Torres' guitars and it inspires me … It's just a presence in the Torres guitars that you don't see in any other guitars'.

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different instruments. Because of the fact that Ramirez guitars' history and current output is not centered around one specific luthier, it is not discussed in this thesis as a separate unit. For more on Ramirez guitars, consult Weller, A. 1990. The Guitar makers of Spain. In Gourmet. November: 132 and 260 – 264 and Vega, C. 2004. The Ramirez dynasty: Spain's first family of classical guitar construction. In Acoustic Guitar. 15: 42-44.

[1] The Gibson Les Paul still remains one of the most sought after solid body electric guitars today.

[2] The quarterly journal of the Guild of American Luthiers is called 'American Luthiery'.

[3] Sloane, I. 1975. Steel-string guitar construction: Acoustic six-string, twelve-string, and arched top guitars. New York: Dutton.

[4] Cumpiano, W. R. and Natelson, J. D. 1993. Guitar making: Tradition and Technology. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Chronical Books.

[5] Courtnall, R. 1993. Making Master Guitars. London: Robert Hale.

[6] See page 24 of this thesis.

Without being critical of so-called modern construction techniques such as the lattice-bracing guitars, Pickard comments that to him such techniques are ‘going away from what the guitar really is’. It is a direction he has no interest in pursuing. ‘It doesn’t appeal to me and I love tone colour. If there’s no tone colour, if what you play with tends to be loud and soft and not one note that you can really work with, then I lose interest. That comes from blues’. Pickard is a traditionalist in many ways and expresses the wish to ‘make guitars like the old masters’. In his opinion the modern guitar, the lattice-brace models in particular, exemplify the modern world. He comments: ‘Nobody wants an ox wagon to go down to Cape Town, which is really what the Torres is. You don’t sit down and take your time to go to Cape Town: like in an ox wagon you would see everything along the road. There is a difference beyond our control … A modern instrument is made in a throw-away society. Nobody fixes a hi-fi or computer any more. You buy a new one’. It is this lasting quality in sound, characteristic of Torres masterpieces, that appeals to Pickard and for this reason he tends towards traditional construction and design in guitar building. ‘So, to me, listening to a Torres in 1860 and what it sounds like now is the wonder of guitar building’. He feels that “modern construction techniques” lack in this kind of lasting and enduring appeal to a great extent.

Pickard relies heavily on his instinct and intuition in guitar building rather than on any scientific testing or measurements. For him, intricate calculations tend to take the fun out of the process and that ‘there’s something that you lose along the way if you calculate too much’. He believes that his training and practice as draughtsman has greatly influenced his work as luthier, as it has influenced the way in which he plans and designs each instrument. He regularly tests the acoustic reaction of the guitar during production by tapping the guitar and making use of a method he refers to as the ‘cough test’. The latter is done by testing the acoustic responsiveness of the guitar when coughing into the soundhole.

1.2 Features of the Pickard Instruments

Figure 3.2 A frontal and back side view of a typical Pickard small-bodied classical guitar.

The physical dimensions and typical characteristics of Pickard's small-bodied classical guitars are epitomized by the guitar photographed in figure 3.2 above. These dimensions are summarized in the following tables:

Physical dimensions

Overall length	900 mm
Weight	1285 g
Scale length	616 mm
String spacing at nut	5 mm
String spacing at saddle	8 mm
Neck width at nut	48 mm

Neck width at 12th fret	58 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	20 mm
Neck depth at 8th fret	23 mm
Upper bout	215 mm
Lower bout	280 mm
Body depth at heel	88 mm
Body depth at end-block	96 mm

Woods used

Backs	*Kiaat*
Sides	*Kiaat*
Bridge	East Indian Rosewood
Soundboard	Cedar
Neck	Honduras Mahogany
Fingerboard	Ebony
Headstock	*Tambotie*

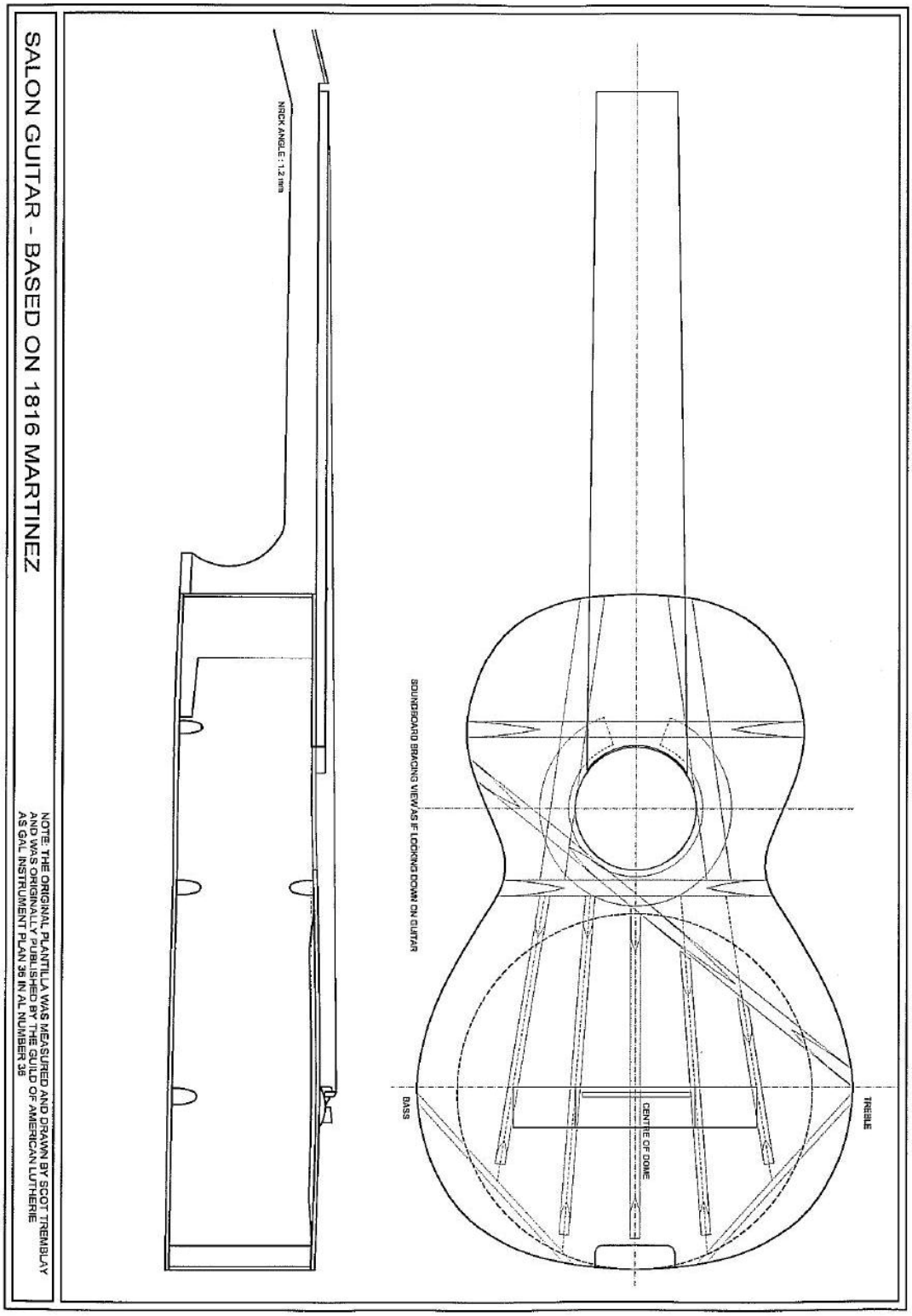

Figure 3.3 An example of a typical Pickard-designed diagram of the featured instruments. Note the treble bar running diagonally across the soundboard in close proximity to the soundhole. (Diagram received by the author from Pickard on 12 August 2005)

Pickard specializes in building smaller-bodied instruments based on early eighteenth-century Martinez models as illustrated in figure 3.5. Although he builds standard-size classical and flamenco guitars to order, the smaller instruments take prominence in his output as luthier. 'I love that shape. It is an old shape. A very female shape'. He observes that the smaller shape attracts interest from players and guitar enthusiasts alike, and that people tend to want to touch it and pick it up. 'It is like a baby or a small dog or something'. The senses, he says, experience these smaller guitars first by seeing, then touching and finally hearing, which he believes to be the right order. Pickard believes the small-bodied guitars to be more suitable to the music of Sor[1] and Guiliani[2] because of the fact that they are modeled on those used by the performers of the eighteenth century. A significant event which drove him towards the smaller-bodied instruments was the results he observed from putting a cutaway in a standard guitar. The cutaway and resultant smaller air volume in the body improved the sound to such an extent that it inspired Pickard to really experiment with the smaller body concept. In addition, the smaller instrument has a higher level of playability. Improved control on the part of the player is an extra advantage of the smaller instruments.

He expresses an interest in also building a smaller-bodied flamenco guitar in future. In his opinion there is no significant theoretical difference between the construction of flamenco guitars and classical guitars. The only practical difference between the two pertains to action determined by the height of the saddle. 'With a high saddle you get an enormous separation of notes. If you lower it, it goes more towards a strumming sound and the individual notes get weaker'. The *plantilla* of Pickard's bigger guitars are all based on Torres.

Pickard's guitars sell for R10 000 to R12 000. He uses a varied fan-bracing strutting in his guitars, combined with a treble bar. This combination is demonstrated in figure 3.3. The treble bar basically fulfills the function of a big fan brace. Pickard describes this

[1] Spanish-born Fernando Sor (1780 – 1839) was a famous virtuoso guitarist and composer who taught in Paris and London.
[2] Mauro Giuliani (1781 – 1828) was an famous Italian guitar virtuoso who composed over 200 works for the guitar.

variation as one based on a Ramirez pattern bracing and he uses it, with or without slight variations for all his instruments. For his flamenco guitars he uses bracings that are very thick, which results in sounds that are not sustained, but which create the characteristic ‘punch’ in the sound of a flamenco guitar.

Pickard mostly uses French polish on his guitars, but has also made use of other finishes such as nitrocellulose. He is not particularly keen on nitrocellulose, however, because in his opinion it crystallizes over time and all the thinners it contains eventually evaporate. He prefers French polish not only because he believes it to be the best finish in terms of the sound it produces, but also because it does not contain any of the toxic substances often found in other modern finishes. French polish also makes touching up from time to time much easier. It is a less forgiving finish in that it does not cover up any flaws in the wood or workmanship and he explains that the luthier must first seal the guitar with shellac and then start building up thin layers of polish, interspersed with the process of flattening it out and starting again. Less favourable attributes of French polish on the other hand, include its lack of resistance to alcohol and perspiration. For this reason Pickard occasionally uses nitrocellulose on the necks of his guitars, according to the specifications of the client. His instruments contain ornamental inlays featuring natural indigenous woods as shown in figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Ornamental inlays in the *Kiaat* back of a Pickard instrument.

Figure 3.5 A selection of smaller-bodied Pickard guitars and flamenco guitars on display during the South African Guild of Luthiers exhibition in 2005.

1.3 Woods

The woods used for Pickard instruments are varied. The rosettes feature natural wood shading and no dyed woods are used. In woods used for fingerboards Pickard's first requirement is hardness. It is for this reason he uses woods like *Hardekool* and *Tambotie*.

Tambotie in particular is ideal as it contains natural oil which eliminates the need to continually manually oil the fingerboard.

He speaks very highly of Cypress which he uses on occasion for flamenco guitars. He remains a great proponent of indigenous woods however, and describes them as 'friendly' woods to work with. It is *Kiaat* in particular that Pickard is quite fond of and that he uses to a great extent for the backs and sides of his guitars. He believes *Kiaat* to be specially suited to guitars that make use of a smaller soundboard. 'If you build a full size *Kiaat* and Cedar guitar, it sounds muddy. When you scale down the size of the guitar, this combination works'. He has not yet had the opportunity to work with Brazilian Rosewood, but it remains one of his objectives for the future.

Cedar remains Pickard's wood of choice for his soundboards. It is the warm sound of Cedar that he believes to combine especially well with *Kiaat*, *Kiaat* itself being a warm sounding wood. He does believe that Spruce certainly has its place as a soundboard wood though. Pickard does not conduct any specific tests in selecting his woods. Instead, he relays that the wood 'speaks' to him and that he cannot otherwise describe or explain what it is that makes him select a certain piece of wood.

1.4 Pickard as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

As mentioned earlier, Pickard can be regarded as a very traditional luthier. Having said this, he nevertheless feels that South Africans can and should take advantage of the fact that 'there are no good historical guitars around to intimidate you. You can really do what you want to do, so there's no benchmark. The benchmark is the sound'. In this regard he supports the view of American traditional luthier, Eugene Clarke, who maintains that you must make a guitar 'breath' and that it must have a 'voice'. He further identifies Mervyn Davis as a good example of the possibilities presented by the use of indigenous woods and subsequent new combinations of these woods. Although he does make some use of electric equipment, he expresses a great love for working with hand tools. 'You learn

from wood if you work by hand. There's a process where the wood tells you something and you have to adapt and work in a specific way'.

Pickard does most of his important bracing and gluing at between 35% and 40% relative humidity. In this regard he does not encounter significant problems with the climate in Pretoria, believing it to be more similar to that of Spain than most other parts of the country.

When speaking of the standard of South African guitars, Pickard sees significant advances made possible through interaction brought about by the formation of the South African Guild of Luthiers. He also remains positive about the future of the industry in the country. He identifies a freedom in guitar building locally that overseas luthiers might not have and comments that South African builders are not as bound to "tradition". Even as a traditionalist, he sees this as something that augers well for the future of the instrument locally and internationally. He does not identify a set South African tradition or sound due to the fact that 'we are still too varied'.

Personal ambitions and goals for the future include building guitars on a full time basis. 'My ambition is to make a guitar which in a 150 years' time is still sounding nice. That would be a successful instrument'. The proudest moment for a luthier, he says, is hearing it sound good in the hands of a competent player (although it may have sounded less so when the luthier himself tried it out). A luthier can ask for no better advertisement or reward than to hear his instrument being played well.

2 HANS VAN DEN BERG (1960 -)[1]

Figure 3.6 A photograph of Hans van den Berg taken in his workshop in Meyerton on 27 June, 2005.

2.1 Biography

Hans van den Berg was born on 1 March 1960 in Orkney, and is currently a Meyerton-based luthier who builds classical guitars exclusively. After completing his primary school education in Orkney at the age of twelve, he moved to Kroonstad with his family, where he completed high school in 1977. This was followed by an apprenticeship in aeroplane panelwork in Kempton Park. He currently works for a company called Samancor, in Meyerton as a design draughtsman, having received his draughtsman's training at the Kemptonpark Technical College.

His interest in building guitars started early on in his high school career, but a lack of readily available information proved to be insurmountable at that stage of his life. He

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interviews conducted with Van den Berg contained in Appendix D. All quotes are taken from this source.

tells of an experience of observing an older boy's unsuccessful attempt at building a guitar and says that had that attempt been successful, he himself would surely have started guitar building sooner. However, thoughts about the possibility of successfully building a guitar remained with him for a good number of years after that incident, spurred on by his own love of guitar playing. In 1995 his sister, a classical guitar teacher in Worcester, sent him a copy of the *Classical Guitar* magazine that contained an advertisement of Cumpiano and Natelson's *Guitar Making: Tradition and Technology*[1]. His decision to acquire that book constituted the beginning of his guitar-making career. A second book that later influenced him was Roy Courtnall's *Making Master Guitars*[2].

Unlike many luthiers, his introduction into the guitar-building world did not come via repair work. Van den Berg identifies his keen interest in the history of the classical guitar as his reason for having thus far concentrated, like Colin Cleveland, on this instrument to the exclusion of all others. Everything about the classical guitar holds a special fascination for Van den Berg. 'Jy kyk nou na daai klankbord en jy hoor wat kom daar uit en jy probeer dit wetenskaplik en fisies verklaar, maar jy kan dit nie regtig doen nie. Dit gebeur egter nogtans en dit is net fassinerend'[3]. Because it is his ambition to take up luthiery on a full-time basis, however, he has recently begun researching steel-string guitars in order to consider a broader market.

He remembers the first guitar he built with some amusement. At that time he did not have access to the right equipment and built it using Beachwood for the soundboard and Honduras Mahogany for the sides. That first guitar was completed in 1996. He subsequently built a guitar for his sister and then received his first order from a student of hers. Hearing one of his guitars being played for the first time by a competent performer and seeing the 'meubelstuk[4]' come alive remains a highlight for him as luthier.

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[1] Cumpiano, W. R. and Natelson, J. D. 1993. Guitar making: Tradition and Technology. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Chronical Books.
[2] Courtnall, R. 1993. Making Master Guitars. London: Robert Hale.
[3] One looks at the soundboard and what emanates from it and one tries to scientifically and physically explain it, but you can't really do it. It happens none the less and that is fascinating.
[4] Piece of furniture.

Van den Berg is one of the relatively large group of draughtsman/architect luthiers in South Africa and other luthiers in this group are Garth Pickard, Colin Cleveland and Mervyn Davis. Being a draughtsman he believes to be a big advantage, as he sees drawing and designing as a crucial part of the luthier's craft, and therefore he begins the construction process with detailed drawings, designing the instrument on paper in every finest detail before embarking on the actual physical work of making the instrument[1]. He is led to a large extent by the 'feel' of the wood in his hands, explaining that no two pieces of wood feel the same in your hand even if they are from the same species. It is for this reason that he relies so heavily on the tap tone produced by the wood.

Another characteristic he shares with most other South African luthiers is the fact that he did not undergo any kind of apprenticeship or formal training, but started instead by relying only on information gathered from books. After mastering the basic Torres design contained in the Cumpiano and Natelson book, he proceeded to make an in-depth study of the instruments made by Romanillos[2] and to a lesser extent also by Friederich[3]. It is Romanillos in particular that would become Van den Berg's strongest influence and inspiration. Romanillos' work also inspired the rosettes characteristic of the Berg instruments featured in figure 3.9. Another important influence he identifies in his work is having the opportunity to take his insruments to local expert performers like Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan[4].

To date Van den Berg has built twelve guitars. He has an annual output of no more than one or two guitars, because he prefers working on only one guitar at a time.

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[1] See figure 3.8
[2] See p 51 of this thesis.
[3] See p 47 of this thesis.
[4] Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan are two prominent Pretoria-based performers and teachers, actively involved with the work of South African luthiers. See Figures B5 and B6 on page 67 of this thesis.

2.2 Features of the Van den Berg Instruments

Figure 3.7 A frontal and back view of a Van den Berg guitar.

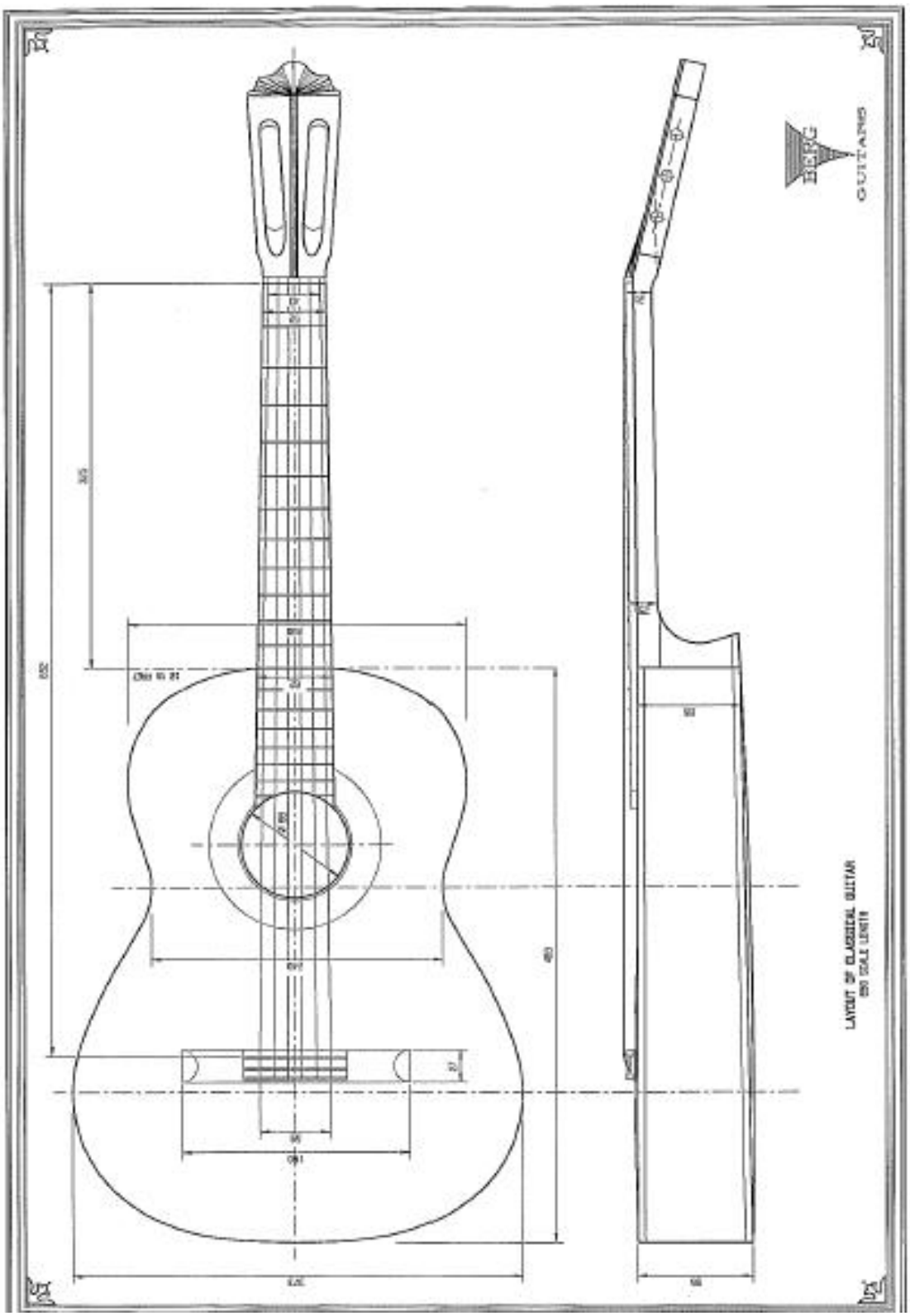

Figure 3.8 An example of a typical Van den Berg-designed diagram, showing the physical dimensions of the instrument featured in 3.7. (Diagram received by the author from Van den Berg on 7 July 2005)

The following tables summarize characteristic features of Van Den Berg guitars:

Physical dimensions

Scale length	650 mm
Weight	1480 g
String spacing at nut	9 mm
String spacing at saddle	7 mm
Neck width at nut	52 mm
Neck width at 12th fret	62 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	21 mm
Neck depth at 8th fret	25 mm
Upper bout	280 mm
Lower bout	373 mm
Body depth at heel	86 mm
Body depth at end-block	96 mm

Woods used

Backs	East Indian Rosewood
Sides	East Indian Rosewood
Bridge	East Indian Rosewood
Soundboard	European Spruce
Neck	Spanish Cedar
Fingerboard	Ebony
Headstock	Bird's eye Maple
Binding	Bird's eye Maple
Purfling	Maple and Rosewood

Van den Berg builds guitars based to a large extent on "traditional" designs and construction methods. On his soundboards he employs different variations of the more traditional fan-bracing design. He adheres to the 650 mm-scale-size guitars and does not feel the need to steer away from the "traditional Spanish" school of building, citing the instruments of Torres as a major motivation and inspiration. He shapes his soundboards to be almost completely dead and quite unresponsive, because when the strutting is added it brings the sound back to life. Since the strutting takes the soundboard to its maximum stiffness, Van den Berg prefers that the pre-braced soundboard not be too responsive. He expresses an interest in experimenting with lattice bracing in future, but feels that for the time being there is much about the various techniques of fan bracing that remains for him to explore.

Another important feature of Van den Berg's instruments that is modeled on "traditional" guitars and on the guitars of Romanillos in particular, is the use of a *solera*. This is a work board in the shape of the soundboard of the guitar that has a slightly hollowed-out contour. The *solera* aids in forcing the soundboard into a dome shape, so strengthening the structure and allowing for the use of a thinner soundboard, which in turn leads to a more responsive instrument. This imparts extra strength to the soundboard which enables the luthier to use a thinner, more responsive one. Furthermore, he does not force the shape of the guitar into a jig, preferring to use the freer approach of bending sides manually and testing the shape on the required profile of the guitar.

An innate part of the construction process involves the aesthetic appeal of its design. He values the aesthetic appeal of an instrument greatly and his instruments are highly rated by other luthiers for their craftsmanship. This he ascribes to the fact that all his final polishing and finishing is done by hand.

Notwithstanding this, the fret work and therefore the intonation of the guitar remain for Van den Berg the most important aspects of construction. This process includes the leveling of the frets to successfully avoid any unwanted buzzing sounds. Balance and sound, in his opinion, are more important and valuable than the appearance of the guitar. Playability and comfort complete the list of features he strives for in his instruments. He believes that an open channel of communication must always be maintained between himself and the guitarist for whom he is building an instrument, because this will ensure optimum customizing of a quality instrument.

In his experience, sound quality and character have become increasingly important considerations as he has gained experience as a luthier, thus he always focuses on maintaining a balance between a comfortable action and quality of sound. For Van den Berg the guitars of Mervyn Davis are particularly successful in this regard. 'Sy kitare breek in op 'n ander frekwensie, dink ek, wat dit in staat stel om saam met ander

instrumente soos vioole en klavier te speel sonder om verlore te raak'[1]. This balance he considers crucial in any quality instrument, as one can easily lose in one aspect when trying to gain in another. A prime example of this, he says, is a lack of some Spanish-sounding quality in certain "modern" instruments with enhanced volume. By this he means that the notes played on different strings have a tendency to sound uniform and similar, which, in his opinion, leads to lack of colour.

Van den Berg mainly uses 'Schaller' machine heads imported from Germany and is especially fond of the ebony tuning pegs. However, he also highly rates the quality of "Sloane" machine heads, sporadically making use of them as well.

He expresses a keen interest in the future use of French polish, although he currently makes use of a Plascon multiface wood laquer for his finishes. Van den Berg applies this laquer as thinly as possible, using only four coats on the soundboard, most of which is sanded away again. This product, in his opinion, is very scratch resistant and polishes beautifully. He does not consider South African nitrocellulose very suitable because it tends to shrink, but has never had the opportunity of experimenting with imported nitrocellulose, since it is illegal to import this product to South Africa.

Another strong Romanillos influence is manifested in the unique rosette design of Van den Berg's instruments. For him the contrast that you get from using different woods determines the effectiveness of the concept. The concept behind his rosette design does not rely on the more widely-used mosaic technique. Although very labourious, this design is a particularly striking feature of his instruments, as can be seen in figure 3.9.

[1] His guitars function on a different frequency, I think, which enable them to play with other instruments like the violin and piano without the sound disappearing.

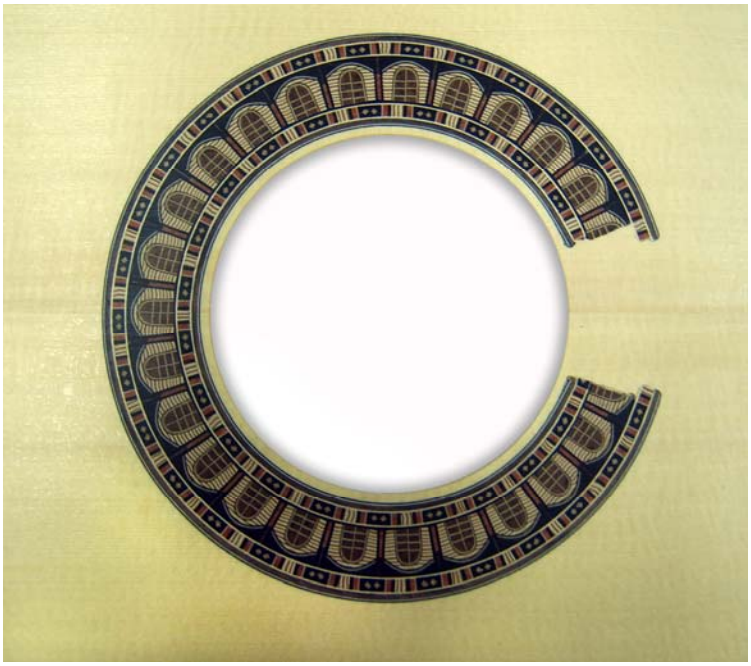

Figure 3.9 The unique and characteristic Van den Berg rosette design.

2.3 Woods

Van den Berg uses Spruce to a much greater extent than he does Cedar. He has made use of both Sitka and European Spruce. Californian Redwood he describes as difficult to work with because of its tendency to crack, which, in his opinion, makes it a wood not suitable for the making of classical guitars. He does not use any indigenous woods for the acoustic parts of the guitar, the only indigenous wood used being Red Ivory in his rosette design. Other woods used in the rosettes include Rosewood, *Bubinga* (otherwise known as African Rosewood) and *Olienhout*. Van den Berg remains open to the possibility of using indigenous woods in future though, and cites the quality of the cuts as his only current concern with reference to indigenous woods. Bird's Eye Maple and *Olienhout* are also sometimes used in Van den Berg's instruments in the front of the guitar head. He plans on launching a more affordable guitar in future, for which he will use Honduras Mahogany.

Because Van den Berg orders the woods for most of his soundboards from the company 'Gleissner Tone Woods' in Bubenreuth, Germany, he does not have any real influence over the selection of the individual pieces of wood with which he works, although he is

satisfied that, in ordering master-grade wood, the possibility of inferior wood is eliminated. However, he still relies on the tap tone of the wood he receives before he begins work on a new instrument, as this will be the final determining factor in selecting individual pieces and in deciding how to shape the top of the instrument in question. He is always mindful of the fact that no wood is stable if it is not adequately prepared and considers the natural aging of wood to be the best preparation in this regard.

2.4 Van den Berg as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

Van den Berg does not experience any problems with the climate, so crucial to luthiery, in Meyerton, and describes the winters as especially ideal. Summertime occasionally presents a few problems in terms of higher humidity levels. Without a humidity cupboard which allows for the control of humidity levels, a luthier may be forced to refrain from conducting certain crucial processes, such as varnishing and gluing, when it rains too much.

Van den Berg has a high regard for many South African luthiers, and identifies Marc Maingard in particular as exemplary in terms of the craftsmanship and appearance of his guitars. Colin Cleveland's unique sound serves as inspiration to him, as does the creativity of Mervyn Davis. He also names Alistair Thompson's experimentation, Garth Pickard's unique smaller guitars, and Rodney Stedall's enthusiasm in terms of ideas and steel-string guitars as inspirational. In global terms, Van den Berg sees a trend, manifest both locally and internationally, of returning to more so-called traditional constructional techniques after a period of experimentation, the latter initiated primarily by the search for more volume. He feels that there is a great possibility for South African guitars to compete with those from abroad if South African luthiers apply themselves professionally, and considers it decidedly unfortunate that so many quality South African instruments draw so little international attention. At the same time, he is realistic enough to admit that performers will probably always prefer established names. 'Die geskiedenis is so ryk van die Spaanse klassieke ghitaar en Segovia het sulke diep spore getrap en daarom doen Ramirez en al sy studente ghitaarbouers so goed vandag. Selfde het gebeur

met Williams en Smallman'[1]. But he looks forward to a time when South African luthiery will be so well established that the performers of this country would rather search locally for their concert instruments before looking elsewhere. He is of the opinion that one should be cautious in classifying or attempting to typify the sound of any one guitar or any one luthier, as the same guitar will sound different in the hands of different players.

[1] The history of the Spanish classical guitar is so rich and Segovia left big shoes to fill. That is why Ramirez and all his student guitar builders do so well today. The same thing happened with Williams and Smallman.

3 MARC MAINGARD (1949-)[1]

Figure 3.10 A photograph of Marc Maingard in his workshop in Scarborough taken on 11 June 2005.

3.1 Biography

Marc Maingard is one of South Africa's most experienced luthiers, and certainly the most commercially successful guitar builder the country has ever produced. His success bares testimony to the quality and craftsmanship of the Maingard instruments, produced in his Scarborough workshop in Cape Town. International performers that play on Maingard instruments include the likes of Earl Klugh[2].

Marc was born in the city of Durban on 31 July 1949. Being from French parentage, he was at first given a catholic schooling, but, on his own insistence, was finally allowed to

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interview conducted with Maingard contained in Appendix E. All quotes are taken from this source.
[2] Earl Klugh is an internationally acclaimed jazz guitarist who specializes in playing on nylon string guitars.

attend technical school instead. He started playing the piano when he was five years old and then took up the violin at the age of ten, playing in the Durban Junior Philharmonic at age thirteen. His first business was a surf board production and repair enterprise, which he ran while still at high school. Military service followed from 1969 to 1970, of which Maingard says: 'It was a good experience for me and I was glad to go through it. It tightened up my act, so to speak. I came out of the military tighter and more together as a person, I believe'.

Maingard took up guitar playing at the age of nineteen, after a serious motor cycle accident had fractured his scull and left him with a damaged neck and spine, thus putting an end to his violin playing. By the end of 1970 Maingard was performing as professional guitarist. 'I played folk music. Not much jazz. I played a kind of African folk style music. Mainly laid-back lounge-type music like Crosby Stills, Simon and Garfunkel and the like'.

Maingard's guitar-making career began in 1972 whilst studying under local violin maker, Brian Lisus. Shortly after this, he spent some time in the south of Spain as musician and performer. He spent his days meeting and befriending various local classical guitar makers, while performing in the evenings. From 1972 to 1974 he worked for them without remuneration for the purpose of gaining experience, starting off by shaping necks and French polishing. After studying yoga in India for a year, Maingard returned to Durban, South Africa. Shortly after, in 1975, he started his own career as luthier in Cape Town. This happened by chance, he says, as he was only stopping over in Cape Town on his way out of the country again when he decided to make this city his home. 'I got to Cape Town and I just found it an incredibly stimulating place…'. He settled there and started off his career by doing guitar repairs, although he does not do any repairs today. He lists some of his major influences as Richard Hoover, under whom he studied for a number of years at Santa Cruz[1] Guitars in apprentice-shop program in 1978 and specialist classical guitar maker Jose Oribe, who he met during a return visit to the USA.

[1] Santa Cruz guitars are highly sought after today for their quality and craftsmanship. This American company specializes in steel-string acoustic guitars.

Of his own work as luthier Maingard comments: ‘It’s always a labour of love. I still walk into the workshop and look at a piece of wood just to look at it, because it still intrigues me. I think of it with joy…’. He ascribes his success as luthier both to his own ability as musician and to the fact that he took the time to learn from others. Maingard currently employs two assistants who work for him on a full-time basis and who do most of the assembly work on the guitars. However, he remains involved with all the critical steps and decisions. ‘The secret to a good guitar is the top, the selection of the top, the selection of the back and sides, the correct thicknessing of the top and of the back and the sides. Also, the selection of the braces and the correct scalloping and carving of the braces for tone. That is what I do.’

Maingard is closely involved with the selection of every piece of wood that goes into his guitars. He relies very heavily on an ‘intuitive feel’ in wood selection, which he ascribes to fifteen years of accumulative knowledge and experience in handling wood. This ‘feel’, according to him, can only be learned through experience. Maingard refers to it as an ‘x-factor that you cannot give to someone’, and relays the account of the great master guitar builder, Torres, who is reported to have said that his knowledge lay between his thumb and forefinger, and that it would follow him to the grave.

Furthermore, Maingard never deviates from set patterns, working to a 0.2mm accuracy with the use of clock gauges and digital readout veneers. This he believes results in the consistency in sound characteristic of his guitars. He also carves all the braces and sands the tops of the guitars himself.

He currently produces 28 to 30 guitars annually, of which a third are classical guitars. Each guitar constitutes approximately eighty hours of labour. This is more than any other South African guitar builder. One of the reasons for this large output is his use of jigs, coupled of course with the help of his assistants. By using jigs and by relying on the help of his assistants, Maingard has time to focus on what he considers the crucial aspect in sound production, namely the soundboard. ‘I spend hours on the soundboard, tapping and

listening and carving the braces'. Tap tone, in his opinion, is relative to the stiffness, age and year lines of the wood. There are thus any number of reasons why a wood may have either a bright tone or a bass tone.

He identifies the most important influences on his guitar building career as being luthiers like Jose Oribe from southern California, who built in the "traditional Spanish" style. Studying Santa Cruz guitars for a year in 1978 also played an important role in shaping Maingard as luthier. Although he does use a humidity cupboard, he feels that Scarborough, being the driest spot in the Cape, is ideal for his trade. He therefore seldom experiences any problems with humidity levels, so crucial for guitar construction.

3.2 Features of the Maingard Instruments

Figure 3.11 A frontal and back view of a Maingard guitar.

The physical dimensions and typical characteristics of Maingard's classical guitars are epitomized by the guitar photographed in figure 3.11 above. These dimensions are summarized in the following tables:

Physical dimensions

Overall length	970 mm
Weight	1560 g
Scale length	665 mm
String spacing at nut	8 mm
String spacing at saddle	13 mm
Neck width at nut	52 mm
Neck width at 12th fret	63 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	15 mm
Neck depth at 8th fret	16 mm
Upper bout	278 mm
Lower bout	366 mm
Body depth at heel	91 mm
Body depth at end-block	98 mm

Woods used

Backs	Brazilian Rosewood
Sides	Brazilian Rosewood
Bridge	East Indian Rosewood
Soundboard	Cedar
Neck	Mahogany
Fingerboard	Ebony
Headstock	Brazilian Rosewood

Volume is the first feature of structure and sound that Maingard regards as important, and for which he aims in his guitars. He believes that his guitars have a lot of power, and, furthermore, that their bright trebles, their distinctly Spanish sound, and their good balance between treble and bass are characteristic features. One of the most important reasons for the good balance between treble and bass, particularly in the case of his classical guitars, is that he only uses double sides. These double sides consist of two laminated pieces of wood, with Rosewood on the outside and Canadian Cypress on the

inside. He first observed this, he says, when repairing a top model Ramirez[1] guitar a number of years ago, and believes their efficacy to lie in the fact that double sides provide the soundboard with the rigidity needed to prevent the loss of vibrations. A consequence of this is the clear, separate nature of individual notes. For Maingard clarity is very important. He thus works towards ensuring that 'the edges of my notes, when they decay, are not wrapped up in the others'.

Perfect intonation is another feature Maingard regards as crucial. He thus goes to great lengths to ensure the accurate setting up of each guitar. The Maingard bridges are also slightly compensated to ensure perfect intonation. Aesthetic appeal and finish, although important, he considers as secondary to the value of producing a good sound. For Maingard it is the sound of the guitar rather than its appearance that separates good guitar builders from great guitar builders.

In order to strive to optimal quality of sound, Maingard uses Sloane hand-made machine heads in the making of his classical guitars. 'They are very expensive, but that is part of the joy of what I do'. As far as bracing is concerned, Maingard relies exclusively on a seven-strut fan-bracing pattern that is based on a Torres[2] pattern as shown in figure 3.12. He does however add two extra bass struts. Furthermore he adds a long strut, one that extends three quarters of the way across the lower bout, in order to hold the trebles tight. An added benefit of this is the increased volume it gives. Haddad writes that 'even the labels inside his guitars tell a story. His trademark 'M' is in one corner. Then there is the Maingard family crest: an oak tree bearing two golden acorns, with the motto *Ut Rupes Nostra* or "like our rock"' (2004: 64).

[1] See footnote on page 70 of this thesis.
[2] See page 24 of this thesis.

Figure 3.12 The standard *plantilla* that Maingard employs on his classical guitars, making crucial adjustments to suit the requirements of each customer.

Although volume is always an important consideration, Maingard warns that the luthier must always be conscious of the 'fine balance between volume and soul'. It is this lack of 'soul' that he identifies as one of the important shortcomings in the lattice-brace guitars pioneered by contemporary luthiers such as the Australian Greg Smallman[1]. 'I've heard a few of them and they all have huge volume, but they have an edge to them that I don't like. They are very heavy and rely on very thick backs … I have no desire whatsoever to go that route'. Another aspect of lattice-brace guitars he does not like is that, because of the pressure exerted on the very thin top, they do not last as long as fan-brace guitars. Furthermore, because functionality on different levels forms an important part of design, he believes that the weight of a lattice-brace guitar detracts from its functionality.

For the finishes on his instruments, Maingard uses a two-part mix varnish which he imports from Germany. Although French polishing is the ultimate finish for a guitar in terms of sound and aesthetics, he finds that it tends to be impractical for use on modern instruments because of its heat intolerance. The secret to the success of his varnish of preference is that it always be very thinly applied. 'It's part of why I have such a crisp sound, because my varnish doesn't hold my sound back'.

Unlike many South African luthiers Maingard does not shape his guitar tops to form a dome. It is not necessary to do so, he believes, because once the instrument is placed in a humidity cupboard, the pressure exerted on the top by the strings causes it to be moulded into a dome shape naturally. He always sets his carved linings at an angle to allow for this moulding process in the humidity cupboard.

3.3 Woods

Cedar is Maingard's wood of choice for soundboards, not only for the warm sound it evokes but also because it becomes responsive in a shorter space of time. In other words the guitar reaches its optimum sound sooner than in the case of a Spruce-top guitar. He does use Spruce as well though, depending on the kind of sound the client requires.

[1] See page 58 of this thesis.

For Maingard ‘a good guitar relies on fabulous timbers’. For this reason he sporadically visits overseas wood suppliers to personally select the woods he uses for his guitars, thus avoiding the frustration of having to send back woods because of their undesirable quality. These hand-selected woods include different varieties of Spruce, ranging from Sitka to Engelmann. In terms of Cedars, Maingard prefers Western Red Cedars from the northern part of the North-American continent. He uses this wood for his soundboards almost to the exclusion of all other Cedars.

Maingard is equally meticulous in choosing woods for the backs and sides of his guitars. ‘The woods make a big difference because your backs and your sides are reflectors’. For these parts of the guitar he chooses one of four wood types: Brazilian Rosewood, African Blackwood, Cocobolo from Pacific Mexico, or Indian Rosewood. Of these four, Brazilian Rosewood is by far the most sought after, rare, and (most will argue) ideal wood for the backs and sides of especially classical guitars. As a result the price of Brazilian Rosewood is exorbitant, making of a Brazilian Rosewood guitar an extremely valuable investment. Having worked with Brazilian Rosewood for many years, Maingard says: ‘It does have an aura about it. It is a wonderful tone wood and it is beautiful. You just cannot deny the beauty of a wood like that. There’s no other wood that looks like it and to go with its looks is that beautiful tone.’ Sadly, Maingard warns, because it is so sought after and rare we may soon see the extinction of this wood. Both Brazilian Rosewood and African Blackwood can be very temperamental though, he adds. After a few years little indentations might begin to appear. Aware of this problem, Maingard runs a cinnamon-water solution, imported from America, over all the possible future cracks before gluing up the instrument.

Indigenous woods do not feature prominently in most Maingard instruments, the only exception being African Blackwood which he uses to a great extent for the backs and sides of steel string guitars. He has experimented to a certain extent with other indigenous woods such as *Kiaat* and *Bubinga*, but has found none of them to his complete satisfaction. In his opinion *Kiaat* gives a very open sound, ideal for blues guitars, whereas

Bubinga results in a sound that lacks crispness, which renders both these woods undesirable for classical guitars. ‘My first concern is always sound … I’m looking for a particular note and any wood I use must give me that’. African Blackwood, however, he regards as ‘one of the best timbers in the world ... It will give you the most stunning tonal separation I have ever come across. The change from trebles to mids to bass is phenomenal. It is extraordinarily subtle, but its there. You can hardly hear it. It just shifts across like an automatic gear box. Other guitars are often too blended and you don’t get that subtlety.’

Knowledge of wood grains and of the best wood cutters is important in the selecting of woods, as is of course each individual piece’s tap tone. Maingard speaks passionately about his love of wood, and stresses the importance of acquiring patience in order to successfully work with it. ‘For the tree to sing again you have got to have the patience to go with it’.

3.4 Maingard as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

Maingard believes that South African luthiers have hugely undeveloped talent. ‘South Africans need to have faith that they can do it’, he says. However, they also need to recognize that ‘we don’t need to reinvent the wheel here. There are people that have gone before us and it would be wise to go and train and study with them’. South African luthiers could benefit greatly, he feels, from spending some money on overseas apprenticeships and courses, and from visiting wood suppliers.

As luthier, Maingard does lean on sketches and planning to a certain extent, but is led to a greater extent by his ear and ‘the knowledge that exists between my thumb and my forefinger’. He is also led by what the client requires. Given this latter requirement, the wood selection will be made in response to its tap tone. The tapping test places each piece of wood in one of three categories: bass, mids and trebles. Working from a standard basic design, Maingard then shifts the dimensions of the body according to the desired outcome. This ‘shifting’ is what ultimately makes all the difference to the success of the

instrument, but it is not one that can be calculated on paper. Armed with the intrinsic knowledge of years of experience, he says, ‘the only way you can be consistent is when you trust yourself’.

Maingard sees his own greatest achievement as luthier as having perfected a system of guitar making that he has been able to pass on to two younger guitar builders. These two assistants are destined to continue the Maingard name, and he has already begun the first steps in allowing them to take over the production. Having devoted the best part of thirty five years to guitar building, he now aims to slowly extricate himself from it, and to allow time instead to spend on his other passions. He feels called to devote more of his time to the running of men’s groups and other forms of social work with which he has involved himself for some years. Other ambitions include taking up guitar-playing again, after having released a CD in 2004, and spending more time with his children.

4 RODNEY STEDALL (1956 -)[1]

Figure 3.13 A photograph of Rodney Stedall in his workshop in Pretoria taken on 26 June 2005.

4.1 Biography

Rodney Stedall was born in Pretoria on 6 September 1956. He matriculated from Pretoria Boys High School, after which he studied optometry in Johannesburg at the then Wits Technicon, now the University of Johannesburg. He qualified in 1978 as Optometrist. Save for the few years as student in Johannesburg, he has resided in Pretoria his whole life.

Stedall is currently the coordinator of the South African Guild of Luthiers and began building guitars in 1998. However, he first took up singing and guitar playing, the folk guitar in particular, at the age of 11, inspired by his love for the music of singer-guitarists such as Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen. It was a strange series of events, he recalls, that

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interviews conducted with Stedall contained in Appendix G. All quotes are taken from this source.

led to his building his first guitar. He saw a guitar in a shop that he particularly liked, but, not being prepared to pay so much money for the instrument, began looking around elsewhere for a more affordable Martin-like guitar, finally deciding to advertise for old instruments in the local *Stoep Chatter* paper[1]. The result of this advertisement was that he ended up possessing a number of old ukuleles, guitars and banjos, all in need of repair. The repairing inspired Stedall to begin thinking about building his own guitar from scratch. Eventually, however, his first attempt was at that of a dulcimer[2]. 'It's a slightly easier thing to build. It gives you an idea of how to bend wood, the fretwork et cetera'. After mastering these basic techniques Stedall felt more prepared to attempt his first guitar, one that was designed to emulate the guitar he had originally seen in the shop. It is treasured in his house to this day. 'I'll never get rid of it. It will stay in the family'.

Stedall is not a full-time luthier and consequently only builds to order. He normally works on two guitars simultaneously as he considers this to be a more efficient use of his time. Like most South African luthiers, he is totally self-taught and started off with only Cumpiano and Natelson's 'Guitar Making: Tradition and Technology'[3] as guide. He did however attend the annual conference of the American Luthiers Guild in Tacoma, Washington, in June/July of 2004 – an occasion which brings together between 200 and 300 luthiers - where he also enrolled for one of their courses. Stedall has made twelve guitars to date, each selling for approximately R14 000. This includes eight classical guitars, one electric bass guitar and three steel-string acoustic guitars. He therefore builds both steel-string and classical guitars and of the constructional differences between the two he feels that the 'steel string is a more forgiving construction and I think that one can do a lot more experimentation with steel string'... In the case of his last two steel-string guitars, such experimentation has included some use of indigenous woods.

[1] The 'Stoep Chatter' was a local paper in which people could advertise for specific items they were looking for.
[2] The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music defines a dulcimer as 'a shallow closed box over which are stretched wires to be struck with 2 wooden hammers held in the players's hands'.
[3] Cumpiano, W. R. and Natelson, J. D. 1993. Guitar making: Tradition and Technology. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Chronical Books.

He identifies Mervyn Davis and Garth Pickard as his biggest influences and has a great regard for Mervyn Davis in particular, especially appreciating Davis's willingness to be of assistance to him. 'I really do admire him. I think that he is a true, true, true luthier […] He has given me a lot of info, especially on finishing. He helped me with my first guitar'. Stedall also has regular contact with Garth Pickard. It is largely due to Pickard's influence that Stedall has become a fairly traditional builder in the sense of using "traditional" woods and construction methods. 'I would say that I'm a traditionalist. I build traditional classical guitars and I always will'. In addition to his interaction with Davis and Pickard, Stedall, like all the Pretoria-based luthiers, greatly benefits from the feedback he receives from two prominent guitar teachers and performers, Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan. These two musicians act as consultants, lending the luthiers valuable insight from a player's perspective.

Although the Pretoria climate is not always conducive to guitar building, says Stedall, it is nevertheless satisfactory; the fact that humidity levels remain between 40% and 50% for a large part of the year renders the climate suitable to a large extent.

4.2 Features of the Stedall Instruments

Figure 3.14 A frontal view of a Stedall classical guitar.

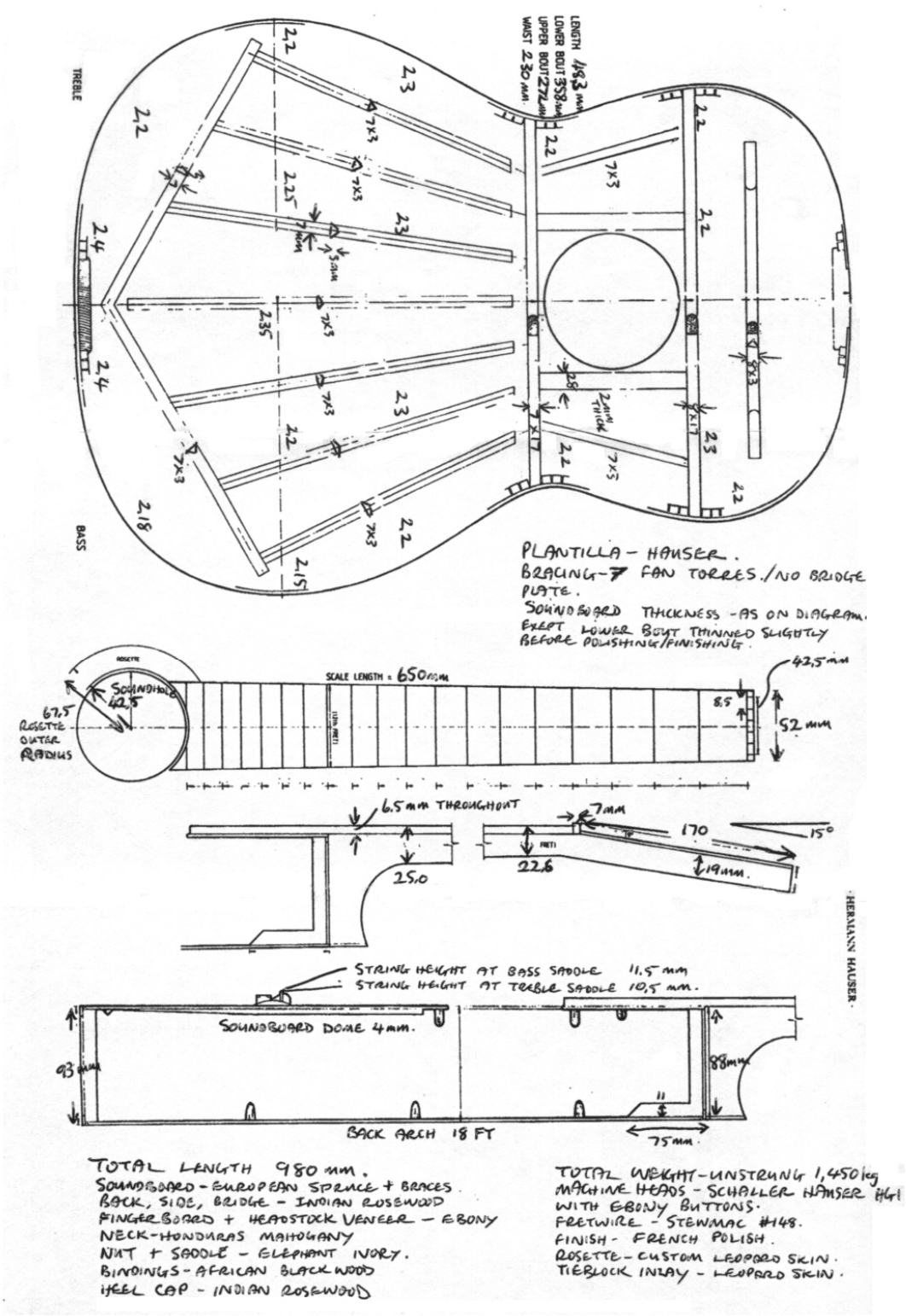

Figure 3.15 A diagram showing the measurements of the physical dimensions and woods used in the featured Stedall guitar that is featured in figure 3.14. (Diagram received by the author from Stedall on 21 July 2005)

The physical dimension and typical characteristics of Stedall's classical guitars are epitomized by the guitar photographed in figure 3.13 above. These dimensions are summarized in the following tables:

Physical dimensions

Overall length	980 mm
Weight	1475 g
Scale length	650 mm
String spacing at nut	8.5 mm
Neck width at nut	52 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	22.5 mm
Neck depth at 8th fret	25 mm
Upper bout	272 mm
Lower bout	358 mm
Body depth at heel	88 mm
Body depth at end-block	93 mm

Woods used

Backs	Indian Rosewood
Sides	Indian Rosewood
Bridge	Indian Rosewood
Soundboard	European Spruce
Neck	Honduras Mahogany
Fingerboard	Ebony
Headstock	Ebony

Stedall uses a *plantilla* on his classical guitars that is based on a 1947 Hauser[1] pattern, although he does not adhere to the pattern rigidly. He does not lean as heavily on planning and sketches as the architect and draughtsman luthiers[2] do. In addition, he employs a fan-bracing strut system, motivating this by saying that 'lattice bracing would be too premature for me. I think you need to build quite a few guitars using traditional fan bracing first'. In this manner he avoids the potential problem of lattice-braced guitars, namely, the possibility of the top splitting.

[1] See page 38 of this thesis.
[2] These luthiers include Mervyn Davis, Hans van den Berg, Garth Pickard, and Colin Cleveland.

The finishing of Stedall's guitars place him in a fairly unique group with Garth Pickard in that these two luthiers are probably the greatest proponents of French polishing in South Africa. Stedall prefers French polish because, due to the fact that it is applied so thinly, its impact on the sound of the guitar is minimal. This enables the guitar itself to sound at an optimum level, with virtually no external interference. An added advantage of French polishing is that you don't have to 'spray and pollute the environment'. But, he comments, the process of French polishing can be a difficult one. 'It is a process of learning how to lay down that French polish without removing it at the same time'. He has regular contact with Dutch master luthier Otto Vowinkel[1] who also employs the French polish finish on his guitars. Stedall's decision to opt for a French polish finish is motivated more by its impact on - or, more properly, by its lack of interference with - the sound of the guitar, than by its contribution to the visual appearance of the finished instrument. He admits, however, that he is unable to describe in words exactly what this ideal guitar 'sound' is; such a description is something to which he aspires, believing that it may come to him in time and with experience. To this ideal, visual appeal must remain a secondary consideration. '…With French polishing you have to sacrifice a bit of visual appeal, but it doesn't have to be that way, because if you are a good French polisher, you can get the guitar to eventually be as good as can be … It is a finish that takes a lot more elbow grease'.

Stedall uses imported Schaller machine heads on his classical guitars. In the case of his two most recently completed classical guitars, he used a Hauser *plantilla* combined with a modified Torres bracing and a domed *solera*. The dome in the *solera* is three sixteenths-of-an-inch deep, which makes it quite prominent. The dome is in fact very visible when viewing the profile of the guitar. This "traditional" feature, says Stedall, is very important in sound production. It is achieved by forcing the top into a dome shape with the aid of hide glue. The glue helps to ensure that the dome shape is retained. The 'drum-like' function of the guitar top as soundboard results from the constant tension of the dome shape. The domed top is a significant feature of all of the most recent Stedall classical instruments.

[1] See figure B2 on page 66 of this thesis.

Finally, one of the most beautiful features of Stedall's classical guitars is the unique rosette that he himself designs, an intricate leopard-skin mosaic pattern that requires a great deal of patience, skill and planning. An example of his rosette is shown in figure 3.16.

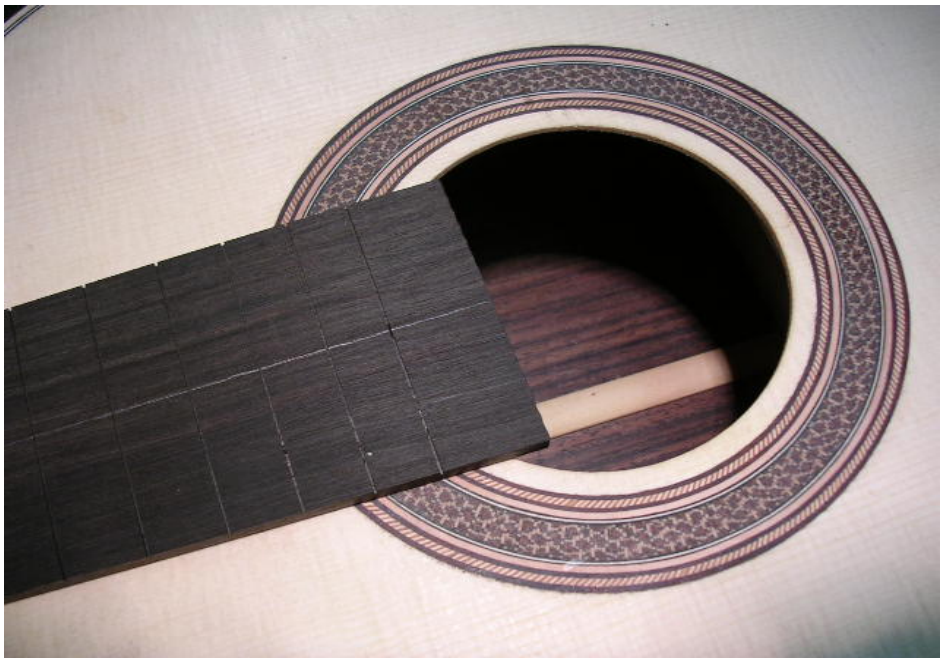

Figure 3.16 A leopard-skin mosaic pattern, the typical rosette of a Stedall classical guitar.

4.3 Woods

Stedall's exclusive use of traditional imported woods for his classical guitars, mentioned earlier, is motivated by his belief that classical guitar players themselves are for the most part very traditional in their tastes. 'I might not be able to sell a classical guitar if it is made from unusual wood'. To date he has used Indian Rosewood for backs and sides, and, with the exception of one guitar for which he used Cedar, his guitar tops have been made exclusively from Spruce. For both Spruce and Cedar he relies on imports from Germany. In addition to these, Stedall also expresses an interest in working with other traditional woods, such as Brazilian Rosewood.

For steel-string guitars, as previously discussed, Stedall believes that indigenous woods have a lot to offer. In this regard he has worked with *Mopanie* and *Kiaat*. *Mopanie* he describes as a lovely wood that is 'easy to sand, not so easy to bend. It's nice in that it doesn't clog up sand paper. It's a pleasure in that respect'. Stedall sees *Kiaat* as a lovely wood to work with because of its stability. He believes that *Kiaat* has the potential to become the South African luthiers's wood, the trademark of South African guitars. 'The indigenous woods are just brought about by economics and why should we use another wood if *Kiaat* works so well?' It is a wood that he feels might be able to compete with other woods internationally in terms of its acoustic properties, but might be found lacking in terms of aesthetic appeal. '*Kiaat* is … just not as striking as Rosewood'.

Another locally available wood, Australian Blackwood, Stedall describes as the 'wood of choice for Australian luthiers. It grows here as an alien species. It's actually quite invasive but readily available. It's a beautiful wood to work with'. Furthermore, he uses African Blackwood for his bridges and necks. This wood has incredible acoustic properties, but to get hold of a piece big enough to use as back and sides of a guitar is difficult and costly.

Stedall does not conduct any special testing in selecting the woods used in his guitars.

4.4 Stedall as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

Of the art of luthiery in general Stedall remarks: 'All luthiers are looking for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We're looking for THAT sound that sounds fantastic. Whatever you try is subconsciously a way of getting the best sound out of that instrument'.

The lack of any formal support for aspiring luthiers in South Africa is not something about which he is particularly concerned, but he does identify the shortage of full-time local luthiers as a problem in this regard. The art of luthiery is best learnt through apprenticeship, and such apprenticeships are only possible if there are enough established

full-time luthiers from whom others can learn. In addition, the master-apprentice relationship has advantages for all concerned, hence his belief that teaching is a good way of becoming a master. 'I believe a true master is one who gives away information. I believe in giving. That's why I put so much into the Guild'.

Stedall is of the opinion that South African guitars are made to a high standard, and he holds a number of local luthiers in very high regard. 'Hans van den Berg is just amazing. His craftsmanship is absolutely incredible. His attention to quality and finish is just unbelievable … Alistair Thompson is much more sound orientated. Garth is just good all round'. Indeed, he believes, South African guitars have much to offer the world in terms of quality. 'I think it's a big-kept secret. I think we're making marvelous guitars.' It is not possible, he maintains, to speak of the emergence of a specific tradition in South African guitar building - other than possibly the use of indigenous woods - ascribing this to the fact that the community of luthiers in this country is so small, and that each of these luthiers are so unique. He has much faith in the future of luthiery in this country. 'I probably see the most amount of growth, because the Guild gets new members all the time. It's growing very fast.'

He attributes some of his most rewarding experiences as luthier to the interaction that he has with the other luthiers in the country. '…having the Luthier's Guild has been for me the most stimulating thing about building guitars. I have always had someone to look to, to ask and also someone to critique. The criticism has made me far more critical of my own work. I think it has been an amazing thing to have a guild'. As a result, Stedall feels that he has really grown as luthier over the years. Unlike his approach to his first guitar, which he built following a 'recipe', he is starting to understand what he is doing and why he is doing it. In addition to his interaction with other members of the Guild, he attributes a lot of his progress in this regard to his dealings with Eugene Clarke, an American traditional luthier he met at the conference he attended in 2004. A major difference he observes between South African luthiers and their American counterparts is the Americans' greater use of mechanical equipment. They 'have jigs for everything', he says.

CHAPTER 4

SOUTH AFRICAN LUTHIERS WHO BUILD EXPERIMENTAL GUITARS OUTSIDE OF THE "TRADITIONAL SPANISH METHOD"

This chapter will highlight the features employed by the South African luthiers that have broken away from the perceived traditional Spanish method of guitar construction, unifying them as a separate group that warrants a discussion as such. It will be remembered that in global terms, a "modern" school of guitar construction can be identified as a relatively recent trend in luthiery. It has also been stated thus far that this "modern" approach to luthiery is less characterized by homogeneous features than by a general lack of reliance on "traditional" construction techniques. This includes many new alterations in so-called traditional guitar construction made for various reasons, ranging from increased playability to stronger tone and better projection. Gruhn comments on this:

> Most classical guitars are conservative in ornamentation and body shape but almost every facet of their construction has been the subject of experimentation. Whereas the classical guitar traditionally had been considered an intimate "parlour music" instrument modern makers have attempted to produce a concert instrument with greater power and more projection (Gruhn: http://www.gruhn.com/articles/ramirez.html. Accessed on 14 November 2007).

These alterations have taken many different forms and include features such as carved backs, cutaways and lattice-braced soundboards. Materials that veer away from the accepted norm also play an important role in this perceived modern school of guitar construction. They include the use of non-traditional woods, in the case of the South African luthiers, often indigenous woods such as *Kiaat*. Woods used in the construction of instruments in general and more specifically guitars are well documented in sources such as Jahnel 1981. Understandably so though, 'unusual' woods such as *Kiaat* and other indigenous South African woods do not yet feature in such academic records. This

chapter will thus also shed light on some of these woods, notably *Kiaat*, in reference to South African luthiers' thoughts on their perceived acoustic and aesthetic properties.

1 ALISTAIR THOMPSON (1949-)[1]

Figure 4.1 A photograph of Alistair Thompson taken in his workshop in Pretoria taken on 25 June 2005.

1.1 Biography

Alistair Thompson is a scientist by occupation and was born in Johannesburg on 4 November 1949. He studied at Wits University and has stayed in Gauteng his whole life, currently running the diagnostic centre at the Roodeplaaat Agricultural Research Council. His responsibilities include the diagnosing of crop diseases, recommending possible solutions and treatments, and then controlling their implementations.

Thompson has been building guitars on a part-time basis for twenty years, having started in 1986/87, save two years he stayed in Nelspruit where he did not have any facilities that allowed for building. Since moving back to Pretoria fourteen years ago and reestablishing himself as a luthier, he has constantly been building and experimenting with different

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interviews conducted with Thompson contained in Appendix A. All quotes are taken from this source.

guitars and designs. He has played the guitar since childhood, first in school bands and other informal groups, and later in more professional bands as a semi-professional jazz/blues/rock musician. Thompson started doing repair work around 1980 for 'Ivory Lane', a guitar shop in Pretoria that kept all sorts of guitars. However, he cannot recollect exactly how it came about that he made the transition to luthiery, although does mention that meeting the then nineteen-year-old Mervyn Davis proved to be a big inspiration to this end. 'He had just come out of the army and was staying in a little place called 'Wondergeluk' in Pretoria. We have had contact all through the years and he was always my main inspiration. I've always been knocked out by his guitars'.

Thompson has never received any specialized training or instruction in luthiery and has gathered most of his information from books. In this regard he credits the books of Doubtfire[1] and Young[2] as having laid the foundations of his approach to guitar building.

[1] Doubtfire, S. 1981. Make your own classical guitar. London: Victor Gollancz.
[2] Young, D. R. 1975. The Steel String Guitar: Construction and repair. Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Co.

1.2 Features of the Thompson Instruments

Figure 4.2 A back and frontal view of a recent Thompson classical guitar featuring a carved arched back.

The physical dimensions and typical characteristics of Thompson's classical guitars are epitomized by the guitar photographed in figure 4.2 above. These dimensions are summarized in the following tables:

Physical dimensions

Scale length	650 mm
Weight	1937 g
Body length	496 mm
Depth of heel	105 mm
Upper bout	290 mm
Waist	242 mm

Lower bout	362 mm
Soundboard thickness	2.7 mm (centre) 2.4 mm (edges)
Soundhole diameter	84 mm
Carved back arch	14-15 mm
Bridge width	27 mm
Bridge lenght	177 mm
Height of saddle	9 mm
Fingerboard width at nut	52.5 mm
Fingerboard width at 12th fret	62.5 mm

Woods used

Back	*Kiaat*
Sides	*Kiaat*
Bridge	*Hardekool*
Soundboard	Western Redback Ceder
Neck	Honduras Hahogany
Fingerboard	*Hardekool*
Headstock	Black Ivory with soapstone inlays
Binding	Rhodesian Mahogany
Purfling	Maple

Thompson's latest classical guitars feature arched backs. This is a fairly modern notion and one that veers away from the perceived Spanish tradition. He identifies two main schools of guitar building, the one encompassing arched-back and lattice-bracing guitars of the "modern"[1] school, the other being the "traditional Spanish" school of construction. The main reason for his moving in this direction is his fear that *Kiaat* may soon become unobtainable. Thompson therefore whishes to create a 'signature sound' from South African guitars while such woods are still available. 'I therefore thought that the most sensible thing to do would be to do the arched-back'. He explains that to an extent the back and especially the sides of an arched-back guitar is not acoustically as important as in a conventional guitar and therefore does not warrant specifically ideal wood. 'I thought that there is going to be a real lack of good quality back and sides wood, so I thought it would be better to get into arched-back stuff'. This makes him the only South African luthier apart from Colin Cleveland currently building arched-back guitars. Arched-back guitars are very labour-intensive guitars to construct, mainly because they feature a solid piece of wood for the back from which the arch is carved out of. 'A wood like *Hardepeer*

[1] See page 112 of this thesis.

is unbelievably hard so it involves a lot of hard work'. These arched-backs generally have a characteristic, non-traditional sound which lacks the warm bass of the traditional Spanish guitar but which features greater volume. The greater volume of arched-back guitars, says Thompson, may be attributed to its construction, wherein the reflective surface of the back plays a big role. The sound also tends to be more clear-cut, penetrating and metallic in nature. To effectively counter this colder sound, Thompson uses Cedar for the top, which generally results in a warmer tone.

Thompson continually experiments with different bracing techniques and patterns. He concludes that 'if you have parallel bracing, you tend to get good separation of notes, but if you do cross-grain bracing like Torres[1], you definitely get a better balance between bass and treble'. On his most recent guitar Thompson has chosen to make the soundboard as stiff as possible by joining all of the braces 'to form sort of a rigid structure.' He also made use of transverse braces to stiffen up both the treble and the bass sound of the guitar. This specific guitar features a very thin 30g bridge plate made from *Hardekool.* This he considers important in terms of 'distributing the sound and stiffening up the centre of the lower bout … *Hardekool* has got something about it. It kind of holds the sound back and it punches it out'. This instrument is slightly larger than most classical guitars because Thompson wanted to bring out the bass frequencies, but the soundboard and back of the guitar were not sufficiently compatible in terms of the fundamentals they produced. 'I have always believed that the back and the top should be sort of half a tone apart in their fundamentals to get good coupling between the front and the back. With this kind of guitar you have got no coupling because the tap tone of the back is so high, because it is so thick, that it is literally tones and tones apart from the soundboard'.

According to Thompson the fan braces of this guitar are notched over the bridge plate so that the sound radiating out from the bridge does not hit any sort of dead spots, but moves straight out of the guitar. Another feature of this guitar is an 8-9 mm thick fingerboard to compensate for a neck that is tilted up. This tilt of 3-4 mm is used to improve the volume.

[1] See page 24 of this thesis.

The greatest success of the instrument, Thompson believes, is the treble frequencies emanating from the Cedar top. When tapping and selecting the tops he mainly listens to the clearness of the tap tone. Furthermore, he feels that the arched-back guitar is 'one of the most flexible instruments' and that the sound of an arched-back is easier to manipulate.

Ornamental materials used in Thompson classical guitars include soap-stone, glass and precious-stone inlays. These are illustrated in figure 4.3 and 4.4 below. Soap-stone inlays are a rarity in classical guitar finishes and a feature unique to Thomson instruments in South Africa. His rosette patterns are based on Ndebele textile designs. 'I would say that African textiles have been my greatest influence'.

Figure 4.3 An example of a soap-stone inlay in the head of a Thompson guitar.

Figure 4.4 The rosette of a Thompson guitar, showing the influence of Ndebele textile designs.

1.3 <u>Woods</u>

Thompson was the first South African luthier to experiment with indigenous woods, and *Kiaat* specifically. He found *Kiaat* to be an ideal wood for the backs and sides of guitars. He cannot recall what initially inspired him to use *Kiaat*, but relates that 'it is a nice wood and there was a lot of it ... I must have had access somewhere to *Kiaat* and I tapped it and the sound impressed me'. He does have great concerns about the future of *Kiaat* since 'it's not being sustainably cut down'. This is particularly unfortunate, he believes, as *Kiaat* is one of the few trees known to him that will grow from a cut-off branch that is

simply stuck in the ground. He describes it as a very user-friendly wood to work with. It occurs naturally in South and Southern Africa, starting round about the Kruger National Park and growing more extensively northwards to countries like Zambia, Namibia and Mozambique. 'Mozambique ones tend to be a bit more orange and reddish, much heavier. The Namibia one tends to be very light and not all that suitable. The Zambian one is incredibly beautiful. It's almost like glass - it's so hard, so it's a great wood'.

Other indigenous woods he has used include African Mahogany which he found to work especially well when used in conjunction with Redwood for the tops of steel string guitars. 'It's just got some kind of wonderful combination. It's got a kind of warmth that I really love'. *Hardekool* he has used successfully and extensively for fingerboards. Thompson also describes Black Ivory as a wonderful wood with which to make guitars, but mentions that it is incredibly difficult to get hold of. 'It's unbelievably hard. It's like mild steel, but it's got miraculous qualities and it is said to be as good as Brazilian Rosewood…' which is traditionally the wood of choice of most luthiers because of its superior acoustic and aesthetic qualities. Other woods that have been used by Thompson include Rhodesian Rosewood for backs and sides and *Chunfuti* for fingerboards, 'which is a rather rare wood from Mozambique which they used to make sleepers with at the end of the last century'. He has furthermore used *Hardepeer* for the backs and sides of his arched-back guitars.

Thompson has never used anything other than Cedar or Spruce for the tops of his guitars because no suitable indigenous replacements have been identified to date. 'The only local wood we have from the pine family is *Widdringtonia*, which grows in the Cedarberg. I've never really looked at that wood, but they are very small trees so I doubt very much if you could ever get any top from them. There are no other indigenous woods suitable… Spruce has got the highest weight-to-strength ratio of any wood'. Furthermore, he has made use of Rhodesian Teak for decorative purposes and has experimented with enameling techniques because of his interest in African jewelry. This process involves heating up coloured glass that produces intense colours. He expresses an interest in exploring the use of precious metals like gold and silver in his inlays in future. This idea

also stems from his inspiration found in African jewelry, those emanating from Central Africa up through to the Middle East particularly.

1.4 Thompson as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

More often than not Thompson tends to work on two or three guitars simultaneously and has an average output of about two instruments per annum. Although he builds guitars to the exclusion of all other instruments, he has over the years built a wide range of different types, from classical to steel-string to arched-top jazz guitars. Being such an experimentalist and building such a wide range of instruments makes it very difficult to discuss or identify typical features of Thompson's guitars for the purposes of a study such as this. His guitars total around twenty, including twelve classical guitars and four steel string guitars. Of these he finds the steel string construction to be the more challenging one, because of difficult procedures like dove-tail joints and the need to successfully negotiate a low action.

As one of the more experienced luthiers in South Africa, Thompson was one of the founder members of the South African Guild of Luthiers in 1998. It was in this capacity that he made contact via e-mail with another luthier that served as inspiration to him, the renowned Australian luthier Greg Smallman[1], who pioneered the lattice-braced guitars that revolutionized guitar making with new sound production principles. He regards Greg Smallman and Mervyn Davis as leading international luthiers and as innovative builders of supreme instruments. Both of these leading luthiers have on occasion relayed to Thompson that they do not believe in any form of 'scientific' building. Thompson on the other hand classifies himself as a more scientific builder who loves experimenting. 'I prefer to experiment myself and write my own notes … I have now got a little book I compiled from my own experience. I lean quite heavily on this, being a technically-orientated scientist. Things like the weighed top sound in relation to stiffness, calculating terms of stiffness versus weight et cetera'. He tells of scientific tests he performs, like weighing the finished braces and only choosing the lightest, and testing and documenting

[1] See page 58 of this thesis.

the responsiveness of soundboards through the use of graphs and diagrams. ‘I am therefore more scientific than most, but I also go by my gut feel’.

He does not exclude any intuitive judgments in matters such as wood selection, however. ‘You start off following dimensions of drawings … This guy thins his top to 2.5 mm so you do it. Then you realize that you’ve got to start tapping and listening, you know’. He does not really conduct any special tests in selecting woods, often having to work with woods ordered from foreign countries. Thompson expresses the wish to have a more extensive knowledge of design. ‘I think it’s something that gives a lot of luthiers a real head start … I would say it’s one of the biggest advantages starting if you’ve got design abilities’.

On his steel string guitars he uses Grover machine heads while Schaller machine heads feature exclusively on his classical guitars. Thompson describes the Pretoria climate as largely ideal for luthiery, except for humidity buildups during the night. He conducts all the important gluing processes like that of the fingerboard, braces and bridge at 40% relative humidity.

He believes the standard of guitar making in South Africa to be reasonably high and again identifies Mervyn Davis’ instruments as definitive. He sees the ability to sell your guitars in the overseas market as the ultimate test in proving yourself as luthier, the main reason being that the local market is very limited. Asked whether he could identify features of locally made guitars, he responded that the woods some South African luthiers use is the only possible unifying and unique element in local luthiery.

2 COLIN CLEVELAND (1936-)[1]

Figure 4.5 A photograph of Colin Cleveland in his workshop in Cape Town taken on 11 June 2005.

2.1 Biography

Colin Cleveland was born in Canada on 16 September 1936. His family moved to Zimbabwe in 1939 where he spent the remainder of his childhood. After school he left for Cape Town in 1956 to commence architecture studies, deciding thereafter to make this city his home. 'I met my wife here and fell in love with the Cape'. He is currently part of a big firm of architects in Cape Town called 'Louis Karol Architects' and builds classical guitars exclusively on a part-time basis.

Cleveland has been building guitars since around 1960. At the time he was playing rhythm guitar in a main-stream jazz group while at university. When this guitar (a steel-string Gibson) broke, he was obliged to attempt to repair it, thus leading to his first

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interview conducted with Cleveland contained in Appendix B. All quotes are taken from this source.

experience in the art of luthiery. Soon after, Cleveland's musical interest was turned to flamenco music because of two Spanish guitarists that visited South Africa. He then built his first guitar, a flamenco type '…using all the wrong woods…' because of his inexperience then. Since then, he has built more classical guitars than any other South African luthier, the number exceeding 250. This he ascribes to the fact, firstly, that he has been building guitars longer than any other South African luthier and, secondly, that he builds classical guitars to the exclusion of any other. 'If you want to make a living out of guitars you have to make a range of instruments. My passion has always been classical music and particularly classical guitar … If I didn't play I probably wouldn't build classical guitars, because you can't test what you do'. His earlier building was influenced by a local guitar builder called Harry Harrison[1] who started building around the same time. Cleveland and Harrison became for each other a mutual source of information and inspiration since there were no other local guitar builders active during the time.

Cleveland has produced on average anything from a minimum of one to a maximum of eight to ten guitars per annum. Currently he limits his orders to two per year, which allows for more time spent on experimenting. 'I would say that I took orders of up to six or seven a year, but I couldn't do them all in one year. I did that for a number of years and sold quite a few guitars overseas in the process'. The bulk of these exports went to Italy where Cleveland had a concert guitarist friend in the guise of Uliano Marchio[2] who regularly played on his guitars and had students who subsequently also ordered Cleveland guitars.

Experimentation is high on Cleveland's priority list and takes up a fair amount of his time. This opportunity to experiment, he sees as a luxury afforded by the fact that he does not have to build guitars for a living, being a full time architect. Sharp's book, 'Make your own Spanish Guitar'[3], had some influence in the beginning of his guitar-making career, but not to the same extent as the guitars he inspected and studied with the

[1] Harry Harrison, whom Cleveland met in 1961, was a part-time luthier working as an electrical engineer.
[2] Italian guitarist Uliano Marchio and his wife, Marisa (soprano), were professional performers and together formed the duet known as Marchio.
[3] Sharpe, A.P. 1957. Make your own Spanish Guitar London: Cliford Essex Music Co. Ltd.

permission of visiting performers. His biggest influences have come from the feedback he has received from performers, such as his friend Uliano Marchio, who used to test his instruments. 'Often there were times where I would go to him and say that I don't know what else to do or where else to go. He would encourage me to keep on going. Then suddenly you make a breakthrough in sound. I keep fairly detailed notes on what I do and the things I change and you store them up, so you can follow a direction'. Other influences include the Johannesburg luthier Jacob van der Geest[1] and the player David Hewitt.[2] Being an architect, Cleveland makes extensive use of drawings, plans and sketches, especially when designing jigs and other similar constructional designs.

[1] Dutch immigrant Jacob van der Geest was one of the first South African luthiers and built both guitars and violins, still held in high regard today.
[2] David Hewitt was a prominent South African guitarist and composer who performed and recorded internationally.

2.2 FEATURES OF THE CLEVELAND INSTRUMENTS

Figure 4.6 A back and frontal view of a Cleveland classical guitar.

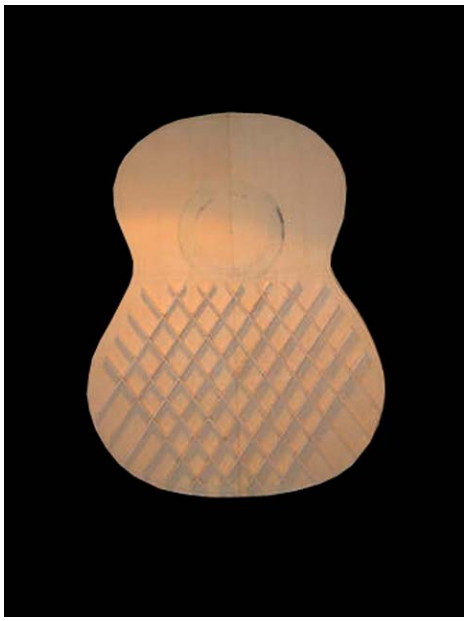

Figure 4.7 The lattice-braced soundboard of the Cleveland guitar featured in figure 4.6.

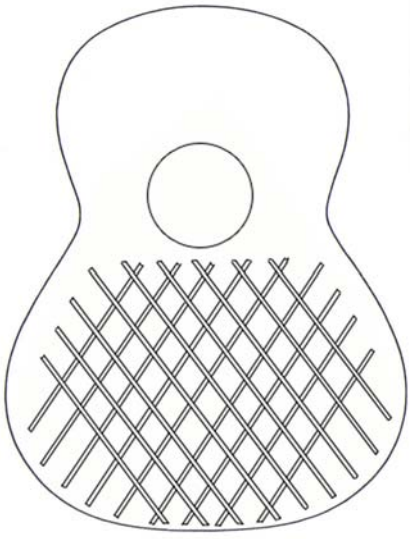

Figure 4.8 A diagram of the lattice-braced top featured in figure 4.7.

The following tables summarize characteristic features of Cleveland's guitars:

Physical dimensions

Overall length	960 mm
Weight	1450 g
Scale length	650 mm
String spacing at nut	9 mm
String spacing at saddle	12 mm
Neck width at nut	54 mm
Neck width at 12th fret	63 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	26 mm
Neck depth at 8th fret	26 mm
Upper bout	283 mm
Lower bout	368 mm
Body depth at heel	78 mm
Body depth at end-block	102 mm

Woods used

Backs	Brazilian Rosewood
Sides	Brazilian Rosewood
Bridge	East Indian Rosewood
Soundboard	Spruce
Neck	Spanish Cedar
Fingerboard	Ebony
Headstock	Brazilian Rosewood
Arm rest	African Blackwood

Cleveland makes use of a *plantilla* very close to a Torres[1] pattern with some Bouchet[2] influences. Years of building guitars have taught him that a luthier should not aim for guitars with a big volume only. 'I've learned to go for quality of sound'. For him, the fact that there are many construction techniques with special reference to strutting patterns in guitar building forms part of the charm of the guitar. 'They all have different-coloured voices'. His latest experiments seem to indicate to Cleveland that one other factor that does play an important role in sound production is a solid carved back. He explains that the carved back has qualities of sustain and balance. However, this has to be combined with factors involving the soundboard and sides. This constructional feature he believes

[1] See page 24 of this thesis.
[2] See page 43 of this thesis.

to have merit because of the sustain and balance it generates and has ambitions of further experimentation in this direction.

Although Cleveland places the quality of the sound first and foremost in terms of importance in a quality instrument, the need for more volume has sent him down different roads, including that of lattice bracing. This places Cleveland in a unique position as the only South African luthier who has really ventured into lattice-bracing principles. He has built more than twenty guitars using the lattice-bracing design, which he says generated valuable information not necessarily related to actual lattice-bracing, such as support structures and balancing tops. This he feels has made the lattice-bracing experiment a worth while one. Currently he builds guitars in the more "traditional" fan-bracing style, after identifying shortcomings in the results of the lattice-bracing construction. Of these, he names the lack of beauty in sound as the major deterring factor. Lattice-bracing does however provide advantages, such as strong volume and consistency over the whole range of the instrument but this consistency can lead to the loss of colour, which constitutes the main reason for Cleveland's return to the "traditional" fan-bracing construction. This he occasionally combines with the less "traditional" solid-carved back. The resulting smaller tone of the fan-bracing guitar he justifies in saying that '…the guitar is not a symphonic instrument'.

Cleveland instruments sell for up to R40 000 each. Save for the polishing, which is a process he often applies to more than one guitar at a time, Cleveland always completes one guitar before starting with a next. Although he started out using French polish[1] on his finished instruments, Cleveland has since opted for alternatives such as polyurethane, since French polish is not as long lasting. According to him polyurethane polishes up very well, but is something you have to work with very carefully. Nitrocellulose he believes to be the best compromise for the important reason that it does not harm the guitar. He uses mainly Schaller machine heads, although not exclusively, having also used numerous Spanish, American and English made ones.

[1] See page 20 of this thesis.

2.3 Woods

Both imported Cedar and Spruce are used in Cleveland instruments. He does not however find Engelmann Spruce quite to his liking and does not make use of it. Cleveland prefers top grade European or Balkan Spruce and Western Red Cedar. 'The Engelmann that I had was quite fibrous and did not have the clear tap tone of the other two'. Likewise he finds Sitka Spruce too fibrous.

For backs and sides Cleveland uses both Brazilian Rosewood and East Indian Rosewood of which he is fortunate enough to possess fairly large stocks. He has also used both Vietnamese Rosewood and Chinese Rosewood for this purpose which he describes as being 'very dense'. Like most luthiers he favours Brazilian Rosewood above all others for the use of backs and sides, both in terms of sound and aesthetic appeal, although concedes that it is difficult to get hold of, very expensive and not very cost effective to work with, since a large percentage of the wood is rendered useless due to cracks and imperfections that arise after shaping it to size. He often uses Brazilian Rosewood for the face of the head of his guitars because of its aesthetic appeal. This can be seen in figure 4.9. Woods that Cleveland uses for fingerboards include mainly African Blackwood and Ebony, although he has also made use of *Padauk*. Cleveland does not use any indigenous woods for acoustic parts of the guitar.

He regards tapping as a very important part of testing and selecting woods and believes the tap tone to be a very good guide and indication of acoustic potential. 'I believe in the Spanish method which does not involve electronic measuring …To me the tactile feel of the wood you work with tells you what it is going to do … I have tried measuring and weighing the wood, but have gone back to working by feel'.

The rosette used on most Cleveland instruments is one he designed himself, based on the Musaceae tree commonly found in Zimbabwe. This design is shown firure 4.10. He was inspired towards this pattern by his son who built a guitar with a rosette that reminded Cleveland of that tree. For this pattern he primarily makes use of natural colour woods like Ebony and Boxwood, or possibly the red of *Padauk*, preferring these to artificial

colours. Well-seasoned woods are crucial to Cleveland in guitar construction for reasons of stability and countering the effects of humidity, both during the building process as well as for the finished guitar. He does not make use of an electronically-controlled humidity room and therefore finds that the climate in Cape Town is often not ideal for luthiery, especially in winter.

Figure 4.9 The head design of a typical Cleveland classical guitar featuring Brazilian Rosewood.

Figure 4.10 The rosette and label of a Cleveland guitar.

2.4 Cleveland as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

When building new instruments, Cleveland does not work off written measurements, preferring to rely on the 'instinct' he has developed as a result of years of experience. He therefore finds the final fretting of the guitar particularly daunting. He attaches the neck of the guitar before he adds the frets. 'By then you have almost finished the guitar and one really bad cut or mistake will have you take the whole neck off again. Attaching metal to the instrument I just don't like'. For him building guitars is a life's obsession. 'To me, if I don't make guitars it feels like a part of me is missing. I haven't found anything to fill that gap. I almost did music instead of architecture because of my qualifications. I think I did grade eight or something and I did music in matric. I played bassoon, 'cello and piano, but there is nothing that has ever excited me as much as the classical guitar. That sound. I think that is what drives you. To hear somebody who is a

really good player play one of my instruments and the instrument is sounding like you hoped it would is enough. What more do you need?'

Cleveland speaks highly of South African guitars and luthiers. '…I don't think we are inferior to any overseas luthiers. Our methods are the same. Actually, I think that we are a lot more adventurous than the European guys and I think Mervyn has pushed the use of local woods or African woods, which work very well'. He does not identify a "South African sound" or tradition though, in the same way that one can not identify an "Australian" sound. 'There is a "Spanish sound", but that is where it all started'. Cleveland is positive about the future of luthiery in South Africa, but stresses that a lot of its success will depend on the interest shown in music by all South Africans.

3 MERVYN DAVIS (1955-)[1]

Figure 4.11 A photograph of Mervyn Davis taken in his workshop in Broederstroom on 24 June 2005.

3.1 Biography

Mervyn Davis, one of only two full-time guitar builders in the counry, has long been considered one of South Africa's finest. He was born on 10 January 1955 in Pretoria and stayed there till the age of seven, when his family moved to Queenstown in the Eastern Cape. There he matriculated from Langkloof High School, after which he studied Architecture at the then University of Port Elizabeth. Military service took him back to his town of birth, and then he settled in the nearby town of Broederstroom, where he lives and works to this day.

[1] The information contained in this section is based on the interviews conducted with Davis contained in Appendix F. All quotes are taken from this source.

A love of music and an interest in musical instruments is deeply entrenched in the Davis family history. His grandfather built violins on his farm in Namaqualand and his father, whilst a prisoner of war in Italy during World War II, built a mandolin from an old tea box, his one and only tool being a broken sickle blade tip. Even as a schoolboy Davis felt the urge to follow in their footsteps, also launching his own career as luthier with the building of a mandolin before attempting his first full-blown guitar at the age of seventeen. Lured by the sounds of the guitars he heard performed on the radio, he began to teach himself to play on that first guitar. A spellbinding encounter with Laurindo Almeida[1] at a school concert, where Almaida played Tarrega's famous 'Recuerdos de la Alhambra', inspired Davis to turn his attention to the classical guitar. He made a few alterations to his own old Gallo steel-string guitar to make it suitable for nylon strings and then promptly began to teach himself 'Recuerdos de la Alhambra' from a tape recording he had made off the radio. This in turn led to the building of his first authentic classical guitar, which he completed in 1971. His guitar-making career began to gain momentum when, as University student in the Unitas hostel in Port Elizabeth, he received his first few orders. In his final year as student he moved out of the hostel and into town, affording him the 'luxury' of a workshop, which, along with an increasing demand for his instruments, finally launched him into guitar making as a full-time profession. Even though today Davis works almost exclusively on guitars, the bulk of his early work as professional luthier was made up of work on other members of the string family.

Davis currently maintains an output of about six guitars per annum. He ascribes his biggest inspiration and his aspiration as luthier to the early recordings of guitarist John Williams. 'John Williams was absoluut my "hero" gewees as 'n speler. Daar is net nie 'n gelyke vir hom nie. Sy skoonheid en "timing" en klank is net ongelooflik. Mense sê hy is klinies, maar ek dink hy is nie. Hy is baie ekspressief, maar op 'n baie subtiele manier en dit is vir my wat klassieke ghitaar is, teenoor flamenco'[2]. With the sound of John

[1] Laurindo Almeida (1917 – 1995) from Brazil was an internationally recognized, award-winning classical and jazz guitarist.

[2] John Williams was my absolute hero as player. There is just no-one to equal him. His precision, timing and sound is just unbelievable. Some people say that he is clinical, but I don't think so. He is very expressive, but in a very subtle manner and that is what the classical guitar is all about in my opinion, as opposed to flamenco.

Williams' early recordings as model, he began experimenting with guitar sounds and designs, an experimentation process which was eventually to lead to his proudest achievement, the 'floating articulation node' (FAN) design.

Davis's mercurial rise as luthier of renowned stature and reputation is made all the more astonishing if one considers that he is completely self-taught. He recounts: 'Ek was 'n paar jaar lank al 'n voltydse ghitaarmaker voor ek die eerste boek daaroor in die hande gekry het'[1]. This he sees as one of the great advantages in his career because of the fact that he started off totally uninfluenced and thus steered clear of copying, rather experimented right from the start. Davis is of the opinion that an unawareness of the rules can afford you a freedom that in turn can lead to significant breakthroughs and discoveries.

[1] I had been a full-time luthier for a number of years before I picked up the first book on the subject.

3.2 The Floating Articulation Node Design

Figure 4.12 A back and frontal view of the unique Davis Classic FAN design.

The following table provides a summary of the physical dimensions of the 'Davis Classic', built on the principles of the floating articulation node design. An illustration of this unique design can be seen in figure 4.12 above.

Physical dimensions

Overall length	965 mm
Weight	3812 g
Scale length	630 mm
String spacing at nut	8 mm
String spacing at saddle	11.5 mm
Neck width at nut	50 mm
Neck width at 12th fret	60 mm
Neck depth at 1st fret	19 mm

Neck depth at 8th fret	21 mm
Upper bout	280 mm
Lower bout	375 mm
Body depth at heel	70 mm
Body depth at end-block	90 mm

Woods used

Back	*Kiaat*
Sides	*Kiaat*
Bridge	Engelmann Spruce
Soundboard	Engelmann Spruce
Neck	*Kiaat*
Fingerboard	*Rose de Boa*
Headstock	Ebony

3.2.1 Origin

According to Davis, the revolutionary floating articulation node design is the culmination of years of experimentation. He identifies the first real prototype of this design as a guitar he finished in 1988, a first generation FAN-design guitar, as it were.

In plotting the birth, influences and evolution of the design, Davis relays that numerous experiments with strutting patterns seemed to him to indicate that strutting does not necessarily always play as big a role in sound differences as he had assumed. This in turn led him to wonder about the actual critical variables in terms of sound production in the guitar, a question that fascinates Davis even to this day. He noticed on one occasion that a slight neck adjustment to a conventional classical guitar resulted in a marked difference, both in sound quality and volume, and thus the first important variable was identified, the first step taken towards the emergence of this new design. Davis observed that the higher you lift the neck angle, the more harp-like the sound becomes and that the first sound you hear upon release of the string is a strong initial volume followed by sustain. He believes that this effect results in a specific tone colour. This raised the question of how much sound in fact is allowed to flow into the soundboard and how much needs to be retained in the string. A volume/sustain continuum emerges. The more energy you retain in the string, the lower the initial volume will be, but more sustain will result. This concept

speaks to the principle of energy management. The first concrete step in the new design was thus the raised neck angle.

Secondly, the building of two baroque guitars[1] at that time focused Davis's attention on the question of the arbitrariness of air volume. He concluded that air volume does not really make a substantial difference to the sound. Thus, the next step for him was to decrease the size of the soundboard in order to allow the full soundboard to be used to its optimum capacity. This forms one of the fundamental differences between conventional guitars and Davis's FAN design. A conventionally designed guitar does not use the whole soundboard in sound production, which can result in energy wastage.

A third important construction implication that Davis identifies in the prototype of 1988 is the free access it allows to the whole of the neck, extending above the twelfth fret. This is made possible by the fact that, when compared to conventional guitars, it has a smaller elliptic soundboard and consequently also a reduced air volume. Reducing the size of the body of the guitar thus provides an increased access to the neck.

These three important discoveries and subsequent constructional amendments of 1988 saw the birth of new principles in guitar sound construction. It was to be a design that would occupy much of Davis's time and energy in the years ahead. The instruments he has built since 1988 show a gradual evolution of the same basic principles of this design. He comments: 'In 'n mate dwing hierdie nuwe ontwerp homself af op my'[2] and feels that he has just scratched the surface in terms of the design's potential. The most important breakthrough it has made, he believes, is its total detachment from any so-called tradition enforced on the instrument. He is quick to add, however, that he is not entirely skeptical of tradition and that the "traditional" classical guitar remains one of the most beautiful things you can ever find, both aesthetically and in terms of sound. The term "classical" in itself can refer to something that is an exemplary model and Davis feels than in a lot of ways the classical guitar is just that. It is the characteristic warm sound of the

[1] The baroque guitar is significantly smaller than the guitar in use today and therefore utilizes a smaller air volume.
[2] In a way this new design forces itself down on me.

"traditional" classical guitar that especially appeals to him. But, he says, you guarantee the death of a tradition by holding on to it too vehemently.

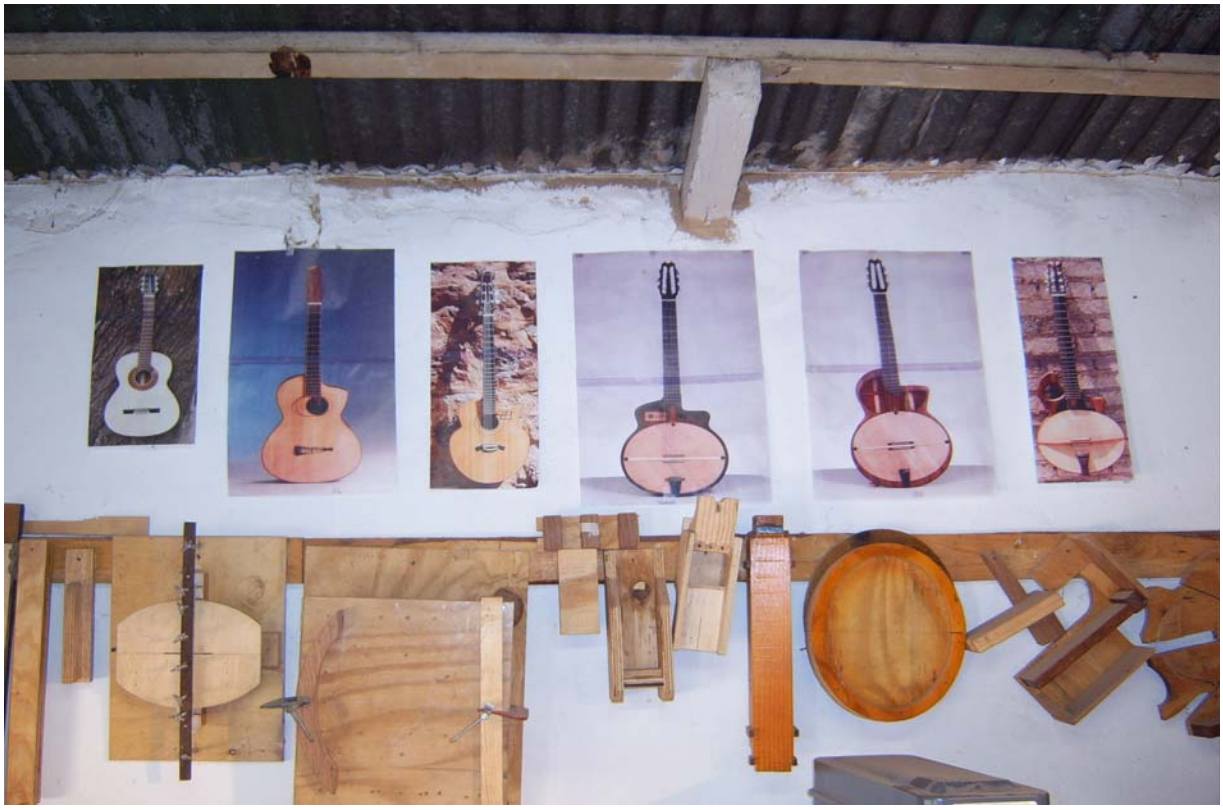

Figure 4.13 Posters on the Davis workshop representing the evolution of the FAN design since 1988.

3.2.2 Aesthetic Features

The aesthetic qualities of a guitar are of utmost importance to Davis: he believes that this is the one factor that first inspires you when looking at a guitar. In this regard, it is noticeable that the FAN guitar is deprived of any 'added' decorations. Instead decoration is an intrinsic part of the guitar. One very noticeable feature of this built-in aesthetic appeal is Davis's novel use of wood: the darkness of *Kiaat* for the neck, back and sides of the instrument is strikingly offset by the light wood of the soundboard (see later discussion of his use of wood). Furthermore, the instrument does not require a gloss finish. Davis uses a penetrating wax finish that covers the guitar in a matt watertight seal, providing the added advantage and convenience of allowing one to touch up scratches without difficulty. The design does not have a traditional soundhole and does not require the characteristic rosette that consists of inlays and that forms such an important aesthetic

feature of the "traditional" classical guitar. Thus, he says that the Davis design's aesthetics are built into the design and are not added afterwards, which would make the construction process much longer. 'Dit is "significant" omdat dit vir my ook 'n aanduiding is van die tyd waarin ons leef"[1]. Davis sees this as a major challenge in the design.

3.2.3 Features of Construction

Constructional features of the guitar warrant special mention because they are so revolutionary. One of the primary ideas behind the design is to provide performers with a sturdy instrument. In fact, the only fragile part of the guitar, as in any guitar, is the top or soundboard. Even here Davis has been innovative, minimizing the problem by using a removable soundboard, enabling easy replacement without affecting in any way the rest of the guitar. The sides of the guitar are solid, thick *Kiaat* rather than the bent, thin pieces of wood of conventional guitars. This gives weight to the guitar. Furthermore, because optimum use is made of the soundboard, this design does not rely on the acoustic properties of the wood used for the sides to the same extent that so-called traditional guitars do. In this design therefore, Davis uses *Kiaat* for its aesthetic and physical rather than its acoustic qualities. Another important advantage of the solid and weighty sides of the new design is the fact that it optimizes energy conservation in that it minimizes the oozing away of sound. Such oozing away can occur in "traditional" instruments when the sides are too light to keep the soundboard perfectly still.

The soundboard is traditional in the sense that it requires the use of bracing to strengthen the thin wood used. For bracing Davis relies on a modified fan-bracing[2] system, combined with a soundboard that has the grain of the wood turned at a ninety-degree angle to the strings, as opposed to the traditional parallel system used in most guitars. Because the braces then run across the grain of the wood, this innovation results in more effective stiffening of the soundboard. The increased stiffness enables Davis to rely on a very thin soundboard, which in turn improves the responsiveness of the instrument. His

[1] This is significant to me because it is an indication of the times we are living in.
[2] Fan bracing refers to the traditional bracing system established by Torres, not to be confused with the Davis FAN (floating articulation node) design.

fan bracing is modified in that it consists of struts running parallel to each other, rather than the traditional approach, which is to have the struts branch outwards from a central point in the manner of a fan. He also dispenses with the cut-off bars used in conventional guitars, because this function is fulfilled by the rim of the FAN guitar. Unlike conventional guitars, this design does not utilize the back of the guitar as an active role player in sound production.

The idea of a removable soundboard holds a number of inherent advantages. First of all it allows for the easy repair of the guitar in the case of a damaged soundboard. Whereas normally a damaged soundboard would render a guitar forever useless, good for nothing but the scrap heap, now this is no longer the case. When one considers that, unlike the violin for example, the classical guitar does not maintain its acoustic properties over an extended period of time because of the extreme tension exerted on the soundboard, a replaceable soundboard could certainly be seen as a benefit to performers. Another significant advantage is that it allows easy removal for modification of a strut or struts. In this manner Davis is able to experiment with the sound of each completed instrument, and then to easily make whatever adaptations may be desired.

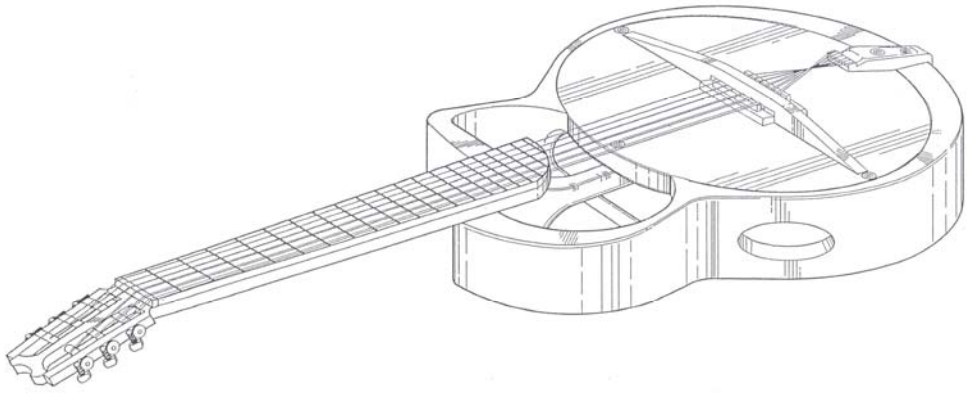

Figure 4.14 The Mervyn Davis FAN design. (Diagram received by the author from Davis on 24 June 2005 and taken from Adams and Adams Patent Attorneys document, 2002)

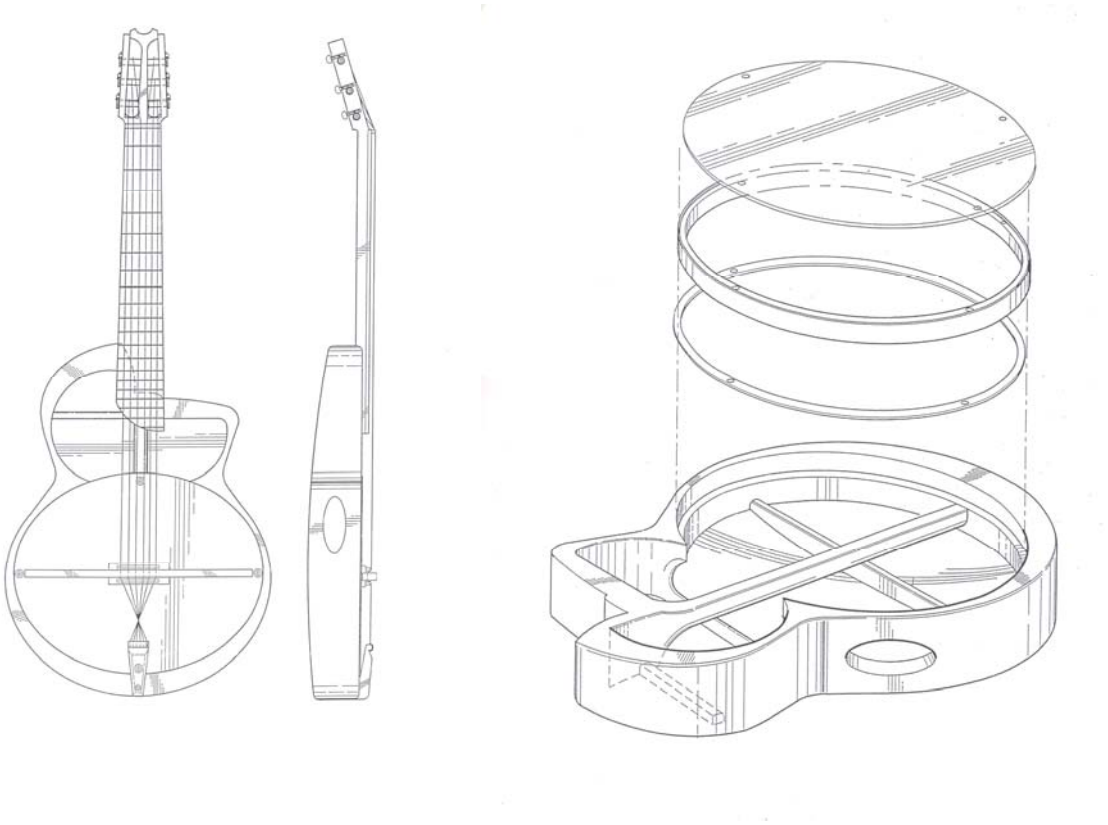

Figure 4.15 A frontal and side view of the FAN guitar as well as a diagram indicating the makeup and assembly of the removable soundboard. (Diagrams received by the author from Davis on 24 June 2005 and taken from Adams and Adams Patent Attorneys document, 2002)

3.2.4 Sound Features

Early John Williams recordings, as previously discussed, served as model for the sound aspired to in the FAN design. In Davis's experience, performances on the instrument have shown that the trebles are not drowned out the way they can be with conventional guitars, especially when combined with other instruments. This, together with the fact that the design results in an increase in volume and projection, renders it ideal for ensemble playing.

The solid, sturdy design also minimizes feedback when the sound is electronically amplified. Sound engineers, says Davis, have commented that it is an instrument that lends itself to effective sound recording.

Davis feels that the guitar is especially suited to the playing of jazz. This he ascribes to the clear separation of notes characteristic of this design. The separation of notes works especially well in the playing of extended chords consisting of adjacent semitones, often encountered in jazz.

The greatest challenge now is to find a way of marrying the above qualities with a return to more of a "classical" sound. At the moment the characteristic sound of the FAN design falls more inside the parameters of jazz guitar or "modern" classical than "traditional" classical. If he could achieve this, he feels, he will have achieved a 100% manipulation of the sound potential of the FAN design. In a "traditional" classical guitar one is always confronted with a sound box dominated by bass and mid-range frequencies, while the trebles are often drowned out. The new Davis design has taken that phenomenon to the other extreme, but at some cost to the bass. A great deal of his current time and effort is devoted to experimenting with means of reversing that process again, in order to better understand all the variables involved.

As previously discussed, the removable soundboard affords Davis the unique opportunity to work towards a specific sound and, after testing various patterns and combinations, to amend the strutting on the soundboard accordingly. It is this 'sound test' that has become the exclusive test done to the soundboards of the Davis instrument. A myriad of documented experiments over many years, using sawdust to test the responsiveness of the soundboard, have led to a basic concept of bracing design that precedes the sound test. Davis is currently experimenting in largely uncharted territories in line with his quest to determine the crucial variables in sound production by applying energy management principles of bass and steel string guitars to the classical guitar. He feels that this allows him to more accurately gather and subsequently analyze information. Universal principles of energy management applied to different guitars inevitably produce different results. The idea behind his experiments is therefore to move closer towards the ever-elusive place of relative predictability, to be able to quantify and document the relationship between design and sound production in the specific case of the FAN design.

This predictability principle will allow Davis to ultimately be in a position to spend less time on each instrument, thus he will be able to produce more of these guitars at a lower price, without sacrificing any of the sound quality. He contends that the whole world is moving in the direction of mass production and lower prices and that if his experiments prove to be successful, he will be able to provide the same quality cheaper to all. Along with predictability and assurance of sound quality, the very latest Davis guitars are totally modular in that they can be taken apart completely and any part can be replaced and/or altered. This is also an important advantage, conducive to mass production of the instrument.


Figures 4.16 A selection of Davis guitars on display at the South African luthiers guild held in Pretoria in 2005.

3.3 Woods

The freedom of thought that led Davis to experiment so freely and fruitfully with guitar design and sound quality is also one that led him to start experimenting with indigenous woods. The use of indigenous woods, specifically *Kiaat*, has become one of Davis's important trademarks. In this regard he was initially influenced by long-time friend and fellow guitar maker, Alistair Thomson. He comments: 'Wat die inheemse houte aanbetref, dink ek was ek en hy tot 'n groot mate pioniers gewees en ek het basies op sy kennis in die begin gewerk'[1].

[1]As far as the use of indigenous woods is concerned, I think that he and I were pioneers to a great extent and I basically worked from his knowledge initially.

It is a combination of the availability, user-friendly nature, aesthetic and acoustic properties, and the stability of *Kiaat* that appeals to Davis, and that has led to his almost exclusive use of this wood for the backs, sides and necks of his guitars. He further believes it to be a wood that can compete with any traditionally-used wood in the world in terms of the sound that it evokes. He comments: 'Hy is sekerlik die stabielste hout wat ek ken. Jy kan hom basies nat gebruik en hy word droog sonder om te trek of te kraak'[1]. Davis does not do any scientific testing in wood selection, relying instead on his intuitive feel in this regard.

For the making of guitar tops, however, no indigenous wood is really suitable, thus Davis adheres to the traditional Cedar or Spruce for this purpose. He does not have any specific preference between the two as far as their sound is concerned, but is of the opinion that the lighter colour of Spruce better compliments the *Kiaat* of his guitars from an aesthetic point of view, and therefore tends to make use of it more often. Davis regards the humidity factor in South Africa as something that has not always been recognized as important and states that he does not do any strutting when the relative humidity is higher than 20%. He therefore does most of his work in winter when it is dryer while doing planning and other less weather-reliant work in the summer months.

3.4 Davis as Luthier and his thoughts on South African Luthiery

Davis holds South African luthiers in high regard and looks forward to contributing more to the South African Guild of Luthiers in future. In his opinion, one of the greatest contributions South Africans can make to luthiery worldwide, is their knowledge of indigenous woods. The quality of the work produced in South Africa he sees as 'absoluut op internasionale standaard'[2], referring in particular to the exhibitions he has seen at the conferences of South African Guild of Luthiers. For him, it might be too early to identify a specific South African tradition in guitar building but observes its inevitable growth. It is especially in terms of the aesthetics of the South African instruments that he feels it is

[1] It is the surely the most stable wood that I know. One can basically use it wet and it will dry without cracking or bending.
[2] Absolutely on an international standard

possible to distinguish a common thread. He identifies Rodney Stedall's leopard-skin rosette and Alistair Thomson's African jewelry inspired designs as examples of this. He also sees a willingness to experiment as something that the South African luthiers as a group have in common.

SECTION C

AN HISTORIC – HERMENEUTIC CRITIQUE

CHAPTER 5
GADAMER, HEIDEGGER AND LUTHIERY

The study on the development of the guitar in a historical and international context in the previous chapters has shed light on a number of aspects that warrant philosophical enquiry. This chapter will seek to offer a basic philosophical structure in which such a discussion can occur and concomitantly identify and seek to explain certain characteristics of luthiery as an art and science, characteristic collaborations between makers and players and the role of tradition in luthiery as became clear through the interviews conducted with the South African luthiers.

1 THE MAKER/PLAYER COLLABORATION

As mentioned earlier, the close collaboration and symbiotic relationship between luthier and player permeates much of the history of the development of the guitar. This phenomenon is well documented by authors such as Summerfield (1996: 329). This is of course a collaboration not unique to the guitar by any means. It does however seem to feature much stronger in this instrument's development than most others'. Renowned luthier Greg Smallman gives a possible reason for this in saying that the guitar, unlike the violin, is not in a highly developed state[1] which therefore necessitates the introduction of experimental features. For him this cannot be done without the input of professional guitarists, more able to comment on workable and desirable features (Saba 2006: 20). Similarly, Romanillos states that 'the guitar is an instrument that lacks stability like the cello or fiddle. Some ideas work, some don't' (Romanillos in Evans and Evans 1977: 88). Chapter two of this thesis draws attention to the input of professional performing guitarists in the innovations, motivation and careers of prominent luthiers. A

[1] Given the notion of tradition adopted in this thesis, namely, one that is open-ended and never finished, Smallman's reference to the state of the guitar's development is perhaps somewhat problematical, since it seems to suggest a continuum with a beginning and an end, and that the violin is further progressed along this continuum if not already at its end, whereas the guitar has a long way to go. Smallman's remark should be understood, however, as pointing to the absence of an exemplary model for the guitar such as the violin has, for example, in the Stradivarius.

diagrammatic representation of this collaboration highlighted in chapter two could be represented in the following way:

LUTHIER		**PLAYER**
Torres	-	Tarrega/Arcas
Hauser/Ramirez	-	Segovia
Friederich	-	Alexandre Lagoya
Romanillos	-	Bream
Smallman	-	Williams

The central chapters of this thesis have also drawn attention to the fact that, through forums such as the South African Guild of Luthiers South African luthiers receive regular input from local guitarists such as Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan[1]. Underlying this very practical and pragmatic working relationship, there emerges a thought-provoking philosophical issue. In a quest towards excellence and continuous improvement, the luthier relies on the experience of one who can speak from a place of knowing. Plato, although on a secondary level, refers to this phenomenon in his dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon:

> Socrates: And the excellence or beauty or truth of every structure, animate or inanimate, and of every structure of man, is relative to the use for which nature or the artist has intended them?
>
> Glaucon: True
>
> Socrates: Then the user of them must have the greatest experience of them, and he must indicate to the maker the good or bad qualities which develop themselves in use; for example, the flute-player will tell the flute-maker which of his flutes is satisfactory to the performer; he will tell him how he ought to make them, and the other will attend to his instructions?
>
> Glaucon: Of course.
>
> Socrates: The one knows and therefore speaks with authority about the goodness and badness of flutes, while the other, confiding in him will do what he is told by him?
>
> Glaucon: True.

[1] See figures B5 and B6 on page 67 of this thesis.

> Socrates: The instrument is the same, but about the excellence or badness of it the maker will only attain a correct belief; and this he will gain from he who knows, by talking to him and being compelled to hear what he has to say, whereas the user will have knowledge?
> Glaucon: True (Plato[1] in Rosen 2000: 208-209).

In light of the above, it could therefore be argued that only the player of the guitar will have true knowledge of the quality of a guitar in as far as knowledge is based on experience. John Williams voices his appreciation of the realization of this fact by luthier Greg Smallman, with whom he collaborates with great success:

> Often I have found that after trying out a new guitar at the request of the maker, you give them your opinion, pointing out weak spots as well as good things, and they just start arguing with you, trying to persuade you that it really is a better guitar than it is! Greg impressed me from the start because he was always willing to listen (Williams: http://www.thewholeguitarist.com/musos/williams-AGJ-06.htm. Accessed on 10 April 2007).

For Romanillos, the collaboration and friendship with the acclaimed Julian Bream is 'a driving force, but it could also be a pitfall, because his standard is terribly high and one is trying to produce the ultimate instrument' (Romanillos in Evans and Evans 1977: 88).

Several questions then arise: To what extent are knowledge and truth related to experience? Should experience be explored as a diachronic or a synchronic phenomenon? Can experience ever be objective?

Gadamer's hermeneutical approach to the concept of experience offers perhaps the most credible treatment of this issue. For him, the concept of experience proves to be particularly problematical when approached from within the historico-critical paradigm characteristic of the natural sciences. In his view the natural sciences see experience as valid only if such experience can be confirmed by repetition, and 'this means that by its very nature, experience abolishes its history and thus itself' (2004: 342). He elaborates on

[1] Plato. *Republic.* Selected from The Republic of Plato. Tr. B. Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888.

this problem stating that it must be considered that experience is in itself a process. Experience is thus diachronic rather than synchronic in nature:

> In fact, this process is essentially negative. It cannot be described simply as the unbroken generation of typical universals. Rather, this generation takes place as false generalizations are continually refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical is shown not to be so (2004: 347).

The conclusion Gadamer reaches is essentially that there can be no understanding without prior knowledge and that understanding can be described as 'the merging of various horizons of meaning' (Delius 2005: 114). If we are to adhere to this diachronic view in our example of the guitar player, it becomes clear that in this regard experience of such factors as the guitar's quality of sound, its playability, and its aesthetic appeal, must always be viewed within the framework of some kind of historical context. The guitar player, as opposed to the luthier, is in his/her very essence someone with a specific history of similar experiences of extracting and experiencing certain qualities of the guitar. The synchronic scientific notion of confirmation through the repetition of unchanging universals, applicable under all circumstances for all players at all times, would certainly not apply here, the reason being that the guitar builder only benefits because of the specific view of the player afforded him/her through experiences altogether different from those of the builder. Because of the fact that a fairly large percentage of luthiers also play guitar, to varying degrees, it could be argued that in such cases a fusion of horizons occur. Here a distinction needs to be made between these luthiers, who are merely able to play, and professional performers, who, because of their performing experiences are able to comment on the required characteristics of a guitar in a performance setup.

In what relation does knowledge stand to experience then? For Gadamer 'experience stands in an ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge' (2004: 350). Instead experience emphasizes the changing, contingent nature of knowledge:

> The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only **through** experiences but is also open **to** new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call "being experienced," does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself (2004: 350).

We can thus see the undeniable qualitative element Gadamer attaches to the concept of experience. Furthermore, he states that 'only through negative instances do we require new experiences…' and that 'insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense' (2004: 350). His concept of negative instances or experiences can be related to those a guitar player might have in a number of ways. 'Negative instances' relating to guitar players might include constructional and musical shortcomings that the playing of a specific guitar exposes. It is therefore only through the lack of desired qualities such as lack of clarity of sound, lack of volume and/or sustain or lack of playability, that a player could gain insight into the desirability of such qualities in a particular instrument. Playability of an instrument always remains a priority of high importance to many players. Luthiers often try to rise to the challenge of producing instruments that would continually provide players with greater ease of playing while taking care not to compromise any quality in the sound of the guitar. Pickard warns against the possible pitfalls of complying with players' demands in terms of playability to the detriment of the other qualities of the guitar:

> That ease of playing that a lot of guitarists complain about, if I may be controversial, I think they're lazy. Or not lazy, but if you want to make paintings, you need to learn the technique of the brush before you can make a masterpiece. You don't skip the technique of learning to use the brush, in a sense, but that's just my opinion (Pickard in Appendix C: 218).

This provides the player with a certain presupposition of what is to be expected from an instrument. When the subject (player) then communes with the object, whether a work of art or in our case a musical instrument – his/her original horizon of meaning merges with that of the object. He thereby arrives at a deeper understanding of what he began by presupposing. This phenomenon Gadamer refers to as the hermeneutic circle, initially identified by his teacher Martin Heidegger whom he quotes to the following effect:

> It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing, and we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves (Heidegger in Gadamer 2004: 269)[1].

Gadamer interprets this quote as a capability of each and every revision of the anticipatory 'fore-projection' to project before itself a new projection of meaning. Furthermore, 'interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation' (2004: 269). Olivier summarizes this notion as follows:

> Gadamer invokes Heidegger's conception of 'fore-understanding' – that is, the insight that the so-called hermeneutic circle is not a vicious circle, but one that harbours a positive possibility in so far as a 'working-out' of the 'fore-meanings' or pre-judgements implicit in one's understanding of something potentially confirms that they are not 'arbitrary fancies', but well-founded or legitimate in terms of their validity and provenance (2002: 249).

Returning to the example of the guitar builder and guitar player, it becomes apparent that that which distinguishes the player from the builder is the extent to which he/she has been exposed to this 'constant process of new projection' in terms of the sound and playability of the instrument . Theoretically, the player would be more open to new experiences and horizons of understanding through more rigorously revising and modifying fore-

[1] From *Being and Time*

conceptions. Cleveland and Van den Berg are well aware of the valuable input the player can give the luthier because of the player's aforementioned 'privileged' position, as is evident in their comments concerning two prominent South African guitar players, Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan:

> If it hadn't been for those two, there wouldn't be anybody making guitars. Not like they are today, at least (Cleveland in Appendix B: 210).

> Hulle sal vir my uitwys waar ek kan verbeter en dan gaan ek weer terug en doen my huiswerk en kyk of ek in daardie opsigte kan verbeter. Ek het baie aan hulle te danke vir hulle bydrae[1] (Van den Berg in Appendix D: 232).

This two-way inter-dependent nature of the respective activities of the guitar builder and player has hitherto been viewed only in terms of what the player can present the builder. It stands to reason though that the builder similarly presents the player with the instrument necessary for his/her profession and built to his/her exact requirements. This can only be possible through a mastery which always implies the use of technology on some level. Seeing that this thesis focuses primarily on luthiery as a phenomenon of the merging of technology and art, we need to investigate the ontological nature of both. Of the 20th century philosophers who have done extensive work on these topics, it is Heidegger who presents us with possibly the most systematic treatment of both. A complete and exhaustive study of Heideggerian philosophy would far surpass the scope of this study and would not be entirely true to its purpose. It is important however to have a basic knowledge of Heideggerian terminology and thought to identify and conceptualize those areas applicable to luthiery. His later work is particularly significant in this regard.

[1] They show me where I can improve and then I go back to the drawing board and try to improve in those areas. I am very thankful for their input.

2 MARTIN HEIDEGGER (1889 – 1976)

Heidegger is widely regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. His magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927), seeks to analyze human existence and its temporality. In it he identifies a relationship of humans to space and time in essence different to the mode of existence of things. Delius offers a very accurate and effective summery of Heidegger's view on Being:

> Being is always "being in the world," that is to say, it entails a relationship to a pre-existent environment with its own quite specific quality as regards existence. Hence the world is always "disclosed" (erschlossen) in one way or another. However, existence cannot choose a pre-disclosed world for itself; it is thrown into the world. But existence that is thrown into the world is not tied to any particular manner of being. It must first, at every moment and in every decision, make itself into what it wants to be. Heidegger gives the name of 'concern' (Sorge) to this "existential," the fact that existence is "that Being which is concerned in its being with its being". In concern, the temporality of human existence, the knowledge of our own mortality, becomes visible. Existence is a "being unto death." Were it not for the certainty of death, were existence not "held out into Nothingness," there would not be the danger of wrongly choosing one's own authentic life. But as things are, only by being "resolute" can we escape inauthenticity, the helpless dependence on "Them." However, Heidegger leaves open the question of "resolute to what end?" (2005: 99)

Being remained a subject that dominated Heidegger's philosophical thought throughout his career. For him, traditional philosophy was unable to adequately approach or explain the essence of being. He criticized Western philosophy for neglecting to see being as the ground of all objective existence and in his later philosophy appealed for modesty and attention to the 'quiet messages of being', for only when humanity no longer tries to bend nature to his will with the aid of technology, will he be able to carry out his task as the 'guardian of being' (Delius 2005: 100).

3 HEIDEGGER AND ART

Heidegger's interest in art as a subject of critical reflection grew in significance only after mid-1930. In his most substantial work on the topic, *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), he rejects two widely held notions:

1) That art is concerned only with beauty and pleasure.
2) That a work of art is primarily a thing and that we superimpose aesthetic value on it by our subjective view of it (Inwood 2000: 116).

Clark comments on this view in saying that 'for Heidegger, art for art's sake is the death knell of art. So, ironically, is the very discipline of aesthetics, formed in the eighteenth century as the separate philosophical study of sensuous feeling' (2002: 42).

3.1 The Nature of Art

What then does Heidegger indeed identify as the true nature of art? In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' he firstly identifies a 'thingly character' contained in all works of art. For him, 'there is something stony in a work of architecture, wooden in a carving, colored in a painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical composition' (Heidegger 1971: 19). What makes a work of art different from other everyday objects that surely contain a similar 'thingly character'? In answering that question it is perhaps important to make mention of the fact that Heidegger identifies three types of things, namely:

1) a mere thing
2) equipment
3) an artwork.

He draws attention to the similarities as well as the differences between these three modes of beings in identifying usefulness as a basic feature of equipment which renders it distinct from a mere thing or from an artwork (1971: 28-29). In short, '…an artwork differs from equipment and has something in common with a mere thing. Like a natural

rock and unlike shoes, an artwork is not produced for a specific use or purpose, though unlike the rock and shoes it is not "self-contained" (Inwood 2000: 117).

Self-containment refers to the fact that the work of art is unlike the mere thing and equipment in that it always calls for an observer or interpreter. These observers and interpreters Heidegger refers to as 'preservers'.

One all-important Heideggerian view of art that Clark identifies as 'the rejection of mimesis', is the rejection of the notion of art as a form of representation or imitation (2002: 43). Great art, for Heidegger, will always be related to truth as 'unconcealment'. It should be pointed out that this is a revolutionary conception of truth, as opposed to the hitherto widely-held notion of truth as correspondence. In what Clark refers to as 'the singularity of the work' he describes the nature of the work as one that calls for a removal from all relations, thus standing on its own and for itself alone. Heidegger refers to this 'singularity' in the following way:

> But the artist's most peculiar intention already aims in this direction. The work is to be released by him to its pure self-subsistence. It is precisely in great art … that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge (1971: 40).

This view invariably questions the role of the artist and accordingly Clark concludes that 'to view the art-work as the product of some creative state in the artist is only superficially correct … So the power of disclosure is not our own – it is not a human creation – but it may be harnessed and harmonized as it shows itself differently in varying kinds of emergent work' (2002: 49). The artist thus emerges not as a creator, but as someone who merely harnesses that which the work reveals. It is this singular nature of the work that distinguishes it in essence from equipment in that it is not absorbed completely in its function. Thus, for Heidegger, the artist is the origin of the work of art, and the work of art is the origin of the artist. This is a logic of undecidability, which refuses to indicate a definite, privileged origin.

Heidegger identifies another important trait in his analysis of works of art in that '…it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made' (1971: 20). In searching for the 'something other' he refers to, we need look no further than his discussion in *The origin of the Work of Art* pertaining to works of art as opposed to 'mere things' and equipment. Here Heidegger famously presents two exhibits in his analysis of art, namely that of Van Gogh's painting of a solitary pair of worn peasant shoes, and the Greek Temple of Aphaia.

3.2 Van Gogh's Painting of a pair of Peasant Shoes

For Heidegger this painting reveals to us that the shoes are involved both with the 'world' and the 'earth'. The world here refers to human products and activities, in this example the world of the peasant, while the earth is the natural foundation on which the world rests, as is evident in this case by the wear and tear on the shoes. Shoes certainly fall within the sphere of equipment in that they have a certain form and thereby have a certain usefulness imposed upon them. Heidegger then comments on the 'artfulness' of the work in the following way:

> What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings *aletheia.* We say "truth" and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work. In the work of art the truth of an entity has set itself to work. "To set" means here: to bring to a stand. Some particular entity, a pair of peasant shoes, comes in the work to stand in the light of its being. The being of the being comes into the steadiness of its shining. The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work (1971: 36).

3.3 Art and Truth

For Heidegger it is thus truth and not beauty and/or aesthetics that separate works of art from equipment. Heidegger uses 'truth' not in terms of that which could be said of an assertion or belief that is not 'false', but more in terms of what he calls 'ontic[1] truth' or the 'uncoveredness' of entities, or seeing things as they really are. A world 'comes to pass' when things are uncovered in a new way and organized differently into a meaningful whole. Great works of art, Heidegger argues, play an important role in establishing a world. They do this by letting a truth be seen (Wrathall 2005: 72).

3.4 The Greek Temple

The second exhibit Heidegger presents us with is that of the Greek Temple. He identifies this specifically as a work of art that is inherently distinct from the first example of Van Gogh's peasant shoes in that it cannot be deemed as representational art. The architectural quality of this example makes it especially applicable for the purpose of this study because of the link between architecture and luthiery that will be looked at later. Heidegger sees the temple as a work of art in that it sets forth both 'earth' and 'world'. It is important therefore to attempt to establish how Heidegger uses terms like 'earth' and 'world' before continuing the discussion on the temple.

3.4.1 Earth

Earth is irrefutably bound to both works of art and equipment in that a certain 'material' is shaped in both, but to different ends. The difference between the two lies in the following: 'The work, Heidegger argues, does not just a *set up [aufstellt]* a world but also *sets forth [herstellt]* the earth. It is site of struggle between these two complementary but adverse powers. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet

[1] Kockelmans (1965: 27) distinguishes between 'Ontological' and 'Ontic' in saying that 'the distinction between ontological and ontic is derived from the distinction between being and be-ing. One can regard a be-ing simply as it is. This is the ontic standpoint: it has to do with the Greek *on*, the *ens*, be-ing. But one can also try to understand the being of be-ings, that which makes this be-ing be what it is, its fundamental and constituent structure'.

cannot be separated' (Clark 2002: 52). Earth is revealed as earth and is evident in the example of the temple in its natural surroundings due to the fact that the temple is formed by natural and 'earthy' materials. Heidegger refers to the example of the temple in relation to his discussion on earth in the following way:

> …the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work's world. The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the world to speak. All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color, into the clang of tone, and into the naming power of the word (1971: 46).

We observe in Heidegger's view a clear relationship between a work and the material it consists of. The art form does not impose its form on the material, but lets the 'earth be an earth' (1971: 46). This unique characteristic in a work's relationship to the material that it is made of warrants special attention. In the case of equipment, the material that the object consists of is 'used up' in its functionality. Conversely, in works of art, materials are merely 'used' (1971: 47).

From this it is reasonable to conclude that the material that the work of art consists of remains conspicuous within the work. In the case of equipment, any functional material can be used. An artwork therefore always involves a relationship between earth and world and unlike equipment 'composes conspicuous earthy materials into a reposeful form' (Inwood 2000: 121). Inwood further explains the difference between equipment and a work in the following way:

> A broom fades into the background of other equipment, its constituent materials 'used up', smothered down into its usefulness. A work is solitary, tensed, and striking. It is especially suitable as a marker of truth. But the very existence of the work cries out for explanation. A work, unlike a tool, bears the scars of its production (Inwood 2000: 121).

In other words, 'in equipment, earthy raw materials are 'used up', that is, fused into the artefact so that they are no longer noticeable: it does not matter, and we do not notice, whether shoes are made of leather or of some functionally equivalent material' but 'it matters whether the Parthenon is made of marble or plastic. In one way or another, all artworks set forth earth' (Inwood 2000: 119). Furthermore, the 'earth' element of the artwork signifies that human 'shaping' activity is always incomplete in so far as it is an attempt at mastery; the artwork respects the being of the earth, equipment which points towards technology (as an assault on the earth) does not. This characteristic of art is particularly applicable to luthiery as will be discussed later.

3.4.2 World

The Earth's counterpart, namely world, is likewise set up in the example of the temple in that the temple opens up a world to us. The world of the temple, namely, is the history of a people. Thus for Heidegger 'to be a work means to set up a world' (1971: 44). But what is it to be a world? He answers this question by arguing the following:

> The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The *world worlds,* and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen (1971: 44).

What exactly is Heidegger trying to say in making a statement such as 'the world worlds'? For Wrathall, 'letting the world 'world' means letting it arrange and organize and make coherent and relate all the entities in the world. We do this by actually dealing with the entities around us – by making them, working with them, caring for them' (2005: 78). 'World' is therefore a sphere of interpretability.

Clark describes this Heideggerian view of world in saying that '… the whole 'world' of the classical Greeks – how all things appeared to them – is projected by the temple, something we may sense even now, though that world has perished. The fact that

architecture provides basic shelter already suggests the profound seriousness of art in general for Heidegger, as opening the space in which people dwell and understand things' (2002: 45).

Olivier's (1984: 23) insightful elaboration on Heidegger's 'world' initially inquires into this notion through an analysis of its relation to 'equipment'. He returns to Heidegger's insistence that the '…aroundness of the environment, the specific spatiality of entities encountered in the environment, is founded upon the worldhood of the world, while contrariwise the world, on its part, is not present-at-hand in space' (1978: 135). This calls for an explanatory inquiry into what Heidegger refers to as 'present-at-hand' and the consequent notion of 'ready-to-hand'. Olivier explains:

> Heidegger differentiates sharply between the mode of being of 'entities as things that are *present-at-hand'* and the mode of being of man as *Dasein,* which he terms existence. *Presence-at-hand (Vorhandenheit* – literally 'before the hand' designates the kind of being of things *other* than Dasein (e.g., stones, flowers, mountains, etc.) except when such things appear in a pragmatic context , i.e., as things of use (e.g., a hammer, a chair). The latter are termed *ready-to-hand (Zuhanden)* (1984: 28).

It stands to reason therefore that it is the latter notion, that of 'ready-to-hand' in its 'proper character of equipment' (Kockelmans 1965: 33) that is more applicable to luthiery in that an 'equipmental' role of luthiery can be argued, as will become clear in due course. Kockelmans elaborates on this in the following way:

> For example, one uses a hammer in the right way without explicitly understanding the proper mode of being of this piece of equipment. In our everyday life we do not know the hammer as "simply given" and "merely there," but we know how to use it. By using the hammer in the right way within a certain equipment manifold, *Dasein* has appropriated it in the most suitable way, for a hammer is not there to be looked at, but to hammer with. By using the hammer, *Dasein,* in its everyday concernful dealing with things, has to submit to the assignment that is constituent of this piece of equipment, namely, its "what … for." By using the hammer, *Dasein* discovers its manipulability (*Handlichkeit),* which term clearly

> indicates the hammer's relationship to the hand *(manus).* A piece of equipment is a thing that is "ready-to-hand" *(zuhanden)*; it possesses "readiness to hand"… (1965: 32).

Having thus arrived at a better understanding of Heidegger's notions of 'earth' and 'world', it is important to also acknowledge the nature of the relationship between the two. Heidegger again offers an illuminating summary in this regard:

> The opposition of world and earth is a striving … In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigating of this striving. This does not happen so that the work should at the same time settle and put an end to the conflict in an insipid agreement, but so that the strife may remain a strife. Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work accomplishes this striving. The work-being of the work consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth. It is because the struggle arrives at its high point in the simplicity of intimacy that the unity of the work comes about in the fighting of the battle. The fighting of the battle is the continually self-overreaching gathering of the work's agitation. The repose of the work that rests in itself thus has its presencing in the intimacy of striving (1971: 49 -50).

4 HEIDEGGER AND TECHNOLOGY

In *The Question concerning Technology* (1954), Heidegger returns to ancient doctrine in looking at the essence of a thing in terms of *what* that thing is. In asking what technology really is, he presents the widely held view that there are two answers to that question in that:

1) technology is a means to an end (instrumental definition)
2) technology is a human activity (anthropological definition).

He does however imply that these statements hold true only if seen in terms of the 'instrumental and anthropological definition of technology' (1977: 4).

Heidegger goes on to identify a correlation between technology and art which necessitates a return to *The origin of the work of art*, wherein he inquires about the nature of art and its original connection to technology in relation to ancient Greek thought. Here it is required to quote Heidegger at length:

In the work, the happening of truth is at work. But what is thus at work, is so *in* the work. This means that the actual work is here already presupposed as the bearer of this happening. At once the problem of the thingly feature of the work confronts us again. One Thing thus finally becomes clear: however zealously we inquire into the work's self-sufficiency, we shall still fail to find its actuality as long as we do not also agree to take the work as something worked, effected. To take it thus lies closest at hand, for in the word "work" we hear what is worked. The workly character of the work consists in it having been created by the artist. It may seem curious that this most obvious and all-clarifying definition of the work is mentioned only now.

The work's createdness, however, can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation. Thus, constrained by the facts, we must consent after all to go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art. The attempt to define the work-being of the work purely in terms of the work itself proves to be unfeasible.

In turning away now from the work to examine the nature of the creative process, we should like nevertheless to keep in mind what was said first of the picture of the peasant shoes and later of the Greek temple.

We think of a creation as a bringing forth. But the making of equipment, too, is a bringing forth. Handicraft – a remarkable play of language – does not, to be sure, create works, not even when we contrast, as we must, the handmade with the factory product. But what is it that distinguishes bringing forth as creation from bringing forth in the mode of making? It is as difficult to track down the essential features of the creation of works and the making of equipment as it is easy to distinguish verbally between the two modes of bringing forth. Going along with first appearances we find the same procedure in the activity of potter and sculptor, of joiner and painter. The creation of a work requires craftsmanship. Great artists prize craftsmanship most highly. They are the first to call for its painstaking cultivation, based on complete mastery. They above all others constantly strive to educate themselves ever anew in thorough craftsmanship. It has often enough been pointed out that the Greeks, who knew quite a bit about works of art, use the same word *techne* for craft and art and call the craftsman and the artist by the same name: *technites.*

It thus seems advisable to define the nature of creative work in terms of its craft aspect. But reference to the linguistic usage of the Greeks, with their experience of the facts, must give us pause. However usual and convincing the reference may be to the Greek practice of naming craft and art by the same name, *techne,* it nevertheless remains oblique and superficial; for *techne* signifies neither craft nor art, and not at all the technical in our present day sense; it never means a kind of practical performance.

> The word *techne* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such. For Greek thought the nature of knowing consists in *aletheia,* that is, in the uncovering of beings. It supports and guides all comportment toward beings. *Techne* as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* present beings as such beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making.
>
> The artist is a *technites* not because he is also a craftsman, but because both the setting forth of works and the setting forth of equipment occur in a bringing forth and presenting that causes beings in the first place to come forward and be present in assuming an appearance. Yet all this happens in the midst of the being that grows out of its own accord, *phusis.* Calling art techne does not at all imply that the artist's action is seen in the light of craft. What looks like craft in the creation of a work is of a different sort. This doing is determined and pervaded by the nature of creation, and indeed remains contained within that creating.
>
> What then, if not craft, is to guide our thinking about the nature of creation? What else than a view of what is to be created: the work? Although it becomes actual only as the creative act is performed, and thus depends for its reality upon this act, the nature of creation is determined by the nature of the work. Even though the work's createdness has a relation to creation, nevertheless both createdness and creation must be defined in terms of the work-being of the work. And now it can no longer seem strange that we first and at length dealt with the work alone, to bring its createdness into view only at the end. If createdness belongs to the work as essentially as the word "work" makes it sound, then we must try to understand even more essentially what so far could be defined as the working of the work (1971: 58-60).

In this lengthy excerpt, Heidegger returns to ancient Greek thought on art and what would today be called technology to establish the initial undeniable link between the two. Although acknowledging the similarities between a craft - the making of equipment - and making works of art, namely the requirement of craftsmanship, he clearly draws a distinction between the two as well. For him the nature of what is created determines the nature of creation, in other words, the end determines the means. Thus, the nature of creation can be said to be artistic if what is created can be considered art, even though the creation process could be 'technologically' inspired or similar to the process of creating equipment on some level.

After acknowledging the instrumental and anthropological definitions of technology in *The question concerning technology*, Heidegger continues by questioning the 'essence' of technology and thus arrives at the fourfold causality of technology with reference to its instrumental definition thereof. These four causes can be summarized as the matter, the form, the end and finally the working cause (1977: 6).

He famously uses the example of a silver chalice to show how 'the four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else' (1977: 7). For Heidegger, these four ways are responsible for bringing something into appearance. This he refers to as 'bringing-forth':

> It is of utmost importance that we think bringing-forth in its full scope and at the same time in the sense in which the Greeks thought it. Not only handcraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis. Physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis. Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense. For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself (*en heautoi).* In contrast, what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g., the silver chalice, has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another (*en alloi),* in the craftsman or artist. The modes of occasioning, the four causes, are at play, then, within bringing-forth. Through bringing-forth, the growing things of nature as well as whatever is completed through the crafts and the arts come at any given time to their appearance (1977: 10-11).

Heidegger eventually arrives at a very important conclusion, that modern technology is essentially a mode of revealing and therefore no mere means, and once again draws attention to the fact that *techne* in Greek thought is applicable to 'activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts' (1977: 12-13).

Having thus established that it is as revealing, as opposed to manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth, he turns his attention to modern technology, inquiring whether it should be deemed different from all earlier technologies. He concludes that modern technology

too is a revealing, but one that 'does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis'* (1977: 14). 'The revealing that rules throughout modern technology has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging forth' (1977: 16). Heidegger then identifies 'standing-reserve' as the particular mode of unconcealment unique to modern technology. Standing-reserve is the logical result of what he calls 'enframing', and is defined as 'the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological' (1977: 20). Adding to this notion, he later defines 'enframing' as 'the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve' (1977: 24).

He finally concludes that the essence of modern technology, namely the revealing of the real as a standing-reserve is 'neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity' and it is therefore untenable to adhere to the mere instrumental and anthropological definitions of technology (1977:21). Because it will be argued that luthiery - as practiced by the luthiers featured in this study - falls outside the realms of what Heidegger defines as modern technology, let us inspect the technological claims made by luthiery with reference to the original instrumental and anthropological definitions of technology.

5 LUTHIERY AS ART AND TECHNOLOGY

In his essay 'The question of human dwelling: Architecture between art and technology' (1984) Olivier poses the following question: '…is architecture indeed an art? Does its unavoidable functionality not remove it from the realm of the arts? No other art is comparable to architecture in terms of the practical service it performs in society. If anything, it tends towards engineering, and therefore occupies an uneasy position between the latter and art' (1984: 30). He then justifies the inquiry on this topic by using the following quote:

> Caught between engineering and art, modern architecture has been unable to achieve a convincing and lasting reconciliation of pragmatic, technological and aesthetic considerations (Harries 1975: 14).

Luthiery is in many respects similar to architecture in that it occupies this so-called uneasy position between engineering and art. Similarly, luthiery is perhaps first and foremost functional, which some would argue also removes it from the realms of art. Another strong similarity between architecture and luthiery is the use and design of space as a habitation, in one case for human beings, in the other sound. Also, the reliance on design in both disciplines highlights their similarity on a number of levels. It could therefore hardly be considered surprising that four out of the seven luthiers interviewed in this study are/were either architects or draughtsmen.

If luthiery is indeed functional, to what extent can and should it be reduced to a functional pursuit and how does that impact on the discipline as an art form? Should it aspire to an art form or even be considered as such?

5.1 Art

When looking at the merit of luthiery as an art form, one is forced to start by looking at the question that is still at the core of aesthetic reflection: what is art? For Rosen, most of art of the postclassical and premodern period had the function of being subservient to religion, especially in architecture and music (2000: 188).

The 18th-century European philosophical movement known as the Enlightenment, which sought to put humankind's reason and rationality at the centre of all development, also profoundly influenced the reflective attempts to determine the nature and function of art. Modernity saw the aesthetic dimension as increasingly independent. Questions on the nature of art remain very contentious and have been the subject of reflection of many a philosopher. The purpose of this study is not to discuss the nature of art per se, but to attempt to find a role, if in fact there is one, for luthiery within the artistic realm. It will be remembered that Heidegger's view on art is distinctly removed from the realm of

aesthetics which means that art is not concerned only with beauty and pleasure. In view of this preceding discussion on Heidegger and art, we can inquire into the merit of any possible artistic claims luthiery might have in how it is practiced by the featured luthiers.

It needs to be clarified at this stage exactly what is meant by luthiery as referred to hitherto. A clear distinction needs to be made between mass produced guitars built in 'factories' for commercial exploitation, often making use of mechanized equipment, and luthiery as a pursuit practiced by the luthiers discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4. The instruments constructed by the latter are all handcrafted by one person who administers every process in construction, often in a small workshop with few if any assistants. Here once more we can draw a parallel between luthiery and architecture in that we find different but comparable modes of existence within both disciplines. On the one hand it is possible to identify an artistic manifestation of both, and on the other, the opposing extreme; that of the mass-produced, technologically manipulated phenomenon. In his critique of architecture, Olivier cites the work of Buckminster Fuller or Hans Hollein as examples of the former and 'any drab, architecturally largely uniform suburban zone' as an example of the latter (1984: 30). Thus, for the purpose of this study we shall consider luthiery in its more personal, handcrafted and possibly artistic manifestation as described above.

Firstly, it should be obvious that it is possible to identify the 'thingly character' of a guitar as work of art. The woods featured and discussed in previous chapters result in a distinctly 'wooden' character that permeates the essence of what we know a guitar to be. This alone does not however distinguish the guitar from any other wooden constructions as art form. For that we need to look at what Heidegger calls 'self-containment'. Even though the guitar is built with a specific purpose in mind, that of creating music, which will arguably render it no different from equipment, it does call for interpreters or 'preservers'. A guitar by its very nature calls for an interpretation of its qualities, visually, but even more importantly, aurally. It is impossible to be able to fully appreciate, interpret or 'preserve' the artistic character of the guitar if not actively engaging in listening to what is produced in terms of sound. It will be remembered that this

interpretation will take many different forms according to the number of different observers (audience) involved, given the hermeneutic circle discussed earlier. The fact remains however, that although guitar works of art always involve a degree of visual aesthetic and artistic appeal, the essence of a guitar as a work where truth is 'uncovered' only 'opens up' once the sound is produced in the presence of observers. These observers which Heidegger refers to as 'preservers' can take the form of viewers, readers or in the case of a guitar as work of art, an audience who aurally functions as 'preservers'. Although a guitar can be said to have a degree of visual aesthetic appeal, it is mainly in the aural perception of the qualities of the instrument by 'preservers' that the artistic nature of the work can be identified.

Luthiers in general are well aware of this fact, evident in the following two South African luthiers' comments:

> To me, the proudest moment is when I build an instrument and I play it myself, but it sounds ugly and then I take it to someone like Charl Lamprecht, who plays on it and he makes it sound beautiful (Pickard in Appendix C: 224).

> To hear somebody who is a really good player play one of my instruments and the instrument is sounding like you hoped it would sound, is enough (Cleveland in Appendix B: 214).

Olivier (1987: 17) further adds that 'Heidegger thinks of the relationship between the artwork and its audience as a kind of dislocation with regard to everyday experience' and that, 'for him, truth "happens" or is "at work" in the artwork in the form of a conflict or struggle between the moment of self-disclosure or "world" and the oppositional moment of self-seclusion or "earth"'. He concludes:

> In ordinary language this means that works of art, whether literary, sculptural, architectural, cinematic or whatever, articulate (i.e. 'open up') certain possibilities of being, cognition, action, decision or attitude. Alternatively, they embody different values which, once made accessible to humankind, do not leave their own world – as distinct from that of the artwork – untouched. And, keeping in mind the moment of concealment in the work, this does not imply *complete* theoretical or practical transparency (1987: 17).

The role of the luthier as artist needs to be investigated here, keeping in mind our initial goal of determining the artistic signification of luthiery. The singular nature of the work of art becomes clear when we view the luthier not one-sidedly as creator, but as someone who allows the work to 'project the terms whereby it could be received' (Clark 2002: 51). This phenomenon luthier Mervyn Davis describes by saying that in a way the guitar's design imposes its will on him (Davis in Appendix F: 260). Here we clearly see how the artist, in this case the luthier, sets forth the material, in this case the wood, through the guitar, thereby allowing earth to be earth without imposing his/her will on it at the expense of the material.

Another important observation that must be made in the investigation of luthiery as an art form is the one pertaining to what Heidegger calls 'earth' and its relation to 'world'. Few would argue that the hand-crafted guitar presents itself as an object that sets forth both earth and world. The earth is revealed in the earthy materials it is constructed of. Here we identify a merger of two possible ways in which a work sets forth earth identified by Heidegger, namely in 'the firmness and pliancy of wood' as well as 'the clang of tone' (1971: 46).

What emerges is that, unlike equipment, the constituent materials of the guitar are not used up and lost into its usefulness and that the wood used in the construction of the guitar cannot be replaced by another functionally equivalent material. This becomes evident in the high importance both luthiers and players give to the visual and acoustic selection of wood as can be seen from the interviews contained in the Appendices and described in chapters 3 and 4. A guitar as work of art would not set forth earth in the way it does had it been built from plastic or any other material. Consider Maingard's comment with reference to his favoured Brazilian Rosewood:

> It does have an aura about it. It is a wonderful tone wood and it is beautiful. You just cannot deny the beauty of a wood like that. There's no other wood that looks like that and to go with its looks is that beautiful tone (Maingard in Appendix E: 250).

Heidegger's rejection of the notion of the artist as being the prime source of the work becomes particularly applicable to luthiery in the sense that for Heidegger, the artist merely listens and responds to the work's emerging possibilities and force (Clark 2002: 50). In light of this, consider the following luthier remarks:

> I feel a piece of wood, I thicken it to what I think it should be, I listen and I thicken it to that, what it tells me (Maingard in Appendix E: 245).

> 'n Mens ontwikkel oor die jare 'n gevoel om sekere dinge te kan voorspel. Mens sal nooit als weet wat daar binne aangaan nie[1] (Davis in Appendix F: 264).

> If I can be silly: the wood speaks to me. It's nothing you can put your finger on… You're supposed to have this instinct/sensitivity. Instinct is a strange thing… (Pickard in Appendix C: 219).

> To me the tactile feel of the wood you work with tells you what it's going to do (Cleveland in Appendix B: 212).

> You need to know what that specific piece of wood requires to know what to do with it (Maingard in Appendix E: 252).

> Bending wood is something that you learn to get a feel for. You can't tell someone what to do, it's a feeling. The wood starts to move in your hands: it's a magic thing, but you have to understand it (Stedall in Appendix G: 280).

Having established that a hand-crafted guitar can indeed be seen as a 'marker of truth' in the way it sets forth earth, let us now consider earth's counterpart, 'world' as encountered in a guitar as work of art. In the preceding analysis of world as phenomenon encountered in Heidegger's Greek temple it became clear that a world was opened up to us – the world of the classical Greeks and how things appeared to them.

Can we then identify a specific world opening up in observing a classical guitar? If so, what would this entail? Chapter 1 and 2 of this study documents the history and

[1] One develops a feeling and ability to predict certain things over the years. You will never understand everything that goes on inside.

development of the modern-day classical guitar and the emergence of the instrument we know today. It also deals with the more important traditional construction methods and variations on these as well as important luthiers and their contributions to luthiery. It could be argued therefore that this is precisely the world that is opened up to the observer of the classical guitar: the history of an instrument's development. This includes all the failed and successful experiments conducted, the interactions between famous performers and luthiers, the emergence of a "traditional" school of construction, the fluctuating popularity of the guitar as concert instrument, the different woods used and their selection, the changing and growing repertoire of the instrument and the new developments we see today.

Having thus hopefully established the artistic nature of luthiery as practiced by the luthiers featured in this study through a Heideggerian perspective, we can now use a similar perspective to investigate the role of technology in luthiery.

5.2 Technology

Notwithstanding the practical interaction of luthier and player previously discussed, it needs to be acknowledged that luthiery in essence will always remain a largely solitary pursuit. The virtually infinite number of variables, ranging from physical dimensions to choice of wood, all relate back in some way or another to one person - the luthier - and the choices he/she makes, consciously or unconsciously, in this regard. All have a profound influence on the final outcome of the instrument. Shaping and assembling pieces of wood to a specific, desired form inevitably involves technology on some level, but the question arises to what extent technology plays a role in luthiery. It will be remembered that Heidegger initially reduces technology in ancient Greek terms to its two most basic, widely-held definitions: firstly that technology is a means to an end, and secondly, that it is a human activity. Few would argue that these two basic definitions are indeed very applicable to luthiery. Luthiery is clearly a means to an end, evident at a most basic level in the need for someone to construct musical instruments for others to play on. Secondly, technology as human activity is self evident in the case of luthiery (as it is in fact in almost any other human activity), so much so that Heidegger initially

acknowledges instrumentality as the fundamental characteristic of technology. But upon reflection, he later warns against this very assumption:

> If we inquire, step by step, into what technology, represented as means, actually is, then we shall arrive at revealing. The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing. Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth (1977: 12).

Heidegger therefore does not discredit the notion of the four modes of causality, but stresses that it is ruled and contained within the more important notion of revealing which contains in it both end and means. We can thus apply the fourfold causality in this case as a practical illustration of the mode of technology used in luthiery before inquiring into the mode of revealing that opens up in this process.

The matter out of which the guitar is made is wood. Heidegger would therefore argue that the guitar is indebted to the wood for that out of which it consists. Concomitantly, the musical instrument is indebted to the aspect or form of 'guitarness' because of the link between the physical manifestation of what is created and its mode of sound production. A third causality is evident in that which in advance confines the guitar within the realm of musical instruments. Finally, there is a fourth causal participant in the responsibility for the finished instrument, namely the luthier. Heidegger stresses however that the luthier 'considers carefully and gathers together the three aforementioned ways of being responsible and indebted' (1977: 8).

These four ways of being responsible thus result in the finished guitar. It could be said that they 'bring something into appearance. They let it come forth into presencing. They set it free to that place and so start it on its way, namely, into its complete arrival' (1977: 9). This 'bringing-forth' Heidegger sees as coming to pass when something concealed comes into 'unconcealment', thus returning to his original notion of technology being a way of revealing. Heidegger also reminds us that *techne* is also a name for 'knowing in

the widest sense … to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing' (1977: 13).

The essence of technology as practiced by the luthier lies in this: gathering together in advance the form and the matter of the guitar, 'with a view of the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering' determining 'the manner of its construction' (1977: 13). This implies an openness and sensitivity crucial on the part of the luthier, thus enabling him/her to 'envision' the 'finished thing', namely the guitar and desired sound. Thus, for Heidegger 'it is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth' (1977: 13). The luthier's active knowing and understanding the workings of acoustics, sound production principles and the intricacies of woods, and being able, from this, to envision the finished instrument, constitutes the true essence of the kind of technology relevant to luthiery.

5.3 Conclusion

From this inquiry into the artistic and technological merits of luthiery, it becomes clear that luthiery as practiced in the form described in this study is an artistic as well as technological pursuit. Its artistic nature is displayed in the way it 'opens up' truth while the revealing nature of the pursuit (specifically regarding a certain kind of 'knowing') points to its technological nature in the ancient Greek sense. What is perhaps more profound than the fact that both art and technology are present in luthiery, is the fact that these two realms, often seen as opposites, manifest themselves in luthiery in surprisingly similar ways, namely through revealing, unconcealment and opening up. We see in this an affirmation of Greek thought which originally acknowledges the strong link between the two.

6 GADAMER, AUTHORITY AND TRADITION

The preceding chapters of this thesis have described how, in the development both of the guitar as instrument and luthiery as pursuit, certain "traditions" and schools of guitar

construction can be identified, as practiced by various individual luthiers who in turn influenced (and still influence) others. Although many different influences and styles of guitar construction have been practiced in luthiery in the course of its history, this thesis has distinguished between two 'poles' in luthiery: Those luthiers building in the so-called Spanish tradition as standardized by Torres and those breaking away from this perceived tradition in a variety of ways.

This distinction draws attention to the notion of tradition pertaining both to its general meaning and to luthiery as phenomenon. We shall return to Gadamer once more to investigate his notion of tradition as contained in *Truth and Method* (1960) cited earlier. His inquiry into this topic announces itself in an initial call for the 'fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices, if we want to do justice to man's infinite, historical mode of being' (1975: 246). Gadamer thus distinguishes between what he sees as legitimate prejudices and 'all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of the critical reason to overcome' (1975: 246). His 'rehabilitation of authority and tradition' starts with his critical view of the Enlightenment's treatment of the concept of authority in its claim that reason is its necessary precondition. For him '…the authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge – knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, i.e. it has priority over one's own' (1975: 248). Furthermore, 'authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge' (1975: 248). Gadamer's view of authority as a result of knowledge thus emerges:

> Thus the recognition of authority is always connected with the idea that what authority states is not irrational and arbitrary, but can be seen, in principle, to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimised by the person himself. Their validity demands that one should be biased in favour of the person who presents them. But this makes them then, in a sense, objective prejudices, for they bring about the same bias in favour of something that can

> come about through other means, eg through solid grounds offered by reason. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the enlightenment. Here we can find support in the romantic criticism of the enlightenment; for there is one form of authority particularly defended by romanticism, namely tradition (1975: 249).

Gadamer's initial alignment with romanticism's criticism of the Enlightenment is later broken when he criticizes romanticism for conceiving 'tradition as the antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature' (1975: 249). He concludes that:

> …tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only what is new, or what is planned, appears as the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely-chosen action as revolution and renewal. That is why both the enlightenment's critique of tradition and its romantic rehabilitation are less than their true historical being (1975: 250).

Thus, for Gadamer, 'we stand always within tradition…' and 'it is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a recognition of ourselves which our later historical judgment would hardly see as a kind of knowledge, but as the simplest preservation of tradition' and 'tradition is motivated in a special way by the present and its interests' (1975: 251-253). It should already be apparent that in light of Gadamer's understanding of tradition as an active appropriation and either affirmation or revision (renewal) of the values it embodies, is applicable to the practice of luthiery. The luthier too, inherits a tradition of guitar building, interprets it, and in the process either affirms and repeats it or revises and renews it.

Olivier summarizes this notion in saying that '…tradition cannot be side-stepped. Moreover, when something like an artwork is either created as an "answer" to one's

historical situation, or (re-)interpreted in a historically changed situation, one witnesses an event that is historically "effected". The understanding of an artistic tradition is therefore, for Gadamer, never finished – it is subject to a "history of effects", and tradition is "produced" (in a certain sense "repeated") in the process of one's understanding participation in it' (2002: 250). Olivier also identifies two possible ways in which one can respond to tradition, namely in a creative or a conservative manner, '…in the process renewing and enlivening the tradition itself' (2002: 250). Furthermore, he relates Gadamer's notion of authority and tradition to the criteria identified by Heidegger that legitimize all human endeavours in their 'dwelling' and 'preserving', namely the 'simple oneness of the four' referred to as 'the fourfold' (1971: 150).

7 HEIDEGGER AND THE FOURFOLD

Heidegger's notion of the fourfold stems from his reflection on human being's 'dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth' (1971: 149). For Olivier, Heidegger's interrelated concepts of 'earth', 'sky', 'mortals', and 'divinities' 'comprise the indispensable terms of orientation in the world. This means that, if one or more of these are absent as "markers" to determine one's "place" in the world, one would not be able to claim that one is living an authentically "human" life, which is why he (Heidegger) remarks that the four together comprise "a simple oneness"' (2002: 250). Heidegger explains:

> But 'on the earth' already means 'under the sky'. Both of these *also* mean 'remaining before the divinities' and include a 'belonging to men's being with one another.' By a *primal* oneness the four – earth and sky, divinities and mortals – belong together in one. Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. When we say earth, we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.
>
> The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds

> and blue depth of the ether. When we say sky, we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.
>
> The divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead. Out of the holy sway of the godhead, the god appears in his presence or withdraws into his concealment. When we speak of the divinities, we are already thinking of the other three along with them, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.
>
> The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death *as* death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities. When we speak of mortals, we are already thinking of the other three along with them, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four. The simple oneness of the four we call *the fourfold.* Mortals *are* in the fourfold by *dwelling.* But the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve. Mortals dwell in the way they preserve the fourfold in its essential being, its presencing. Accordingly, the preserving that dwells is fourfold (1971: 149-150).

In his interpretation of this concept of the fourfold, Karsten Harries explains that the earth refers to 'the ground that supports us, both literally and in the sense that it sustains us with its gifts of food and water…' (1997: 159). For him, 'earth' further denotes what he calls 'material transcendence' in that it transcends 'every linguistic and or conceptual space in which things must find their place if they are to be disclosed and explained' and 'what thus appears is not created by our understanding but given' (1997: 159). Furthermore, he distinguishes between 'earth' and 'world' in that 'world' 'names not the totality of facts but a space of intelligibility' which cannot be closed or eliminated and points to the fact that the earth refers to the 'elusive effective ground without which all talk of essences, meaning, values, or divinities is ultimately groundless, merely idle talk' (1997: 159). However, it is the 'body' which 'opens' humans to earth and importantly '…the embodied self is a caring, desiring self' (1997: 159). Olivier draws a correlation between Harries' view of Heidegger's concept of earth and Gadamer's notion of tradition in that 'that which limits "world", or the cultural, linguistic space of a tradition, is the "ground" which moves humans as affective, caring, desiring beings in the first place to articulate their desires, fears and projects, and these articulations are what constitute the "tradition"' (2002: 251). According to Gadamer the 'present interests' that motivate tradition are 'inseparably linked to the "earth" as that which affects the human, embodied self. Seen in this way, "earth" is, despite its inscrutability, ultimately inscribed *as such* in

that which enables humans to traverse the realm of openness or "world", namely language (in an encompassing sense) – the "bearer" of the cultural tradition' (Olivier 2002: 251).

Harries' interpretation of 'sky' centers around the fact that 'human beings are never imprisoned in the here and now but are always "beyond" themselves, ahead of themselves in expectation, behind themselves in memory, beyond time altogether when contemplating eternity', thus 'sky' 'not only means the familiar sky but opens that meaning to what may be called the ineliminable spiritual or ecstatic dimension of human being' (1997: 160). Olivier (2002: 252) again establishes a connection with tradition in that '"sky" suggests the creative ability to renew or transform the tradition in the face of its inherent conservatism'.

Harries' elaboration on Heidegger's 'mortals', the third term of the fourfold, resonates with Heidegger's earlier notion of *Dasein* in that it affirms the acceptance by humans of their own mortality as a prerequisite of what can be regarded as an 'authentic' existence. This is important because 'as long as we remain unable to make our peace with the fact that we grow older and sooner or later must die, remain unable to make our peace with the passage of time, we also will be unable to make our peace with all that binds us to time – with our bodies, for example, with our sexuality, and with the setting of the sun, with the coming of winter, and with the earth, which so often withholds its gifts' (Harries 1997: 160). Olivier once more successfully establishes the connection with Gadamer's notion of tradition in saying that 'accepting one's mortality liberates one for "adding one's verse" to the ongoing drama of the tradition' (2002: 252).

In elaborating on Heidegger's final term, namely 'divinities', Harries (1997: 161) reminds us that for Heidegger the godhead is 'the most fundamental measure of human being' and adds that today 'God remains unknown' but that '… he is revealed in the endless variety of the things that surround us …'. He explains: 'Heidegger gestures here toward the many-voiced ground of all meaning and value. To be touched by that ground in a specific way that gives direction to our lives is to receive some divinity's message...'

and that 'any attempt to name the gods and God – and, in doing so, to take the measure of human being, if only to return that measure to human beings and to let them dwell – is a violation of the unknown essence of divinity, putting the namer in danger of obscuring divinity with some golden calf' (Harries 1997: 161). Olivier points out the underlying connection between this notion and that of tradition in saying that 'the divine as *unknown* … is what "divinities" ultimately denote, it is the deepest source of all cultural activities which first institute and then expand, extend and modify a "tradition" of any kind' (2002: 252).

Olivier then confirms his view on the connection between the 'fourfold' and 'tradition', discussed above, in the following closing paragraph:

> These considerations suggest that Gadamer's conception of 'tradition' may be understood as an articulation – a more 'traditional' one at that – of the theme of the 'fourfold' in Heidegger's work … They also suggest a kind of 'domestication' of Heidegger on Gadamer's part. A more radical way of putting this is to say that Heidegger's *fourfold* is related to Gadamer's concept of tradition as a (Derridean) 'quasi-transcendental': it is simultaneously the condition of its possibility and its impossibility (2002: 252).

8 LUTHIERY, AUTHORITY AND TRADITION

Having arrived at a basic philosophical understanding of the relation between art and technology (as *techne*), and having established a hermeneutic framework for placing it in relation to notions such as authority and tradition, we can return to luthiery as phenomenon to inquire into the relevance of those notions of authority and tradition as encountered in the preceding sections of this thesis. In fact this thesis has been structured on the very premise that there are those luthiers who adhere to a so-called tradition and there are those who do not. Chapter 1 maps the development of the guitar and refers to a period of transition characterized by 'unusual instruments' from which an instrument resembling the 'modern' guitar eventually emerged. What then led to this more standardized manifestation of the instrument and who, if anyone was responsible for this occurrence?

Few would argue that Torres was the first luthier whose work represents the rise of a "tradition" in that it standardized a school of construction that many subsequent luthiers, even contemporary luthiers, have followed. The manner in which this happened could well be explained by a return to Gadamer's view on tradition and its necessary constituent, authority. As stated earlier, Gadamer sees the authority of a person as something based on recognition of knowledge – 'knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, ie it has priority over one's own' (1975: 248). Seen in this light, a figure such as Torres in his capacity as 'establisher of tradition' can only be ascribed such a title and status through the 'recognition' by later luthiers of his superior judgment and insight into the acoustic workings of wood for example. In other words, 'his judgment takes precedence, ie it has priority over' their own (1975:248). Consider the following luthiers' remarks:

> If I don't know what to do, then I go look at Torres' guitars and he inspired me not in the way of helping or putting ideas there. It's just a presence in the Torres guitars that you don't see in any other guitars … I would attribute a lot of my inspiration to Torres… (Pickard in Appendix C: 218).

> Ek het 'n boek by Garth gesien wat ek ook vir my gekoop het van Torres instrumente met 'n CD by wat elkeen se klank uitwys, wat ongelooflik is. As 'n mens na dit luister dan dink mens altyd jy's te modern en jy moet teruggaan na die ou tradisies [1] (Van den Berg in Appendix D: 233).

> The essence of guitar-making today, if we consider the Spanish classical guitar, is still based on this Spanish instrument developed by Torres (Romanillos in Courtnall 1993: 126).

It will also be remembered that Gadamer concludes that it is impossible for humans to escape the influence of tradition, and that we always unavoidably find ourselves within its parameters. Thus, whether we react to it in a 'conservative' or 'creative' manner, we

[1] Garth showed me a book, which I later bought, on Torres instruments with a CD that shows each instrument's sound, which is amazing. When you listen to it one always feels that you are too modern and that you should return to the old traditions.

are always confronted by tradition and the artistic tradition, and its 'history of effects' is constantly 'produced' by our 'understanding participation' in it (Olivier 2002: 250). This is clearly illustrated by the comments of two of the most radical and 'creative' luthiers in the world today, showing their alignment in thought with that of Gadamer in terms of tradition:

> Ek dink jy verseker die dood van 'n tradisie deur hom te vas te hou[1] (Davis in Appendix F: 263).

> There is nothing wrong with the Torres fan strutting. If you use a normal thickness soundboard 2.0 – 2.5mm, then it is the best system… It's hard to optimize whatever system you choose to use (Smallman in Saba 2006: 22).

The fact that these statements were made by Davis and Smallman, whom many would consider extreme examples of luthiers with a lack of dependence on so-called traditional construction techniques and design, is profound. Neither of them sees his own design, which breaks away from the apparent Spanish tradition of guitar construction, as a reaction against and denial of the tradition that confronts him as luthier. Their own contributions are thus not an attempt to undo or annul the tradition they are confronted with, but rather to continue and creatively add to the tradition in their 'understanding participation in it' (Olivier 2002: 250).

This notion of tradition as a 'history of effects' is perhaps particularly applicable to guitar building given the statement made at the beginning of this thesis that 'the guitar is unlike the violin in that the exact way in which it produces sound, and the best way of releasing tone and volume from the instrument, are still in dispute' (Evans and Evans 1977: 58). This points to the fact that although traces of a set tradition can be identified, notably the "Spanish tradition" as established by Torres, no tradition dominates luthiery on a world-wide scale today. This characteristic of guitar-building in particular is what appeals to many guitar enthusiasts, notably Colin Cleveland:

[1] I think you guarantee the death of a tradition by holding on to it too vehemently.

> There's a hundred ways of making a very good classical guitar. There's not just one way… They all have different-coloured voices. That, to me, is the charm of the guitar. If you use a different strutting on three different instruments … there would be three different sounds, but each beautiful in their own right (Cleveland in Appendix B: 210).

The reasons for this peculiar lack of a dominant tradition, in itself part of the tradition of luthiery, are many and mostly speculative. Davis provides us with a possible answer:

> Ek sou amper wou sê dat dit gaan lank vat om by 'n tradisie uit te kom, maar ek dink die ander filosofiese aspek hiervan is dat die ghitaar se ontwikkeling het op die verkeerde tyd gebeur. Die wêreld is nie meer tradisievas nie. Verandering is baie meer kenmerkend van ons tyd as wat tradisie is en die tempoverandering versnel die heeltyd. Daar moet dus 'n tradisie gebou word om 'wat doen mens met verandering?', nie meer 'wat doen ons met die feit dat als dieselfde bly?' nie. Dis 'n helse groot wêreldsvraag. Ek dink dis 'n groot filosofiese kwessie. Die ghitaar het nou ontwikkel te midde van dit en ons het elektriese kitare en allerlei verskillende goed, so ek dink Torres het 'n vernouing gebring en dat dit nou weer begin verbreed[1] (Davis in Appendix F: 271).

Davis' views on tradition appear to deviate from Gadamer's, at least ostensibly. A careful reading shows, however, that even rapid change, of the kind he refers to, can only occur in the context of a tradition in Gadamer's sense, even if the process of modification is accelerated.

Having thus arrived at a hermeneutic understanding of the notion of authority and tradition and having established its relevance to luthiery, we can conclude that luthiery in its entirety falls within the parameters of a tradition, and that all of the different schools of guitar construction and different designs can be regarded as contributions, whether conservative or creative, to the 'ongoing process' of tradition. Seen in this way, different

[1] I would say that it is going to take a long time before we arrive at a tradition, but I think the other philosophical aspect is that the guitar's development took place at the wrong time. The world does not hold on to tradition anymore. Change is much more characteristic of our time than tradition and the rate of change is continually accelerating. Thus, a tradition must be built around the question: What does one do with change?, and not 'what does one do with the fact that everything remains the same? This is a big universal issue. I think it is a big philosophical issue. The guitar developed in the midst of this and now we have electric guitars and all kinds of instruments, so I think Torres brought about a funneling that is now starting to expand again.

luthiers and different designs all contribute to a single ‘history of effects’, always changing, always growing, never finished.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH ALISTAIR THOMPSON ON 8 NOVEMBER 2004 AND 25 JUNE 2005 AT 1262 PUXLEY LANE, QEEENSWOOD, PRETORIA

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 8 NOVEMBER 2004

Brief biography:

I am Alistair Thomson. I am 55 years old. Born in Jo'burg. Lived whole life in Gauteng. Scientist by occupation. I run the diagnostic centre at Roodeplaat ARC (Agricultural research consul). We look at all the diseases of vegetable crops and flowering plants. The flowering industry. I run section where we diagnose diseases and pests and tell them what their problems are and how to control them. I studied at Wits. I have been building guitars on and off for 20 years. I started around ….. must be 1986/87.
Then I moved down to Nelspruit which meant that for two years I did not have any place to build so when I moved back to Pretoria I basically started from scratch again so I've been been building for round about 14 years.

What got you into guitars? Are you a guitarist yourself?

Yes. I am a semi pro musician - that's why I'm half deaf ☺. I've played in all kinds of bands as a semi pro.

When did you start playing?

Since childhood days. Played in school bands etc.

What made you decide to actually start building guitars?

I don't know. Can't really remember. I started to do some repair work for a guitar shop that started in Pretoria. A shop quite ahead of its time called "Ivory Lane" that only kept guitars - all sorts. Almost like Andy McGibbons' shop in Randburg. Fantastic place. I honestly can't remember how I started building guitars though. Mervyn was a big inspiration. He was about 19 years old when I first met him so I've known him for plus minus 26 years now.

Where did you meet him, because I know he studied in P.E.?

Yes. He had just come out of the army and was staying in a little place called "Wondergeluk" in Pretoria. We have had contact all through the years and he was always my main inspiration. I've always been knocked out by his guitars.

Did you receive any specific instruction or training in guitar building?

No. Most of my info I got from books.

That is not unique in SA. All the luthiers I spoke to are self taught through books - no courses attended or anything.

Yes. There was one but unfortunately he was killed in a car crash.

Any other instruments that you build or work on?

No. Just guitars. Pretty much a hobby. I haven't done too much in the last few years because I really haven't had a lot of success in selling and I suppose I have become a bit disillusioned with it a bit. Very expensive hobby! ☺

What is your output so far?

I've probably built about 20 guitars by now. Some of them have been experiments that I have done with arched-back classicals and guitars modeled on Australian models - Greg Smallman and the like. Some of

the guitars where I was experimenting I literally rebuilt 3 times, but I suppose in total round about 20 guitars.

I actually played on a Smallman guitar in London. Amazing instrument! Some of the other SA luthiers however are not totally convinced that it will stand the test of time in terms of construction.

Yes. Funny enough, when Craig Ogden was here in SA, Charl Lamprecht asked me to come around one night when he was visiting and I held the instrument. The first amazing thing I noticed was that it weighed as much as a "Les Paul". ☺ But what a guitar! I've never played such a responsive guitar in my life. I am not a classical player - I came from a Jazz/Blues/Rock background but I was totally floored by that guitar and it sort of inspired me to start building similar classical guitars.

The secret of the Smallman guitar must be the bracing though?

Yes, but no one really knows. Smallman is a very secretive guy. In fact, when I started the guild (I'm not involved anymore), I tried to get Greame Coldersmith (1 of the top guys in acoustic theory in the world) and he had to ask Greg Smallman to talk about lattice bracing and it caused such a debacle that we had to cancel the whole thing. There are a lot of good builders like Jeff Kemp and Redman. Jeff Kemp has got into the German market with his arched-tops. Many builders have tried to make these guitars, but they just came up with loud instruments. They don't have the subtlety of Smallman. Smallman wrote to me once saying that he does not believe in any kind of scientific approach to guitar building. He believes that you must slowly experiment and listen, so that's his approach and he is one of the top guys in the world.

So his "edge" is natural intuition?

Yes. Smallman has got an incredible ear. He's a real front runner. Mervyn is very much similar. I have always believed and I still believe that Mervyn is one of the top luthiers in the world. His problem is that he just hasn't bothered. (slapgat-☺). If he had really marketed himself……. I have seen some of Mervyn's guitars over the last 25 years that were just simply astounding. He's just so talented it's frightening. I really hope he gets the success he deserves with his new guitars, but I doubt he will, because I have tried to sell my guitars in America and I tell you those guys are so traditional. He is asking $4000. If you go and see what else is selling for $4000 – second-hand Herman Hausers and things like that. I can't see classical guys going for that.

Are Americans as traditional as the Europeans?

Yes. I think all classical guitar makers and players are traditional. This "Davis" is a radical kind of guitar for a classical guy. I hope he corners a small market at least, 'cause Mervyn really deserves international recognition.

So you did not have any formal training?

No formal training, no. I ordered the standard books. Two important books helped me a lot, though 1) Doubtfire, and

2) David Russel Young's book on guitar building.

I've never been influenced much by "Compiagno". I prefer to experiment myself and write my own notes, though. I have now got a little book I compiled from my own experience. I lean quite heavily on this being a technically-orientated scientist. Things like the weighted top sound in relation to stiffness, calculating terms of stiffness versus weight et cetera. A guy like Mervyn, though, will just take a look at the top and tap it and come to the same conclusion.

If you categorize all the SA luthiers starting from Garth on one side (the most traditional) to Mervyn on the other (the most radical), where would you put yourself?

Probably right in between because I am experimenting a bit with arched-back classicals.

So you won't describe yourself as a traditional luthier following traditional schools of construction?

I think in a sense anybody who follows anything written in a book is a traditionalist to some extent.

Are there any specific qualities you aspire to aesthetic or soundwise when building guitars.

I don't think I'm at the stage where I can really point to sound. I built a steel-string for my son last year where I specifically tapped the top to try and achieve a certain sound. I think it's more a matter of intuition, though. If you have a really stiff top you are probably going to use bracing that's a little bit wider grained, but I'm still very much experimenting with trying to get there. I still don't know what causes tremors on a classical guitar. I'm still trying to find that out. The steel-string that I built came out really nice, so I'm going to go in that direction towards tapping. You start off following dimensions of drawings, you know. This guy thins his top to 2.5 mm so you do it. Then you realize that you've got to start tapping and listening, you know.

So you build both classical and steel-string guitars?

Yes.

Preferences?

A lot of guys look down on steel-string guitars. They think that it is far easier than a classical. I actually find that building a classical is easier than a steel-string because a dove tail joint is a bastard. To get a dove tail joint to fit well and you don't see any gaps in your heel - it's bloody difficult.

Isn't there more that can go wrong with classical guitar construction though?

I don't really know. I think more can go wrong with a steel-string, because you've got to build a lower action and it still has to be responsive. If you get that neck angle wrong…. It's far easier getting the correct neck angle for a classical guitar. There you've got 4mm over 12 frets, so you have more leeway. I personally find steel-strings far more difficult.

Of the 20 or so guitars you've built, how many were classicals?

I've built more classical guitars than steel-strings. I've built 4 steel-strings and about 12 classics.

Tell me more about your experiments with indigenous woods. Charl Lamprecht tells me that you were the first SA luthier to do that.

Yes. I started experimenting with *Kiaat* and I believe that I was the first person. I then passed that information on to Mervyn. It was quite a long time ago. I played around with a few indigenous woods….*Kiaat,* I find that African mahogany coupled with Redwood makes a marvelous steel-string. It's just got some kind of wonderful combination. It's got a kind of warmth that I really love. Why I attempt to build more of Redwood and Mahogany is because Redwood is a difficult wood to get hold of in good condition. We bought a whole lot of Redwood from reclaimed stumps and every one of those tops that I used have got minor little cracks that you just can't get out. It doesn't make any difference to the sound, but you can't build a guitar with a slight crack and sell it to someone. You'll have to reduce the price. So you have to be careful, but Redwood and African Mahogany combined gives a marvelous sound.
I have also used *Hardekool* on fingerboards quite a lot. Backs and sides I build with *Kiaat*, Mahogany and the like.

What are your thoughts on Kiaat, because people like Mervyn rave about it. They say it's SA's best kept secret.

Yes, it's great stuff!

Do you think it's got something to contribute to international luthiers' works?

Yes it can, but the real problem is that it's not being sustainably cut down and unfortunately the Americans have got the incorrect information that it is being sustainably harvested and they have actually published it as a substitute for teak, so I don't know how much longer it's going to be around - I don't think too much longer. It's kind of sad because *Kiaat* is one of the few trees I know where you can chop off a branch and stick it in the ground and it grows. It's incredibly simple to replant it, but they're just cutting it out like crazy.

Where does it grow naturally?

It occurs in SA. It starts round about the Kruger Park, but it starts getting big going north. You get big ones in Zambia going north. You get them in Namibia, but differences in quality. Mozambique ones tend to be a bit more orange and reddish, much heavier. The Namibia one tends to be very light and not all that suitable. The Zambian one is incredibly beautiful. It's almost like glass - it's so hard, so it's a great wood.
I know Colin Cleveland compared woods once and I had to agree with him that East Indian Rosewood just has that something extra.

And Brazilian Rosewood?

I know nothing about Brazilian Rosewood. It's MUCH more difficult to get hold of. Then, of course, quite a few of us has worked with Black ivory (Del Burgia Mella Nocsolon). It's a true Rosewood. That's apparently a wonderful wood to make guitars of, but it's incredibly difficult to get hold of and it tends to be a tree that is rotted out in the middle, so you struggle to get big pieces to work with. It's unbelievably hard. It's like mild steel, but it's got miraculous qualities and it is said to be as good as Brazilian Rosewood and it is a true Rosewood. It's "del burgia" (genus) and it's our finest local Rosewood. You get a thing called Rhodesian Rosewood. I've used it as well for back and sides, but I used it specifically to have a completely dead wood for my first arched-top, because I did not want it to interact. So I have used Rhodesian Rosewood. I've used stuff called "Chunfuti" for fingerboards, which is a rather rare wood from Mozambique which they used to make sleepers with at the end of the last century. That makes a wonderful fingerboard, but you can't get hold of it. It's almost impossible.

Is Kiaat easy to work with?

Yes. Very user friendly. All of them are actually pretty easy to bend, except Rhodesian Teak. I use woods like Rhodesian Teak and various others purely for decorative purposes. So I haven't really experimented too much with woods for back and sides. Tops, of course, I've never used anything other than Cedar or Spruce.

Now that you mention the tops. Do you think there is any indigenous wood that can replace Cedar or Spruce as a top?

No. Not at all. The only local wood we have from the pine family is "Widdringtonia", which grows in the Cedarberg. I've never really looked at that wood, but they are very small trees so I doubt very much if you could ever get any top from them. There are no other indigenous woods suitable.

Mervyn mentioned them but said that their grain is too far apart because the growth rate in SA is so fast compared to Europe because of the climate.

Yes. Guitar tops are made from "Gymnosperms" (Pine Trees) and there are no real Pines in the Southern hemisphere. Nothing can really replace Spruce and Cedar. Spruce has got the highest weight to strength ratio of any wood. A lot of research has been done on this. I've got a lot of references. There is the "Journal of guitar acoustics" that's come out for a few years. Lots of guys have been doing these tests and Spruce is the wood that's come out the best.

What woods does Smallman use then?

He uses all of those. A lot of classical luthiers use all three of them. Spruce, Cedar and Redwood. Then there are a lot of other pine species they're starting to harvest up in Canada and places. All kinds of Spruces like Red Spruce etc. Also they would be the same genus (Piceya) but different species.

Are there any special tests you do in selecting woods? Specific things you look for when you look at a piece of wood?

Often we don't really have a choice. We get what we can order from overseas.

How is the quality of these woods?

The quality is sufficient. The Redwood that Garth Pickard and I once bought together….. I think that certain woods should not go below 6% water content. If it drops below that you begin to find these really fine cracks running through the log that you can never fix up. You can never fix up a crack properly. I spoke to Andy McGibbon about that the other day and he agrees with me that sometimes it works with super glue and sometimes it doesn't. A fine crack like that has no effect on the guitar at all, though. It tends to close up in summer when it's wet. It's just the visual aspect that's not ideal.

Do you prefer and use specific tuning pegs/machine heads?

On steel-strings and arched-tops I prefer "Grovers". On classicals I've only used "Schaller's". I could never afford anything more expensive.

Are there any other ornamental materials you use for inlays and the like?

Yes. My rosettes I base on African designs – African textile designs. I also use things like soap stone, glass, precious stones etc.

Mother of Pearl?

No, not really. You can inlay anything, though.

I have never heard of soapstone inlays?

Yes. I also played around with enameling techniques, because I'm interested in African jewelry. Enameling is when you heat up coloured glass and it gives you a real intense colour. I think it can really be adapted to guitar building, but you've got to have things like enameling ovens to do it really well. I stopped doing that a few years ago. I would like to experiment with precious metals like gold and silver but I've never had the time.

What is your view/opinion on arched-back classical guitars?

A hell of a lot of work!!! ☺ Another wood I've used is Hardepeer when it comes to arched-backs. An arched-back is a solid piece of wood from which the arched-back is carved out of. A wood like *Hardepeer* is unbelievably hard so it involves a lot of hard work. The first arched-back I made was from *Kiaat*. It sounded quite nice. I took it to America and showed it to a few shops and they actually liked it quite a bit. It's not a traditional kind of sound, though. It doesn't have that warm bass of the traditional "Spanish guitar". Arched-backs are very loud. I do brace them to bring out the basses to be crystal clear - almost metallic. I'm still in the early stages of arched-back experimentation, though. I don't know what my new ones are going to sound like. Probably very loud and almost a steel-string sound to the classical guitar.

Do you enjoy working with Hardepeer?

Hardepeer is thought to have acoustic qualities. There's a guy down in the Cape called Selwyn that builds harpsichords and he has used Hardepeer for the sides quite often. I'm just playing around with Hardepeer, because I had a few planks.

Do you experiment a lot with different bracing techniques?

Yes. I have played around quite a lot. For example in a classical guitar - if you have parallel bracing, you tend to get good separation of notes, but if you do cross grain bracing like Torres, you definitely get a better balance between bass and treble. I used both techniques on exactly the same guitar. The beauty of an arched-back guitar is because it has no bracing, it's just a curved brace. You can pop that thing off as easy as pie and change the bracing on the soundboard and see what it sounds like. So I think we all play around with bracing. Some guys put transverse harmonic bars - one on the bass and one on the treble side.

Why?

To get a clearer bass. To get away from that slightly muddy bass. That's just in my experience, though. It definitely brightens up the trebles nicely. Some people might think that it is a little too bright.

Is this pertaining to classical guitars only?

Yes. Steel-strings have a completely different bracing. With steel-strings I scallop the braces like the old Martins – that makes the top a lot more responsive. Steel-strings is very much a standard bracing pattern. No one plays around with it much.

Is the SA climate (Pretoria in specific) conducive to guitar building?

Yes. Not a bad climate for guitar building. We always have a buildup of humidity at night which is a problem. I build at 40% humidity and any kind of important gluing process like the fingerboard, braces, bridge, anything like that you must brace at a specific R.H. It's very important.

Do guitar makers from e.g. Cape Town experience more challenges in this regard?

Most of them have a humidity control room and dehumidifiers. If you think our climate poses problems, just go to the states. It's a nightmare over there. I was on a truck there with a friend between California and New York and back for three and a half weeks. That place is unbelievable in climate. You think we are hot here!? Mississippi is just unreal. Then it has rain, then it has snow. Humidity control if you were a small shop producing as many guitars a year as possible, I should think would be a must. Even here.

What are your thoughts on SA guitars in general? Where do you think we are in terms of other countries? Are there things you like? Where do we need to improve?

Mervyn Davis is absolutely world class. I think if he took over a selection of his work to some kind of overseas luthier convention in America, I think they would be flabbergasted. He's done it all by himself. Totally by himself.
The standard of people I've seen like Marc Maingard, Colin Cleveland, Garth Pickard, Hans van den Berg, Rodney Stedall…… I think the standard is good. Don't underestimate Colin Cleveland. Colin, I would say, is probably the second best luthier in this country. Colin has built a lot of guitars. Plus minus 200. His workmanship is very good. I haven't kept up with the other guys. I've lost contact but I've seen Hans' 3rd guitar and it was pretty amazing. I hear he is building some really stunning guitars.

I hear Colin's guitars have a really strong tone?

Yes. He started building arched-backs after he saw mine. I think he just builds arched-backs now. I don't know any other guys that I can think of. I saw an exhibition of Jan Tredoux's guitars. He is a talented young guy. Very talented. In fact I did a shared exhibition at the ATKV with him a few years ago. There are a few builders just starting to play around at the moment e.g. Francois Kellerman. Nick Stolz is starting

to produce some brilliant steel-string guitars. Nick is a retired tool maker, so he has got tolerances like you can't believe. I've seen him in this past year build two steel-string guitars that were quite magnificent. Not in terms of radical sound or design, but all well constructed with a great sound. Really great sound.

Do you work on one guitar at a time or more?

I tend to do about 3 at a time. I haven't done a lot in the last year or two, though. I built 2 last year.

Is that your average yearly output?

Yes. I would say about two per year. Last year I built a classic where I wanted to do a certain experiment in bracing. I didn't want to waste money on Spruce, so I used the crappiest Oregon pine I could get. Crappy in terms of that it's the stuff you use for kitchens and furniture. I picked a piece that had a fair grain and it came out surprisingly well. In fact a guy bought it off me. He really liked it. ☺

Were you lucky in selecting a good piece of wood or was it the bracing or what?

I was trying to get the optimum resonance of the soundboard with the bracing and it came out well, even though the wood was lower than 3rd grade. It would never find its way into a luthier shop. Real crap. Shows you. ☺

Are there any specific scientific acoustic tests that you do or do you work by feel and finger tapping?

A lot of tapping yes, but no electronic devices. I have at stages played around with weights. There is a guy called John Gilbert in America who is one of the top guitar builders in the world. He uses a lot of measurements. He weighs the top, he weighs his bracing and he won't touch anything that's beyond a certain weight, etc. I've also played around with quite a bit of that. I'd like to do more but there's just so little time.

Would you like to do this fulltime some day?

No. I don't really see a future for it myself, because I'm struggling to sell guitars. If there was a market for my guitars, yes, but I just haven't had any success in the last few years.

Do you still enjoy making guitars though?

I think I'm getting more bored with it. I've got other priorities in my life that's developing that are more important. Guitar building used to be like a religion to me but since I became a Christian, I just don't take it that seriously any more. Sometimes I enjoy it and if it starts irritating me then I just give it up for a while. It's depressing when you build guitars and they just hang around and nobody buys them. I could talk about why I think it happens, but maybe I shouldn't.

Would you say that there is some kind of SA tradition in guitar building? Some kind of unifying common factor?

Probably just the woods we use. I don't think anybody has really built enough guitars to develop a "SA sound". You must remember a guy like Mervyn….. perhaps it's a negative side of his building in the sense that he hasn't concentrated on one kind of guitar. Mervyn has built a staggering array of instruments. He's built steel-string guitars, classical guitars, arched-top guitars, mandolins, acoustic basses. I've seen an upright kind of bass that Tananas got. I know another guy that's got one of those. It's an unbelievably beautifully made instrument. That strange bass thing that Steve Newman plays….. He's built dozens of different instruments. Mervyn will look at a photograph of an antique guitar and he will build that thing. He's just got this unbelievable mind. He can see what it's like. He draws everything of course - he's almost an architect and he's got an incredible intuitive feel as well. What is sad about Mervyn is that in a way his finest work is in the past. He's reached a stage now where he is sick and tired for doing these incredible inlays. His eyes are going and he's had it. He has been living on the bread line for 30 years and he's just

had enough of it and I really feel that there are certain guitar teachers that could have easily supported Mervyn by giving his work to their students and because of petty things those people didn't. I've never known Mervyn in anything but a broke condition. If he had the support of certain people he could have done a hell of a lot better than he did.

If you look at what Segovia did for "Ramirez" and Williams for "Smallman", it would have been nice if we had a performer of that caliber to boost Mervyn's guitars.

Yes. One would have thought that the influential people would have done that, but they didn't. That is one of the reasons why I don't belong to the guild anymore. Some of us just prefer working on our own.

What are your ambitions and goals for the future?

I'm in a good position in the sense that I have a friend in the States and he is prepared to market my guitars, but its tough trying to sell a guitar in the States. I've been trying this past year, because I've got a guitar sitting with him at the moment. He took it to two big shops in the Bay City area (Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles) and the one shop really liked my guitar and said I should be selling it for between $1000 and $3000. The other place said I should be selling for between $2000 and $3000. They didn't buy my guitars, but they liked them and they really like the arched-tops especially, so I left one over there and I sent the arched-top home and it was completely trashed in the post. It came back in three pieces ☺. I tried to just advertise it in a Sacramento paper and we got a few responses, but no one came around and that's as far as I got. I tried selling it on e-bay and when I start to look at what's available on e-bay, the price I would probably get is round about $900 for this guitar that's sitting here. That comes to about R6000. Not a lot of money. If you want to get a guitar over to the States you have to use U.P.S. They are the ultimate in sending a guitar over. From the moment that you hand the guitar over to them, it's insured for R60000. It's going to cost me R1800 to send a R6000 guitar over through U.P.S. so it's not worth the time and effort. If you can start to sell on word of mouth, I suppose that would be the ideal. If you had a brand new guitar you could sell it for about $1500, but if you see what is available on e-bay….. They start at under $1000 to $2000. If you see what's available, not just second-hand models of well-known people. Guys like us - individual luthiers from all over the world trying to sell. It's phenomenally competitive. I took a guitar over to Germany when I went over for a conference just for fun. I was in Hamburg and just took it to a guitar shop and asked them to take a look at my guitar and tell me what they thought. They didn't even open up the case because I haven't gone through the formal routes. I didn't present my particulars, didn't have a website, didn't present a business card, etc. They weren't the slightest bit interested. So it is tough and ultimately to prove yourself as a luthier you should sell overseas.

So would you like to get into the overseas market?

Yes. If I was feeling positive about building and starting a website, I suppose I would like to sell a few guitars overseas. That's what we all want to do.

Is there anything you consider to be your greatest achievement? A guitar or design or something?

I don't think so. The arched-top is a hell of a lot of work and not a lot of people make them. They are the guitars that if you could sell them overseas, it would be financially viable. You don't get a good arched-top for under $6000 -$7000. A lot of work and real buggers to make. You can control the sound of an arched-top a lot better than other guitars. You can do all kinds of things to change the sound, but it's a hell of a job to make one. They've got a very particular sound. A very deep kind of bass like sound that you don't get with an amplified steel-string. Nice for jazz.

Do you play jazz?

A little bit. I'm more from a blues/rock background, though.

Are there any particular tools that you use? Do you lean more on electronic power tools or are you more of a traditional hand tool oriented luthier?

I use a band saw, obviously a jointer. I made this drum sander, which is one of the most marvelous instruments for making veneers, because I use veneers a lot. If you think that you can carve an arched-back out of Hardepeer using a hand tool, you'll be here for the next two months ☺. You've got to use the right tool. I use quite a few specialist hand tools, but generally go for what's most convenient.

How heavily do you depend or lean on sketches and plans?

I really wish that I had more knowledge on design. That's one thing I really regret. I think it's something that gives a lot of the luthiers a real head start. Hans van den Berg is a draftsman, Garth Pickard is a draftsman, Mervyn Davis and Colin Cleveland are architects. It's a massive advantage. I would say it's one of the biggest advantages starting if you've got design abilities.

How do you compensate for your limited knowledge of design? Do you work more by feel?

I just 'neuk on' ☺. I have started to draw a few designs, especially with my latest classical in terms of getting correct neck angles and things like that.You look at how Mervyn draws, it amazes you. Of course guys like Hans and Garth are into computer designs and drawings so they can do all kinds of orientations now and that's a hell of an advantage. I would say it's a big advantage to have.

What are your thoughts on the future of S.A. guitar building.

I think you actually answered the question yourself when you said that there's only a limited market here. I think there are just so few guitar players and that is one of the things that I wanted to get going with Graeme Collersmith and why I invited him out here. I wanted him to try and get people like Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan to see if we could get some kind of tour going. They bring Australians like Craig Ogden and the like out here. As a semi pro musician who played between 400 and 500 four-hour gigs (1600 hours of playing) I should think that if you are going to be a musician you should perform a lot. There are a lot of guys that are classical guitar teachers who have hardly ever performed and that's unacceptable, really. We need an improvement of performance players. To be honest, Abri Jordaan is the only really good classical guitar player I've seen and, of course, I haven't seen them all not being into classics, but I've heard some S.A. players that would be booed off the stage in Europe or America. If you look at the level of playing in other disciplines in this country…… I mean guys in America is so good it's just mind boggling, because they have a climate of producing better and better players. My experience with classical guitar players here is it's a very clickish group and that the same people go and watch them and cheer them. That's not the way to become a good player.

So you think that the plight of S.A. performers and S.A. luthiers are linked?

The more performers there are the more people would want guitars, yes. Most players are just interested in brand names, though. If I am a young student and I see a great guitarist play on a brand name guitar, why should I buy an Allistar Thompson guitar? I would also want a brand name. When I was young I wanted to play Fenders and Gibsons. I didn't want to play on a local guitar maker's guitars. So you are always going to have a limited market over here, unless there is a marketing kind of thing that can happen. I don't think the future is too bright, to be honest.

What guitar does Abri Jordaan play on?

He has played on a lot of guitars. He had a Ramirez. At the moment he plays on some Dutch builder's guitar. He has bought Colin Cleveland guitars. He even bought some or other carbon fiber guitar at one stage. I think he is always on the lookout for like any guitarist. Always experimenting. A guy of his quality would probably need a number of guitars like any good guitarist in any field.
So to answer your question, I'm not too positive about guitar building in S.A. I don't think there's a real future here and ultimately, like anything in the world, they should be selling overseas to prove themselves just like in any field.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 25 JUNE 2005

I am surprised that classical guitar players have not tried harder to capture that 'classical' sound electronically. You would have thought that there would be a development in trying to capture that sound electronically.

I would like to just ask a few follow-up questions based on our previous interview. You mentioned that Mervyn was a big inspiration to you as luthier. The biggest perhaps?

Yes.

Mervyn mentioned that he heard that Kiaat plantations are being established overseas. Do you know anything about that?

No, but it probably will be planted sooner or later in this country, because it's not a very slow tree. In fact it is a very fast growing tree. Once they have cut out everything from Southern Africa, I would imagine that someone will start to grow these plantations.

Can you tell me more on the two books that helped you in the beginning namely Doubtfire's and David Russel's book.

They are very well known basic beginner books. The reason I don't like Compiagno much is that I don't take to books that tell you exactly what to do very well. I would rather make my own mistakes and try again.

Could you tell me more about Francois Pretorius, who was killed in the motor car accident?

He did an apprenticeship under a well known luthier in Ireland and was involved with the building of quite a large number of instruments. He was quite an experienced luthier and a great loss.

Why did you laughingly refer to luthiery last time as a very expensive hobby?

☺ Just for myself, I don't make any money off it. If I was building 4 or 5 guitars per year and was getting R10 000 per guitar it would have been a nice little side line, but I've had no success in selling my stuff, so it is most definitely an expensive pass time. There are other things I could be doing with my time to improve my building, but I'm just not prepared to do it. It's not worth it to me.

You mentioned that Craig Ogden's Smallman guitar inspired you to move into that direction of guitar building.

Actually that is not the main reason I did it. The main reason is that I saw that the *Kiaat* was going to run out and I wanted to have a signature kind of sound from S.A. guitars. I therefore thought that the most sensible thing to do would be to do the arched-back. The sides of the guitar, in my opinion, don't really contribute anything to the sound and I stiffen mine anyway, I stiffen them all along. Ultimately, then, I could have built a guitar out of anything. Even Emboya. I believe that Smallman does his back made out of chip board or some kind of compressed board and then he just puts something like East-Indian Rosewood as a veneer, almost like French furniture, onto the thing. That is how I gather he makes them. I thought that there is going to be a real lack of good quality back and sides wood, so I thought it would be better to get into arched-back stuff. That is really why I went in that direction. Also, each luthier is trying to build a kind of an individual thing that is different to the rest, obviously.

Apart from Colin Cleveland, who has experimented with arched-back classics, you are the only S.A. luthier to have done that.

I can't even work out whether they are worth anything yet. I am not a classical player and I don't get really good feedback from guys like Charl Lamprecht or Abri Jordaan so I really don't know what they sound like.

Could you tell me more about the arched-back you just completed.

The one you played on is brand new and literally have never been played on, so the top, I assume, would loosen up a bit. I perhaps tightened up the top too much. Perhaps the bass is a little bit too jangly. I could leave out things that would perhaps give it a little bit more warmth. I think the backs of traditional guitars have got quite a lot to do with the bass sound. It's just a feeling that I have, but I might be wrong. So even though the arch that I'm using is quite a small arch, it's about a 14 mm arch, a guy who's name has slipped my mind now told me I should think of something like a 20 mm arch. This guitar is interesting in the sense that if you look at it, it seems like a very big guitar. The depth of the body is not the normal 100 mm going down to 96 mm, but 110 mm going down to about 98 mm. I did that purposefully to try and get a bit more air volume to contribute to the bass and, of course, with the additional curvature I have got a much larger air volume than the average guitar. I think that if I went for something like a 20 mm arch, which I think might actually make playing uncomfortable, I might well get a better bass coming out. I don't know. Maybe if these guitars do sell I might be looking more towards the jazz idiom. There was a jazz guitarist that played on the first one I made. It was full of cracks and stuff, but I could tell that he really loved what he got from the guitar. I think that might be a niche that I can go into, because I really don't hear the things that Garth Pickard and Hans van den Berg do in classical guitars.

Can you tell me a bit more of African Blackwood following up on our previous discussions?

It is from the genus 'del burgia mella nocsalon' and is a true Rosewood. I know a guy called Jeff Elliot who builds up in Oregon. He built a guitar from African Rosewood that he says is as good as Brazilian Rosewood. It is phenomenally expensive and very difficult to get hold of.

That is strange, seeing as it is indigenous?

It is indigenous to the lower veld, Hoedspruit and Kruger Park area. They are very tiny trees, though, so you can only get tiny pieces of usable wood from them for fingerboards or the like.

You mentioned that Smallman wrote to you once saying that he doesn't believe in any scientific kind of guitar building and that he is an intuitive builder. Would you say that that is your approach as well?

No, I would say that I am scientific. I do things like for the brace wood of the centre of the soundboard, I cut all my brace wood and my fans and everything to a certain dimension and I weigh them. I then choose only the very lightest. At one stage I used to follow a more scientific approach. If I had a batch of soundboards coming in I would cut them to the same size and same thickness. I would then test their defection and their weight, test their tap tone and drew histograms, etc. Visually you can see that some tops are vastly superior to others. They are much lighter and much stiffer. They have a much better tap tone. I am therefore more scientific than most, but I also go by my gut feel.

You mention that you have seen some of Mervyn Davis' instruments that knocked you over. Are there any specific instruments you can mention?

Not really. I was referring to what I have observed through 25 years of seeing his instruments and the magnificence of his craftsmanship. I can't really comment on the sound of his instruments.

You say that there is not really a market for these arched-back guitars in S.A., but are they quite popular overseas, though?

A lot of the Australian builders build with arched-backs.

Do you think that it might be a direction that classical guitar construction could go into in future?

Well, the very fact that Smallman is considered to be one of the greatest guitar builders in the world answers that question. I would suppose that there is very much the school of people that play that kind of guitar or, say, Mervyn's guitar and then there is the school of guys who won't deviate from the traditional Spanish construction. There are some well known guys like Jeff Kemp who is making inroads in the German market. When I wrote to him he replied and said that he builds with lattice bracing. So he builds with arched-backs, but he also does a mixture of the two. He might do something like Mervyn, where he would put a very thin layer of carbon fiber in between his fan struts. That is what Smallman is famous for - using things like Balsa wood coated with carbon fiber so it is fantastically light, but also very strong.

You said last time that the combination of Redwood and African Mahogany gives a marvelous warmth for steel-strings. Is that warmth something that you strive for in your guitars?

It is just the opposite of the guitar that you played on in that you try and get not to high trebles, because when you have your fundamental going too high and have too many high consequent partials, they tend to be a little bit off the fundamental and it sounds slightly out of tune. It gives you a real jangly kind of steel-string. I think that Mahogany has always been a wood that is known to give warmth, but then, of course, there are a lot of different Mahoganies. Things like Cuban Mahogany is a different genus to our own, so you are talking about totally different plants all called Mahogany, but I think that African Mahogany is a great wood. In fact I would like to see what it does with the classicals.

Where did you read that Kiaat is being sustainably harvested?

In 'Fine Wood Working' about 3 or 4 years ago. I can get the volume for you, if you want. That was completely incorrect, because when I phoned the guys at nature conservation they confirmed that there is no real control over the harvesting. It was just not reliable information that they received or gave. They are always looking for new kinds of wood.
They can get any kind of wood in the world. If I were a guitar builder in Oregon I could walk down to the local stockman and get just about any kind of wood under the sun that we struggle to get hold of. I think in some ways *Kiaat* is a little bit too light for guitar building. I think it works here with my arched-back, because it is a nice robust piece of *Kiaat* with a thick arched-back. The nice thing about African Mahogany is that it has a nice weight to it. I don't know, maybe Garth Pickard is building *Kiaat* backs and sides and getting a great sound with it. He is apparently going into flamenco a lot as well.

You mentioned last time that your rosette patterns are based on African Ndebele designs. Can you expand on that?

I haven't really played around with too many designs. Most of my designs, like this one, are based on African textiles. I would say that African textiles have been my greatest influence.

In the last interview you said that you would like to use soap stone, gold, precious stones and glass as decorative materials. Have you had a chance to do that in the mean time?

I used soap stone inlays in my last guitar. The one I just finished that you played on. I would have loved to do a lot more experiments with inlays, if I were a full-time guitar builder, but my priorities have changed in life. I am much more interested in DNA finger printing at the moment.

I don't think I have ever seen soap stone inlays in a guitar.

Yes, I doubt that you will ever see that. I would love to try things like silver and gold as well. I have always been inspired by African jewelry. I have some wonderful books on African jewelry. Some jewelry up in central Africa going up towards the Middle East is some of the most beautiful jewelry ever made in the world.

What are some of its characteristics?

It is just master metal work. Those guys are just something else. There are different kinds of techniques. I would have liked to have done that, who knows, perhaps I still will.

I really hope you persevere a bit longer with the arched-back classicals. I think it gives possible answers to inherent performance aspects in terms of volume.

But Rudi, the problem is how you make a mark on the classical world if the few teachers don't push your instruments. How do you get known? I suppose I could start a web page.

You mentioned the overseas market like Germany and America last time?

I did take a couple of guitars to America. A friend of mine took them to a couple of shops in the Bay City area namely Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Francisco. They liked them, but the whole schlep, if you go to something like e-bay there is an unbelievable amount of guitars available. Say I went in there at about maximum $2000. At the current rate that is R12 000. You are not sure if you are even going to sell it. To get it over there in one piece where it is properly insured, you need to use a place like U.P.S. That is going to put you back at least R1800 to R2000. Even $2000 you will be lucky to get. For an unknown builder, $1500 is more likely, so you are going to sell a guitar over there for like R5000.

The marketing aspect is something that Marc Maingard seems to do really well if you look at the well known overseas performers that play on his guitars.

Yes, he has always been an aggressive marketer, so that is good.

Why do you think arched-back guitars have such a strong volume? Solely because of the arched-back?

I don't really know. I suppose so. I do know that some of the guys in Australia that are perhaps not the best builders, have built arched-backs. They don't know how Greg Smallman gets his tone pallet, but their instruments were louder, so I assume that it is related to the construction, probably some kind of reflective surface of the back. One thing I would really like to know, because nobody has been playing it long enough to know whether a slightly resonant back doesn't bring out some Wolff tone somewhere.

What do you do in terms of humidity control?

I don't have a controlled humidity chamber, but I never build anything of importance like bracing or gluing on of the tops if the humidity is not close to 40% relative humidity.

What is it in the tapping of the tops that you specifically listen for?

Basically the clearness. What I want to do is to apply the same principles I use in steel-strings like tapping and bracing 'till I get a nice tone. I want to start doing that with these arched-back classicals, because if you have a classical and it doesn't give you a nice tap tone, I can't see how that instrument can ever really produce a good sound. I have absolutely no idea of how the other guys do it. I'm actually using a different kind of approach to get optimal sensitivity from the guitar top. Because I don't hear that well, I'm forced to do other things. It is based on the fundamental tap tone. I try to get the beat tap tone and then I drop it a little bit in the top and then I get the back to bring back that maximum ring. When I asked Mervyn about it he said that that maximum ring doesn't always indicate a great guitar.

Mervyn told me that there are a lot of perceived ideas on guitar building floating around that is nonsense, but is accepted as facts. An example he gives is the 'false' notion that if you put a cut away in a guitar, you take away of its sound.

Yes, if you can get the overwhelming majority of a guitar's sound to come from the lower bout that is true.

I think there the 'tradition' is a disadvantage, because a lot of players struggle to play high up the fret board.

I think a lot of aspiring classical players want to play on guitars like the Julian Breams. He is not going to get a radical guitar like the ones that Mervyn is building. Trying to market a radical design to serious classical guitarists has always been a serious problem. Mervyn has built anything. There is nothing he can't build. He is just absolutely excellent. I remember listening to Mervyn responding to questions people asked of him at a meeting a year ago where he was asked to talk on the classical guitar. Someone asked him how he gets a certain sound from the guitar. He replied that as Frank Zeppelin said 'I just play the fucking thing, I don't know how it works ☺. Can you imagine the shock of those classical people! ☺

You said last time that one can control the sound of an arched-top much better.

That was more based on what people who build arched-tops say. I have only built one arched-top. It is a well known fact that you can do all kinds of things to change the sound of an arched-top. It is one of the most flexible instruments. Even when you have finished making the guitar, you can just change the bridge and get a different sound. In the construction of the top, all the arched-top has is two cross braces. They determine a lot of what the guitar sound like.

How much have been done in terms of scientific studies of Kiaat with reference to its acoustic qualities and physical make up?

Nothing that I know of. We just started listening to the ring of planks and it was a nice ring. It is a nice wood and there was a lot of it. That is the only reason I started using *Kiaat*. I didn't look it up in books or anything. I do know that Hardepeer is used by that Selwyn guy that builds harpsichords. I also have a five volume book called 'Trees of Southern Africa' which is totally unobtainable. I got it because I was working at Wits and it was the only issue to the librarian and then it was stopped, because the people who had it did not want to acknowledge copyright. In that book the author did quite a lot of measurements of every kind of S.A. wood in terms of density, etc. and in that book he mentions that Hardepeer does have acoustic properties. The *Kiaat* story, however, we just found out for ourselves. There is nothing that pointed us in that direction. There is another book that you might well go and look at called, I think, 'Trees of Southern Africa' and the author is Eve Palmer. It is a difficult book to get hold of, because it has gone out of print, but she spoke a lot about the traditional uses of the woods in South Africa. Not a scientific thing, but a hell of a lot of information. She might under *Kiaat* say that it is known to have acoustic properties and they make this instrument in that tribe, etc. I think you might well get a little bit of reference from that. A lot of things just happen through experiments, though. I, for example, built a guitar once from Rhodesian Rosewood, which is a 'boetie' of Rhodesian Teak. That stuff was as dead as a dodo. I also tried to build a guitar once from 'Wilde Sering', one of the Syringes. It is a wood that is as beautiful as Brazilian Rosewood. Stunning! When I built that thing it was just the craziest thing. It had so many stresses in it and was actually quite dead. We did play around with wood a bit. I do believe I was the first person to work with *Kiaat*. It was so long ago, though. How I did that is truly lost in the sands of time. I just somehow did it. I must have had access somewhere to *Kiaat* and I tapped it and the sound impressed me.

Mervyn rates Kiaat on the level of any other wood in the world including Brazilian Rosewood.

You must also remember that *Kiaat* is an extremely variable wood. If you get *Kiaat* from Namibia, where it grows in those deep sands, it is a very light wood and actually quite crappy. If you get the stuff from Mozambique, it is a lot harder. It has got more resonance and is a nicer wood. If you get the kind of stuff that he picked up somewhere in Zambia, that stuff is magic!! It is so stiff and almost crystallite, so I don't think that Mervyn is making wild statements when saying that. It is amazing stuff. We tried to get some with Mervyn from Zambia and, of course, it was a complete stuff-up ☺.

Mervyn speaks with great affection of the days when he and you went into the bush to search for trees and the right wood.

I'll tell you a story that still makes me sick today when I think about it. There was a guy at work round about 1982, before I got married, that said that he was down at Komatiepoort and saw a railroad being cut through absolute virgin forest. He suggested we go and look to see what wood we can find so we went down. It was about 50 km's and every half a kilometer there were Acacia giraffes with massive diameters that were just chopped down. They were dead straight and they were just lying there. Me and Mervyn cut up a few of those logs. I don't know how we managed to get those things up, because it is very dangerous. There was beautiful *Hardekool* there, but we made a terrible mistake. We cut a little bit of *Tambotie* that was lying around there and then all hell broke loose, because the engineer on that road wanted it and he caused a lot of crap and he must have told nature conservation and you had to have a permit for *Tambotie* in those days. We had a truck lined up to take all the Knoppiesdoring home and we lost everything! There was enough Knoppies there to honestly supply all the luthiers for the next 70 years. We lost all that lovely *Hardekool*! I had to bear the cost of that encounter ☺. Mervyn does not have any secrets, but he is just so good that I don't even understand some of the things he is saying. Mervyn is one of the great guitar builders in this world. To have done the things he has done on his own without any help. To design this new radical design by himself, whether it is a success or not, puts him in the top class of builders in the world. You must remember that if you take guys like Jeff Elliot in Oregon, he did an apprenticeship under a very well known luthier. That does not mean that Jeff is not a great guitar builder - of course he is, but if you apprentice under someone, he tells you how he gets the sound. Mervyn did everything utterly alone. There is no one like him. No one can touch him. He has an absolute intrinsic, intuitive understanding of sound that is just so deep which most of us haven't got.

Tell me a bit more about the guitar you just finished that I played on and will profile.

What is interesting about this guitar is the Cedar. Because of the fact that it is perhaps not the finest Cedar that we got from Canada and is very soft, I wanted to actually make the soundboard as stiff as possible. So even though it has got seven fan struts, the V-struts at the bottom that are usually separate, I actually joined the whole lot up to form a sort of a rigid structure. This guitar is unusual in the sense that even though it's got a transverse brace, which stiffens up the treble, I also stiffened up the bass to get a very clear kind of a ringing bass. That is not normally done. In terms of other things that are related to stiffness I used a very thin bridge plate that I think is important in terms of distributing the sound and stiffening up the centre of the lower bout. What is also important is that those fan braces are notched over the bridge plate so that the sound radiating out from the bridge doesn't hit any sort of dead spots. It moves straight out through the guitar. I also sprayed on a 2 k laquer to try and stiffen it up well and I used *Hardekool* as a bridge. *Hardekool* is a heavy wood and I have always gone on the bridge being round about 22 grams. There has been quite a lot of research done on this by an American guy and he reckoned 22 grams is the best. This guy went to quite a bit larger. It went to 29-30 grams, but he found and Nick Stolz who is building beautiful steel-strings also found that *Hardekool* has got something about it. It kind of holds the sound back and it punches it out. I don't know what it is about it. You mustn't have it too heavy, but it is a great sounding wood. Furthermore it is a much bigger bodied guitar, like I said, because I wanted to try and get better basses coming out, because I don't have any kind of link between the fundamentals of the soundboard and back. I have always believed that the back and the top should be sort of half a tone apart in their fundamentals to get good coupling between the front and the back. With this kind of guitar you have got no coupling because the tap tone of the back is so high, because it is so thick, that it is literally tones and tones apart from the soundboard.

When did you make and finish this guitar?

I finished it about a month ago. It has also got quite a tilted up neck. Between 3 and 5 millimeters, which I think is good in driving the soundboard. Consequently my fingerboard is quite thick. 8 to 9 mm thick fingerboard, so this kind of guitar with a very thick fingerboard, stiffened sides and a very heavy carved back is a very rigid instrument. It is not a finicky kind of instrument. You can take that instrument on the road and chuck it around, but I did try and build as sensitive a top as possible. I think it is the first time that I've really managed to get trebles out of Cedar.

Why do you consider this to be the best guitar you have built?

The fact that I have finally managed to get trebles out of Cedar. I think if you can get trebles out of Cedar then you can by applying the methods that I used for this top onto Spruce. It should give me really nice trebles. This guitar is quite heavy, not only because of the additional struts along the side, which I added to prevent sound from getting lost along the sides, but it is built from a lot more wood than a normal guitar. Traditionally you want the coupling of the fundamentals of the top and those from the back to take place through the air more so than through the sides. With this guitar the coupling with the back is of no importance. It is purely reflective.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH COLIN CLEVELAND ON 11 JUNE 2005 AT 130 CAMP GROUND ROAD, RONDEBOSCH

Short biography:

Well I was born in Canada and brought up in Zimbabwe, because my grand dad went up as a pioneer for the family. He was Canadian and he came out. Then I came to University here in Cape Town. Did architecture. Met my wife here, fell in love with the Cape. I am part of a big architecture practice. We started out as four guys and now we are about sixty or seventy. I have lived in Cape Town ever since.

Date of birth?

Oh, I'm old. You're a baby. ☺ 16th of the 9th, 1936.

It is wonderful finally meeting you, because you are generally considered among the other SA luthiers to be the most experienced classical guitar builder. How many instruments have you built?

250 plus, but I only make classical instruments.

That in itself is also quite unique

Yes, I guess if you have to make a living….look you can't make a living building classical guitars in SA. It is impossible. If you want to make a living out of guitars you have to make a range of instruments. My passion has always been classical music and particularly classical guitar. If I didn't play classical guitar…look I'm not a good player, but I can bear to listen to myself play. If I didn't play I probably wouldn't build classical guitars, because you can't test what you do.

How did the whole guitar building thing start?

It was in about 1960, I played in a group while at varsity and we played sort of main stream jazz. The other guys who played were far better musically than I was, like Chris McGregor - he eventually played in Paris. I played rhythm guitar then, because it was the easiest thing to pick up, because I knew what I was doing on the fingerboard. The guitar broke, so I had to try and repair it and I did. I then got interested in flamenco guitar, because of two Spanish guitar players that came out here in the early 60's. I then started making and my very first guitar was a flamenco-type guitar - using all the wrong woods, though. I didn't know what to use!

So trying to fix the guitar that broke was where it all began?

Yes, I had to try and fix the guitar that was broken. That was a steel-string Gibson. Then I met the Spanish guys and decided that rhythm guitar was not for me. I started making then. There was one guy that was making then in Cape Town, called Harry Harrison. He is dead now. We started making at about the same time and we sort of leaned on each other. It was just the two of us making, but not for a living. I was busy trying to qualify as an architect and it was a nice thing to do with my hands☺.

I saw two of your guitars when I was still in school at the house of my then teacher Marina Kok, who owns two of your guitars.

Oh yes! I remember her. Mervyn Davis is also from PE. He studied there. What a brain that man has. He is so talented - needs a bit of structure and direction - but what a brain!

Coming back to my earlier question. Are you the most experienced guitar maker in SA?

Well, I've been making guitars the longest, yes. That doesn't make me the best or anything.

And you have made more than 200 instruments?

Yes, but you have to include the ones that you've made and didn't like and then took them apart and used the backs and/or sides to make another guitar and you start again. I must have made a lot of guitars.

Your average yearly output?

It varies, because at some stage I wouldn't make more than one a year, because my first love is architecture. I have thought of doing this for a living through the years and my wife would enjoy it. Quite frankly, though, I wouldn't have been able to make a living off classical guitars. You are subject to all the hassles, so I would say my highest yearly output is 8-10 per year.

That is a lot for a part time luthier.

Well… yes. I would say that I took orders of up to six or seven a year, but I couldn't do them all in one year. I did that for a number of years and sold quite a few guitars overseas in the process.

Really? What countries

Italy, mainly, because I used to have a concert guitarist friend who used to live in Rome and he had my guitars and his pupils would also buy from me and other people who saw him play would also place orders. I cut that back though quite a few years ago. I make to order probably two at most per year now and the rest of the time I spend experimenting.

Do you like experimenting?

I love it! You have to experiment. I experiment a lot. The problem is that if you build guitars for a living you don't have the time to experiment. I have this acquaintance who builds guitars in London. I think his name is Brian Levine. He was in Jo'burg years ago and then he came up here and met a friend of mine called Elspeth Jack, who used to teach guitar. Then he popped around to see me. He brought out a guitar, beautifully made, beautiful finish, but it sounded like nothing. I asked him why he doesn't try to experiment with the sound. He said that he doesn't have time to do anything or try anything new. Otherwise his kids and wife doesn't eat. You only need to read books on the lives of people like Torres to see the same thing.

Mervyn would be another example

Exactly! Look what he's been through. Goodness.

Speaking of books. Is that how you taught yourself? You didn't attend any courses or apprenticeships?

No. Any classical guitarist that came to the country or to Cape Town I used to, with their permission, look at their guitar and look inside it with a mirror, but I started with a book by A.P. Sharp which is a hell of an old book. It was called 'Guitar making' or something. It was the only thing around in those days and it was like gold. If you read it today you'll see a lot of it is still relevant, but then a lot of it is things gone past.

Was that book a big influence in your guitar making initially?

No, not really. I think having friends who were good classical guitarists like Uliano Marchio (the guy who stayed in Rome but is back in SA now). He was a tremendous influence, because he would test my instruments. He gave me guitar lessons for a long time. Often there were times where I would go to him and say that I don't know what else to do or where else to go. He would encourage me to keep on going. Then suddenly you make a breakthrough in sound. I keep fairly detailed notes on what I do and the things I change and you store them up, so you can follow a direction.

Having that input from performers is crucial. Just look at the valuable input from people like Abri Jordaan and Charl Lamprecht.

Absolutely! If it hadn't been for those two, there wouldn't be anybody making guitars. Not like they are today, at least. Abri is an old friend of mine.

I was at his house two weeks ago and I played on the guitar you made for him. Beautiful instrument.

Thank you.

Were you influenced by other luthiers at all?

Well, there weren't any here when I started. There was one guy called Jacob van der Geest from Jo'burg. I would imagine that he is an old man now if he is still alive. I know his family went back to Switzerland. He made some very nice guitars, but he made mainly lutes. He was the only guy that I can remember in the 70's and 80's…well I and Marc Maingard might have started in the 80's, but Marc and myself didn't keep contact. I think that Jacob van der Geest was making a range of stuff, so I was sometimes a bit lonely. He made good solid German instruments very much like Hauser. I knew him and another Jo'burg guitarist named Buss. I think he is still there. I also knew Dave Hewitt. He was a classical guitar player, but he died a couple of years ago. I think he got Alzheimer's comparatively young. He was about 50. He moved to Cape Town and I got to know him very well. I made him 10 string guitars and I still have one of them. As an instrument that never really caught on, though. It is only Yepes that I know of that had any success with a 10 string guitar and that school hasn't grown.

Are there any specific qualities soundwise or other that you aspire to in your guitars or that you think make them unique?

The one thing I have learnt (or hope I've learnt), is not to go for just loudness which everybody has tried. I have tried. Everybody else has tried. I've learned to go for quality of sound. There's a hundred ways of making a very good classical guitar. There's not just one way.

Do you think that makes the guitar unique to other instruments?

Yes. They all have different-coloured voices. That, to me, is part of the charm of the guitar. If you use a different strutting on three different instruments – one, say, based on Bernabe or Ramirez and maybe a Bouchet and Torres - there would be three different sounds, but each beautiful in their own right. The big influence that I've found, although I'm not sure of it yet, because I have only been involved with it for the past 6 years, is the solid carved back. That has got a lot of merit, but I've got three guitars that haven't got solid carved backs and they are very good instruments. I've still got to go down that road a little further.

Alistair Thomson is building carved back guitars now.

Yes. He is the guy that initially got me up to Pretoria. He brought me up there, but now I believe he doesn't talk to any of the other guys or anything. It's a pity, because he's such a highly qualified individual and a very intelligent and a very nice guy.

So you say what you strive for in your guitars is more the quality of the sound?

Yes, quality and projection, because volume will take care of itself and besides, the guitar is not a symphonic instrument. People try and make it one like Smallman. I went down that line until a little while ago with lattice bracing. I never used pure Balsa wood and carbon fiber and taken the top down so soon, because that instrument….Smallman has seem to taken it to the extreme.

So you are not too positive about the whole lattice bracing idea anymore?

Not necessarily. Abri's guitar is lattice braced and it's worked very well, but I think with lattice bracing the guitar is very efficient. It is constant over its whole range. If you play an open E and an E elsewhere you

get the same quality and therefore I think it loses colour and I've gone back….the last lattice bracing guitar I made was probably two years ago. I've gone back to more traditional methods, but with a carved back and I prefer it, I think. I've got to get used to it, because the last six years I've been moving in the direction of lattice bracing, but I think I prefer it. Again through people like Uliano who played it and helped me listen as well as his wife who was an opera singer and had a very sharp ear. We discussed the instrument. It was efficient, it outvoiced another one but the beauty of it was gone or the magic was diluted.

This quality vs. volume battle is one that all luthiers seem to struggle with.

Well, that's the beauty of the guitar for both makers and players, because you don't need to have one specific thing otherwise you don't have anything. I think I'm the only SA builder to be involved with lattice bracing, though. In Australia everybody uses it, though. I know this because I go there and I have several contacts, because I have two daughters who live in Australia and there lattice bracing is all over. There are some good builders and some average builders, but there are a lot of guitar makers in Australia.

And they all follow the Smallman route?

Yes, because it does have merit. To me the worst nation of guitar makers generally is probably the States. They want to do all at once and they want to do everything. I'm only talking of classical guitars. There are some very good makers, but not many, where as if you go to Europe, there are literally dozens of very good makers.

What kind of woods do you use? Traditional woods?

For tops I use Spruce and Cedar. Imported. I don't use Engelmann Spruce. I tried it, but I don't like it. I don't use Sitka, because I find it too fibrous. I know Mervyn and a lot of other people use it, but I don't. I am fortunate in having quite large stocks of Brazilian Rosewood as well as large stocks of East-Indian Rosewood. I've used Vietnamese Rosewood back and sides, Chinese Rosewood - very dense. I've just gotten some Madagascan Ivory that I'm going to try for back and sides. Brazilian Rosewood to me is the most beautiful - not just to look at, but also the sound.

Some SA makers are starting to use African Blackwood for back and sides. It is also a type of Rosewood.

Yes. I saw one guitar in Pretoria that had sides made of it. I've never tried it. Basically what I got from Madagascar is very similar. Hard as hell. Beautiful for fingerboards. I do use African Blackwood for fingerboards. It is very heavy and hard, where Ebony is softer. I have used *Padauk.*

So you don't use any indigenous woods at all?

No. I know Alistair was great on that. In fact, I saw that Alistair got somewhere and given me *Kiaat,* but I can't stand the look of it. That yellow look. I know that Mervyn and Garth use it and I'm sure a lot if it, especially I think with Mervyn, is because of the cost. Rosewood you pay R5000 for a small piece that by the time you cut it up there's even less of it you can use. More than half of it has gone to saw dust. I'm just lucky to have a source for Rosewood.

That is one big difference I have noticed between the Cape Town and Pretoria luthiers. In Pretoria nobody can get hold of Rosewood, but down here you and Marc seem to have large stocks of it.

Yes. There's 'Rare Woods' down here. It is a very difficult wood to get hold of, because it is illegal to import from Brazil, so 'Rare Woods' buy it in from stocks in old attics in Amsterdam, for example, in the form of logs and bring it here.

Any unique aesthetic qualities of your guitars?

The rosette I design myself, which becomes like a signature. Hans van den Berg makes a beautiful rosette. Other than that, no. The *plantilla* is very close to Torres probably or between Torres and Bouchet.

Is there any specific inspiration behind your rosette design?

I don't only use one, but I did use one for years based on the Musaceae tree. You get a lot of them in Zimbabwe. I managed to get out a design and what inspired me to do that was my son, who's a doctor, while he was studying asked me to show him how to make a guitar and he made one. By chance he made a rosette that sort of looked like trees, so that's where I got the idea.

Are there any special tests you do in selecting your woods?

Yes. The normal tap tone. I tap a lot. I would say that I am very dependent on the tap tone, because you can, once you know what you're hearing and where to hold it, be guided by it to a large extent. I believe in the Spanish method which doesn't involve electronic measuring.

So you are an intuitive builder rather than a scientific builder?

Yes, but you build up that knowledge. To me the tactile feel of the wood you work with tells you what it's going to do. You don't even need to tap it. I have tried measuring and weighing the wood, but have gone back to working by feel. Too lazy ☺.

Any special materials you use for ornamental purposes like the rosettes?

I use natural woods. Mainly Ebony and Boxwood or something like that. I don't use colours unless they are natural like *Padauk*, which is red.

In terms of your construction methods and techniques, you say that you are moving back towards the more traditional fan bracing?

I experimented a lot with lattice bracing. A lot! I've probably made at least 20 instruments using lattice bracing. It's too early to tell whether that was a wrong avenue or not. It has taught me other things that I wouldn't have encountered if I hadn't gone down that road, so I don't regret it. I am using things at present that I learned from the lattice bracing other than the actual lattice bracing, like the support structures and how you balance a top that I wouldn't have known or ever experienced if I just carried on. I can't just carry on and do the same thing. I get bored.

Is the climate down here conducive to guitar building?

Pretty lousy. It's ok, but winter is quite bad for building. Then I just heat the workshop up. I don't have an electronically controlled humidity room or anything. I think you probably need that up in Gauteng. I've been up there in November and the humidity is sky high and you can't make a thing. Our humidity never gets that high and if it does, I don't build anything. I know Mervyn doesn't build anything if the humidity is over 20%. I have built guitars in up to 60%, but then if it goes up to Jo'burg I warn the guys, but if it stays in the Cape it will be alright. Very few of my instruments, funny enough, have cracked up. I think an important aspect is that the wood that you use must already be well seasoned.

I know the guild of SA luthiers have started a few workshops on things like French polishing and the like. Do you think it is a good idea and that it can be beneficial to young aspiring luthiers?

Yes, absolutely. I think it's a good idea, because for the guy who's starting out it's a very daunting task. Everything looks so difficult when, in fact, it's not. When I make a guitar I instinctively know all the measurements. I don't refer to a book or something unless I've been away for a month or so. I remember speaking to guys who've made one or two and, in fact, speaking to Hans when he was making his first guitar. He was so scared, but he has matured now.

What would you consider to be some of the major challenges in making a guitar?

The most daunting thing that I find, funnily enough, is fretting. It should be the easiest. Bending the sides and bending the linings…..

Why do you find fretting so daunting?

I don't know. I just got a block. I think the thing is one saw cut that's wrong at that late stage is the thing. I think a lot of people make the fingerboard and the frets separately and then only attach it to the guitar, which I have never done. I prefer to have the neck on. I don't even glue my bridge on yet. I put the neck on and then I make sure my measurements are marked out and then I cut. By then you have almost finished the guitar and one really bad cut or mistake will have you take the whole neck off again. Attaching metal to the instrument I just don't like.

What are your thoughts on SA guitars in general?

Positive. I can only speak of what I've seen and who I know. Garth Pickard is a hell of a dedicated guy. He makes the smaller guitars. Very beautifull! Hans van den Berg to me is coming on in leaps and bounds. Guys like Rodney make a range of different guitars, whereas I can only comment on the classicals. I'm very focused in that sense. I think because I only make classical guitars I have to judge my guitars by what is made internationally. I think the fact that Abri Jordaan owns two of my guitars and that Uliano plays on my guitar. Uliano sold his Bernabe and has got two of my guitars…. You have to judge on that basis. I don't know what sort of instruments Marc Maingard is making or not making, because I don't have contact with him.

What do you think of Mervyn's latest guitars?

I saw Mervyn for the first time in a long time and he was busy with this design and I thought 'My goodness!' Charl said I must come up and see this, so I went up and said to Merv; 'Can I copy you?' I wanted to see what it does. The one I made in that design I still have here. I thought THIS is going in the right direction, where you pull the top up and with this sharp angle. For me, though, from a pure classical guitar sound, it lacks. It has a lot of other things, though. I have learned a hell of a lot from how it produces that kick. That instantaneous kick you can get. That has a lot to do with how you brace the under side of the top. Mervyn should be wrapped in cotton wool and supplied so that he can lie comfortably, so that he can just let his incredible brain go. I don't think Mervyn is a 'classical guitar' maker. He is an across the board luthier. Like I said, in that regard I'm limited, because I have never made steel-string guitars or anything other than classical guitars.

Do you think that the SA guitar makers have anything to offer the overseas guitar community?

Again, I can only comment from my limited knowledge in that regard. I would say no, but from what I've heard from guys who play steel-string and acoustic guitar, the SA guys are on a par. That obviously includes Mervyn. From a classical guitar point of view I think we are there as well. I don't think we have to….I mean Garth will do what Garth is doing forever. Occasionally he makes a bigger guitar like a flamenco guitar or something. But what he is making is a superb article. They're great. In fact I e-mailed him and asked him whether like I suspected he basis his design on the Martines size, because I wanted to make my youngest daughter one so her kids can play on it. He sent me all the details. So I don't think we are inferior to any overseas luthiers. Our methods are the same. Actually, I think we are a lot more adventurous than the European guys and I think Mervyn has pushed the use of local woods or African woods, which work very well.

We don't really have a SA tradition of guitar building or a SA sound?

No, I don't think there ever will be. There's no Australian sound, for example. There is a Spanish sound, but that is where it all started. A Brazilian guitar is a hell of a deep instrument. It is quite small, but that developed from their folk music. Same with the Mexican guitar. The SA guitars could develop to an

African sound purely because of African music. There are a lot of African musicians who are internationally just unbelievable. Steel-string instruments made from African woods could produce a unique quality, so it could well develop, but not in the fashion where a European based guy as a musician and a guitar player composing music that has an African beat or something. It's like the young black opera stars we see popping up everywhere with voices like you can't believe. Opera has a bright future in Africa.

Your ambitions and goals as a luthier for the future?

Who the hell knows☺?

Any achievements or qualities of your guitars you are especially proud of?

No, not really. As Garth said to me the other day….Making guitars is an obsession. To me, if I don't make guitars it feels like a part of me is missing. I haven't found anything to fill that gap. I almost did music instead of architecture, because of my qualifications. I think I did Grade eight or something and I did music in matric. I played bassoon, 'cello and piano, but there is nothing that has ever excited me as much as the classical guitar. That sound. I think that is what drives you. To hear somebody who is a really good player play one of my instruments and the instrument is sounding like you hoped it would sound, is enough. What more do you need? We have a very good player that moved to Cape Town, called James Grace. I hope he runs that department well, because it has been through a lot of strife.

I hope he plays on a SA guitar.

That doesn't really matter to me, though.

If you look at what Segovia did for Ramirez and what Williams did for Smallman, I think the top SA players should play on SA guitars.

I don't agree. They should play on something they are comfortable with. The classical guitar production in SA is not big enough to have a choice. Someone would buy my instruments because they like the sound, but the comparison is not with another SA guitar, it is with what is available internationally. Of course, what I sell for here is a hell of a lot cheaper than what you would pay if you were to buy a guitar overseas and bring it back here. If I don't like a person, I won't make him a guitar, because it is not a business to me and the guitar won't like him either ☺.

What do you charge for your guitars?

About R40 000. It's not a question of what the market can stand. If people can pay that, it's fine, if they can't pay that, they don't have to pay it. If you came to me or someone I really like and says he's got R25 000, I'll make him a guitar. It's not a question of that, but you can't price yourself down. It does nobody any good. You've got to make a statement.

Being an architect, I suppose you lean quite heavily on planning, drawing and scetches of the guitars?

You mean drawings of what I want to do to make a guitar?

Yes.

Yes, if I want to work out things like making a jig, I'll draw that out and see how I can put it together. Most of the jigs I've had I chucked away anyway. I don't, for example, make 20 bridges in one go. I make one guitar at a time. I don't use plans for the general designs of the guitar.

Do you finish one guitar before you start with the next?

I would put the strings on before I polish it to try it out, but I'll start another one at that stage because polishing…. Actually THAT is the worst thing. It's terrible.

What sort of finish do you use?

I've used French polish, but I don't anymore. I've tried everything. Poly-acuthane - that polishes up very well, but you have to be very careful. Nitrocellulose is the best compromise, I think, because it doesn't harm the guitar. I've got one guitar that I sprayed with poly-acuthane that I diluted a lot. 80% thinners and 20% poly-acuthane……
The French polish is traditional. That's all they had when they used it, but it wears off in two seconds. That's why I don't use it anymore.

What tuning pegs and machine heads do you use?

I order them from overseas. I use Schaller. I have also got Spanish and English made ones that I use. Various ones that I use.

What are your thoughts on the future of guitar building in SA?

I think the future is good. It links in with the future of African music or Africans taking music further, because if you just count the 'white' population we are too small. If African people take music further, then the future of all music in SA is good. I think musically speaking, Africans are streets ahead of a lot of the European coutries.

What strings do you use on your guitars?

I don't think it matters as much. I have actually gone back to using medium tension strings after using high tension strings, because I find that high tension strings, although they have certain things that are exciting, don't really work for me. To buy student model strings is fine, but if you have a seriously good instrument, the thing won't voice properly. If, however, you put on really good strings it makes all the difference. I used to use a lot of Savarese and I still have a lot of them, but I don't use them anymore. I use strings that Uliano introduced me to. I can give you the name later. Can't remember now. Abri also suggested Italian strings that I have bought, but I haven't tried them yet. They look very nice.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH GARTH PICKARD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2004 AND 26 JUNE 2005 AT 149 RABIE STREET, MEYERS PARK, PRETORIA

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 6 NOVEMBER 2004

Brief biography:

Pretoria-boy all my life; I like the place; born there, originally did all types of things that you normally do until you get wise at 40!☺ Went to Hendrik Verwoerd School (don't want to say too loudly, because of the name) didn't like going there, had Pretoria schooling for high and primary school, went to University of Pretoria where I studie B.Sc building science, so I'm a draughtsman/architect, but I think the guitar-part of my life is more important.

Its funny how many luthiers studied something along the line of architecture

Yes, Colin Cleveland (architect), Mervyn Davis (architect), Hans van den Berg (draughtsman): it helps you draw plans☺.

How did you get into the whole guitar thing? Where did it start?

My brother is a good player - originally blues, and he's now progressed to flamenco; fairly close relation between blues and flamenco. Both folk styles and more connected to society: more social. And then I tried to play, but he got all the playing talents☺. Then I started collecting them: the first collectable I could afford was a Gibson Les Paul with a broken head, and I bought it and then I had to fix it and then I met guys who were guitar builders and found it quite fascinating.

What was the first work you did on a guitar?

The Les Paul originally stood around for 3 years, and in those 3 years I built 3 guitars before I fixed it.

Who were these guitar makers that you met?

Briefly met Alistair Thompson, and briefly at a later stage (maybe 5, 6, 7 years later) I met Mervyn.

What is your yearly output?

The average is fairly low, because I work full-time (in a real job☺) and I'd rather say that this year is most probably going to be a better year, I hope to complete 5 this year.

That's not that low: full-time makers' output is around 6 a year.

Depends a lot on how many orders you get: I've also got orders/commissions. But I'd like to get ahead. So that when someone says "I hear you're a guitar builder" you can say "yes, I've got 2 or 3 to show you". I just can't get ahead at the moment. I've been a bit slack in keeping record of everything I've built. One of my jobs for next year is to collect photos to show people.

Do you work on any other instruments?

Not at this stage, but in future I definitely will.

What kind of instruments would you like to work on?

Not too much violins, more in the lute family. And even going back to vihuelas, I've got a plan for a baroque guitar: it's just so pretty to look at, so I'd love to build one even if it doesn't sound great☺.

Your experience as a luthier: are you self-taught, did you attend any courses?

Just books. Half imported, half locally available. My wife works at Unisa library, so I don't have to buy a lot of books☺. Makes it much easier, she knows all the suppliers. A fair number of them are available locally, some at Tukkies. There are books on constructing guitars: a book can tell you so much, but after that you have to do it for yourself.

So did books contribute a lot to your knowledge? There are no books written by local authors on the subject?

No. The Guild of American Luthiers has a publication that I've learned more from than anything else. In a way the Americans have a way of commercializing everything or making it accessible. They have summer camps where you can go build a guitar or get a guitar kit together.

Is there potential for something like that in SA?

Yes, we do have a little guild here that also presents workshops. Not often, because the guys are fairly widespread and then basically we all don't know anything☺. We'd love to make it bigger and on a more regular basis. If I can expand a bit on it: we've drawn up this plan for the guild and we've got 4 guys who are building their first instruments and I think that that will be quite a learning process. What we really envisage is that they will ask questions and that we will think about it and answer them, which I think will be good for us too.

Is there one person who influenced you a lot in your career as a luthier?

I think what happened is that I never understood the classical guitar. To me the way I saw classical guitar after being involved in the blues, especially the old blues, (the music made after 1950 is not real blues!) that I couldn't understand what it's all about: here's this guy trying to play Bach on the guitar and it's not exciting. Then until the day I heard the Ramirez that contained a whole lot of Spanishness in the playing and sound and suddenly it clicked. Then I went back to Torres. If I don't know what to do, then I go look at Torres' guitars and he inspired me not in the way of helping or putting ideas there. It's just a presence in the Torres guitars that you don't see in any other guitars. I haven't seen a real one, though, but I've got recordings of people playing on a Torres guitar, they are stunning, really. Even his paper-mache guitar! I if could make a real guitar like that, I could say "hey I'm here!" I would attribute a lot of my inspiration to Torres and the turn of the century luthiers. Esteso, Manuel Ramirez and Santos Hernandez. Perhaps up to Marcelo Barbero.

What do you think of current luthiers like Smallman?

I think it's an entirely new direction: going away from what the guitar really is. And it's a direction I won't follow myself, really. It doesn't appeal to me and I love tone colour. If there's no tone colour, if what you play with tends to be loud and soft and not one note that you can really work with, then I lose interest. That comes from blues. Smallman gets volume and ease of playing. That ease of playing that a lot of guitarists complain about, if I may be controversial, I think they're lazy. Or not lazy, but if you want to make paintings you need to learn the technique of the brush, before you can make a masterpiece. You don't skip the technique of learning to use the brush, in a sense, but that's just my personal opinion. I don't want to insult anybody. The luthier-world is too small☺.

The qualities of your guitars: anything specific that you're aiming for (soundwise or aesthetic)?

I'd love to make a guitar that doesn't have some kind of goof-up somewhere ☺. They all have something small that I know of that I don't like.

Don't all luthiers feel that way?

I think that they do. I've seen very expensive guitars from overseas that have small goof-ups here and there. I'd love to make an intimate guitar where the player and the guitar become friends; I think that's most important. And then, I'd like a guitar that could pull something out of the player and take him somewhere he's never been. And vice versa. And all guitars have to be played - that's the bottom line. If you hang them on the wall, it's no good to anybody. And then I'd like to make guitars like the old masters. Very much a traditionalist in that sense.

Is there anything unique to your guitars: you say you've modelled them on international models?

The thing about staying in SA is there are no good historical guitars around to intimidate you. You can really do what you want to do, so there's no benchmark. The benchmark is the sound. A lot of people would say you've got to have Brazilian Rosewood, but if you really put them to the test, they won't recognize the difference between Brazilian Rosewood and *Kiaat*. They don't see the instrument. So in that sense we can really do what we want to. I think Mervyn is a good example of using indigenous woods and you can use combinations that they don't have overseas like Cedar and *Kiaat*. I love to use Spruce and Hardepeer, and I've used Transvaal Boekenhout with Cedar.

Is there any type of wood that you prefer?

I'm busy with my first flamenco guitar, using Cyprus and it's just magic. It's unbelievable. Our indigenous woods are very nice, they are friendly woods. *Kiaat* is a very friendly wood, it makes a friendly guitar. Rosewood, I think is good: I've never worked with Brazilian Rosewood, though I would like to one day. If I can afford it. For soundboards I like Cedar. Cedar goes very well with *Kiaat*. *Kiaat* is a warm sounding wood and Cedar also. Cedar is warmer than Spruce.
Spruce and Rosewood goes together well; Spruce and Maple goes together, Cedar and Maple I've never seen a Cedar and Maple guitar or read about one. For soundboards, Spruce has got its place, Cedar I like, especially on the smaller instruments. Indigenous woods, *Kiaat* I like very much. Mervyn works exclusively with *Kiaat* and *Kiaat* would make a wonderful flamenco guitar. There's no indigenous wood that can replace Cedar for soundboards, though I've heard rumours of a possible wood that could be used as replacement, though I doubt it. The grain on our local woods is very wide because of the warm weather in SA, so it grows faster, which results in the grain being wider and makes the wood unsuitable and unstable to use as guitar tops. I don't believe that the indigenous woods would work. I'd like to experiment, but I'd rather build a guitar that I know is going to work. *Kiaat* works for a smaller soundboard. If you build a full size *Kiaat* and Cedar guitar, it sounds muddy. When you scale down the size of the guitar, this combination works. I've found a photo of a Martinez from the turn of the previous century, 1815, the guys were building replicas and I loved it. So I built one myself. My quest is to build a small guitar that you can't discern from a bigger guitar in sound. Because I think you get more quality in a smaller instrument. More qualities: playability is a lot easier, strings are closer together, and you've got more control over the different parts because they're smaller. All the pitches of the guitar are higher, so you can get the higher frequencies nicely.

Is there a special process selection/test that you do when it comes to choosing woods?
What makes a special piece of a wood?

Not really. If I can be silly: the wood speaks to me. It's nothing you can put your finger on.

Is this an attribute that all good luthiers should have, this ability to "listen" to wood?

You're supposed to have this instinct/sensitivity. Instinct is a strange thing: Mervyn works a lot on instinct too; Smallman is a more calculated luthier: he measures things and if a piece of wood doesn't do something by the third frequency cycle, for eg. Kasha is another one where they work entirely on calculations. But that takes the fun out of it. There's something that you lose along the way if you calculate too much.

Is there a specific method you use for treatment of the woods?

For finishing? Yes. I don't use nitrocellulose that often. Over time it crystallizes and all your thinners evaporate. So you're left with a cellulose which is really a plant material as a finish when it crystallizes. A good example to use is the Martin guitars that were built just before the Second World War. In the steel-string world, if someone says they have a pre-war Martin, then people start taking money out, and its not just small money, its big money and I think it's a combination of crystallized finish and crystallized wood sap in the wood. And it definitely makes an improvement in the sound. Actually cellulose is a funny…
It's got a life of its own: today it will do this, tomorrow it's 2 degrees hotter and it will be different. I hate synthetic polyester and polyurethane acrylics. I've got a flamenco guitar and without knowing it I put an acrylic on and it's a rubbish finish. It was for my brother and he said "this week it sounds fantastic, and next week its dead", eventually it's the weather. The wood swells inside the finish and it can't go anywhere. The finish forms a shell that won't give. The strength of the guitar should be that the wood moves inside the finish, but this wood was just solid. It's a write-off guitar and I paid R1000 to have it sprayed. So synthetic finishes are out.

Are there ornamental materials that you use, eg inlays?

I do inlays using natural woods, local woods. Haven't worked with mother-of-pearl, its coming, it's something I have to do.

Is there anything specific that you use in the rosette, like a hallmark?

The shading is natural wood colours, no dyeing of the wood. I've made enough for 20 rosettes, so it hasn't changed a lot; the patterns haven't changed a lot.

What construction method do you use, do you use fan-bracing?

Fan-bracing, yes, combined with what we call a treble bar. It's more like a Ramirez bracing and I think all my bracings at this point in time are variations of the original plan: some are more closed or parallel. Flamenco's bracing are very thick. I think it takes away a lot of sustain, because they want that punch. It must be short. Treble bar is basically one big fan. Haven't experimented with lattice-bracing yet. I wouldn't really like to get into it, but I need to, 'cause one day someone might ask for a guitar like John Williams' and then I can't say no I don't build those kind of guitars. Getting back to the whole Smallman-thing: I always wondered what would have happened to Smallman if John Williams didn't play on a Smallman. I don't mean that in an ugly way. It's in the way that John Williams and Smallman are running together. And whether that's good or bad, I don't know: in a 100 years' time people will say John Williams' career went like this and the decision will be made then. In an odd way, the modern world fits the Smallman better. Nobody wants an ox wagon to go down to Cape Town, which is really what the Torres is. You don't sit down and take your time to go to Cape Town: like in an ox wagon you would see everything along the road. There's a difference beyond our control.

The general idea is that lattice-bracing is more difficult to control.

I can't speak from experience, but I've heard that Smallman builds a guitar and if the soundboard doesn't work, he takes it off and throws it away. So, to me, listening to a Torres made in 1860 and what it sounds like now, that's the wonder of guitar building; and I don't know if a Smallman can get that old. A modern instrument is made in a throw-away society. Nobody fixes a hi-fi or computer anymore. You buy a new one. I wrestle with the idea sometimes, but in that way a Smallman doesn't attract me. I'd hate to pick up a guitar in 5 years' time and find that the sound is dead. Torres made wonderful instruments - the Segovia guitar and Tarrega guitar were special and the Sagovia guitar was a recycled reject.

The specifications and dimensions of your guitars - does it vary or do you use a standard?

I've done quite a few models in Martinez, which is really a parlour instrument of the 1800's and then the bigger shapes I use are all based on the Torres. There's the small Torres and then the Tarrega Torres was slightly bigger and then the plans they drew now for the guild is to build a Torres guitar that's just smaller than the standard shape. Torres was a pioneer of the big instruments, because they didn't have bigger

strings and scales during his time; I prefer an instrument that's smaller than what I call a full-size. Flamencos are full-sized: you need that body size. My project for "one day" is to make a small flamenco.

Would you say that the biggest difference between Torres and your instruments is just the wood that you use?

No, Torres was a lot better☺. I use his outline or *plantilla*. So I'm working with a very old outline and as to the fact that I use modern glues and hopefully a real master like Torres will forgive me, 'cause he didn't have that kind of glue in his day. I use mainly his outline.

Do you think that SA woods have a contribution to make to international guitar-building?

No, because they'll be coming here and taking our wood away☺.

Hypothetically, a wood like Kiaat, do you think that overseas guitar makers would be interested in a wood like that?

Yes, definitely. It's a high quality wood with a slight…. you have to see it differently than Indian or Brazilian Rosewood. It's a different wood, not closely related. Not the same species. *Kiaat* and *Padauk* are the same species. And that is used a lot for steel-strings.

Where does one find Kiaat? Where does it naturally occur?

The old Transvaal. It's called Transvaal Teak, and then higher up: Zambia, Mozambique, Rhodesia.

Is Rhodesian Teak the same kind of wood?

No, it's a different type of wood.

Can you use it?

Yes, I'm sure you can - it would work well for a fingerboard. It's a lot harder; I think it will be a more reflective than vibrational wood.

What qualities would you look for in woods for fingerboards?

Hardness helps, because I've seen they actually use Indian Rosewood for fingerboards and after 5 years of hard playing, dents start to appear. So I've used *Hardekool* for fingerboards and *Tamboti*, which makes a very nice fingerboard, because it's got a natural oil in it. So its keeps on oiling itself. And *Hardekool* you need to oil a bit. It's hard, though, and takes a long time to get through.

You don't want to use a wood that's influenced by climate.

All woods are influenced by climate. You want a wood that if it's sawn right, you'll minimize too much movement, if it's flat sawn it won't work well, because the grain forces it to bend. If the wood is sawn correctly it looses its funniness.

The tools that you use? Do you use power or electronic tools, being such a traditional romantic?

I use a band saw and a jointer. And sometimes an electric drill, but I enjoy working with my hands. You learn from wood if you work by hand. There's a process where the wood tells you something and you have to adapt and work in a specific way. It's a funny way of looking at it, but Yamaha don't model their instruments on top quality instruments that they've seen, they put them through machines.

My experience is that Yamaha is good value for money, 'cause you won't find a really bad one...

Yes, but you'll never find a Yamaha that stands up and says "try and play me" or "come and play me". On the one hand it's good, 'cause they've achieved a consistency, which a guy like me will never be able to do - everything is controlled, but then I would make a guitar that nobody wants to play, also. There are ones that have got something seriously wrong with it. In the steel-string world, you look at Martins, people don't want to play them anymore, out of 100 only 5 will stand out, and those are the 5 to get.

Does the SA climate play a big role in your guitar building?

Yes, you've always got to keep it in mind. A while ago there was 18% humidity here, which means that anything that could shrink has shrunk to its minimum size. I had soundboards braced, but free, that looked like potato chips, they were bent. Around the rosette, the wood was doing one thing, but the rosette wasn't. I tend to do my bracing at a lower humidity than the factories, I think they work on between 45 and 50% relative humidity, where I work between 35 – 40% relative humidity. You can control it in a sense, if you've got a spare bathroom where you can fill the bath with hot water or boil a kettle in there. Within half an hour everything that's bent is back to normal again. I've got a humidifier in the cupboard. It's easier to bring a higher humidity down than bring the humidity up.

Is Pretoria more conducive to guitar building as opposed to Cape Town? I've heard that instruments built in Cape Town tend to crack in Pretoria.

I think it's a bit of both. If you take a Durban guitar to Europe, it most probably would be okay, if you take it to Namibia, it's definitely going to crack. You are more influenced in Pretoria in building for specific people, so if the humidity goes down in winter……..

Are there guitar builders in Durban?

No.

In conclusion, the climate does play a role but it's not problematical.

I think that the climate here is a lot closer to Spain than Durban.

Your thoughts on SA luthiers: are their standards high?

In the last 5 years it's shot up, due to interaction between the guys. Before that, each guy was just on his own, but with the guild we're trying to get the guys together. I think the quality has definitely gone up.

International quality?

That's an interesting question. I would like to know what the international quality is. I had a look at Miguel Rivera's guitar, it's made of Brazilian Rosewood, but if I had a guitar that looked like that I would be ashamed to say that. The geometry and appearance: the fingerboard is 3 mm high and there's hardly any bridge and the saddle has disappeared into a little thin bridge. The strings are right; they are 6 mm from the soundboard, which is good for flamenco, but it looks wrong. It doesn't look 100 %. I'd like to see what the international standard is. If you take steel-strings, if you want to compete with the type of the range Martins, we'd have to jack up our act. If we want to compete with the lower semi-factory produced classics, we are there, I would say. It's not being big-headed: I think one is on that level now.

You're optimistic about the future of this SA luthier industry?

Yes, we must just get more people to buy our guitars ☺.

That's a problem. The market is small. And so difficult to compete with mass-produced, imported guitars, price wise.
Do you think that SA luthiers have anything to offer to overseas markets?

I think we have something that's unique to us; we have the freedom that the guys overseas haven't got. Overseas, if you build flamencos or classical guitars, it has to be Rosewood, has to be top of the range Spruce, it has to look a certain way depending on where you're from, and here we can do anything and there are people that look at you and say "let's see what you're doing". In SA we have a better way now of seeing everything, we are not bound by tradition, society has changed our instruments. If we don't change with it, we're going to get so far behind.

This is contradictory to what you said earlier about building traditional guitars.

Yes, though I think it can go both ways. Overseas they build different models, the modern European builders anything north of Spain, builders like Humphries and these guys, build guitars that are not in the old tradition either. They've skipped to something else again and the only way that I can explain what they're trying to do or achieve is a more piano-like guitar, or the sound is piano-like in that when you pluck the string the sound is similar to a piano. So it's a guitar that suits the majority of players. There are 4 schools: you have the traditional guys who build exactly like the old builders and even the strings are authentic and they only play music from that period, everything is exact. Then you have guys who build in the school of the old builders, then you have guys that build in a new way of taking the tradition, then you have the Smallmans and the Davis': they build in a more designed way. And each area has got its own identity, so when you try to cross over it gets confusing.

Do we have a SA tradition in guitar building?

We have marvelous instruments; the guild would like to exhibit them. Andrew Tracey from Grahamstown has got an amazing collection of traditional African instruments, because the guitar came from Africa. Somewhere there is a tradition, but it's difficult for a middle-class white boy to get there. I like my blues, 'cause of the polyrhythms and slightly out of tune playing, but I can't identify with African music yet.

Do you think we'll reach a stage where overseas people will listen to a guitar and recognize it as SA? Or are we too varied, that there's no SA sound.

No, we are still too varied.

Do you think we'll get there?

No.

We use different woods to other countries; don't you think that we'll reach a stage where our guitars will sound different?

We might, but that's like fighting the wind. There are too many players in Europe who make it. If a European guitarist looks at our guitars and says "hey here's a guitar that I can get for much cheaper", then maybe we'll start having an input. As a whole I don't think the African guitar as an instrument will influence the world. To me, those parameters are too set. It's like the Soweto String Quartet playing kwela, that kind of thing, on a European instrument.

Ambitions and goals, is there anything you still want to accomplish?

I'd like to stay at home and do this fulltime☺. I think that I want something that you'll never accomplish and that's to understand the guitars and their construction. There's something there that a lifetime's too short to learn, the old tradition worked it out, therefore you've got standard sizes, they're all the same and that's it. My ambition is to make a guitar which in 150 years' time is still sounding nice. That would be a successful instrument.

Do you have a greatest achievement or specific guitar that you are most proud of?

To me your biggest achievement is your small-bodied guitars.

Yes, though I won't really call that an achievement. To me, the proudest moment is when I build an instrument and I play it myself, but it sounds ugly and then I take it to someone like Charl Lamprecht, who plays on it and he makes it sound beautiful. That's my proudest moment.

So there's no specific guitar that you're proud of, its more a good guitar player's touch making it sound good?

Yes, the sympathetic player in a sense that he identifies what doesn't work on the guitar and he doesn't do what doesn't work on a guitar, but plays what does work; in other words he will adapt his style to the instrument. It's hard to feel proud.

How big a role does sketches and planning play in your guitar construction?

I think that's where being a draughtsman helps. I've got outlines and once I've got a soundboard to that outline, I'll draw the layout on the soundboard. But I don't lean heavily on the drawings. The one problem with that is that once you've assembled the guitar, you haven't got record of what you've done. And there's always some situation a year later where you want to know what you did.

Are there any tests that you do to check the sound of the guitar?

I thump it. The criteria for something like that, I don't know. If it doesn't want to thump, then I know I've got to do something. And then, oddly enough, my smokers cough's frequency corresponds to the air volume inside the guitar and if it answers me back then I'm happy. It's the cough test! ☺

Are you positive about the future of the SA luthier industry?

I think our guys mustn't aim too high, because our upper bracket of players is too small and the student model, the guy that's progressing and has got to the limit of his instrument, that's the market. So you're talking R8000 –R12000, not talking R40 000. As a group, the guild, it would be very nice if we could market the guild for that market. In that sense I think it's very difficult to say……..?

It would be nice if we had a John Williams to market our guys' guitars.

Yes. By the way, that's your best advertising - having a player playing a concert on your guitar.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 26 JUNE 2005

In our first interview you mentioned that the first guitar makers you met were Alistair Thomson and at a later stage Mervyn Davis. Did they have any influence on you as a guitar builder?

Yes, I think not having built anything, one is influenced by anything. It takes a while for you to decide what you really want to do and where you want to go. It was meeting them that made me decide that I want to build a guitar.

Do you want to build any instruments other than guitars in future?

I would love to build a lute. The whole lute family. I don't even know them yet, but I would love to build them ☺. I do have the plans and wood and everything for a baroque guitar, but I haven't had the time to start with that yet.

You said that you got most of your information on guitar building out of books. Can you expand on these books?

I think like most of the guys I started off with Irvine Sloane and then Campiagno came along, so everybody switched to Campiagno. After that Ray Courtnall came along ('Making master guitars') and everyone followed Courtnall. The American guild of Luthiers' quarterly publication also had a big influence on me. It is called the GAL journal. I would say that it influenced me more than anything else, because you get varying opinions. They are not strict in what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. If you have an opinion, you are allowed to say it. One or two guys in there are more traditional builders, I would say. Their articles normally give you a lot of inspiration. The books are 'how to', they don't always tell you why and it not being a hands-on thing, they have got to explain it in a way that makes it easy. One of the guys featured in the GAL journal was Eugene Clarke. I am sure Rodney has spoken about him. I have always been attracted to his philosophies. He also builds in the tradition of the old Masters. He throws away a lot of the modern notions. There is not much intellect in building a guitar. By that I mean that if you build in terms of the Spanish way, that's it. You don't change it, you don't improve it. A lot of guys tend to want to reinvent the guitar, which doesn't attract me. I want that old….. I have heard recordings made on a Torres, the paper Mache guitar. I would love to build a real guitar that sounds as good as his paper Mache guitar.

If I could just play devil's advocate for a moment, don't you think that the fact that the guitar is heard in big concert halls in front of big crowds, it should follow that the guitar should also change?

No, get a microphone ☺. Look, to put a microphone in a guitar is about the same as putting a pickup in it and playing through an amplifier. The best way I like hearing and seeing a guitar is in a very small room. The guitar is really made for small venues. If you are playing with a 'cello, violin or saxophone, you have got a problem, because they are not going to hear you. I think if you want to go the modern way, design something else. I think Gibson have got a very flat, anti-feedback, nylon-string amplifier instrument. You are going away from the proper sound in any case.

I see that you have the Russell Cleveland collection book. It is amazing to think that one guy owns all those guitars!

There is another guy that owns even more! Sheldon Ulrich. He has got three Torres guitars and I think he bought another one. He also allows people to come and play them, which is very nice. Where he gets the money from, I don't know.

Can you imagine what a collection like that must be worth today? Last time you told me that the SA guild is planning to help 4 guys build their first guitars. Did it ever happen?

Yes. They are all currently busy working on their guitars. That is exciting! What we did is we drew a plan for them. We have got our third guild plan. Four of the first time builders have taken the plans now. Some of them have bought wood, others have bought clamps. The forum will be open, so any question that may arise, we deal with via the guild for various pieces of information and everybody ads to it. What we have found is that even processes that we know, we do differently from one another. I might battle with my process and Rodney might with his process, but if we don't talk about if we think it is a normal process. That is going to happen still.

It is a big advantage having more experienced guys to help you. It would have been nice, I'm sure, for someone like you to have had the help of the guild when you started off.

I think so and it is actually very nice to share. Rodney, of course, just shares everything ☺. He is quite remarkable in that he shares so much. Anyway, the four new guys are all on their way. There is one in Cape Town, one in Jo'burg and two in Pretoria.

It is exciting to hear that things are happening. Twenty years ago there were only a few guys working in isolation. Now there is some structure.

Yes, I think it makes it easier for a first time builder. Even then, though, they still have to decide for themselves what they want to do.

Mervyn says he is going to get much more involved with the guild now that he has bought a computer. He wants to dispel a few guitar myths like the one that a cutaway takes away of the sound of a guitar.

My first guitar that made sense, was one in which I put a cutaway. I put a cutaway in and it sounded better. Let me tell you my story. The thing is that the cutaway I put in that guitar took away from the air volume. In other words it made the air volume smaller with a higher pick. That is when I started making smaller guitars with a smaller air volume in any case. That is what drove me to the smaller guitars.

Wow! That is interesting. There is more that you like about the smaller guitars, though? Something about them appeals to you?

I love that shape. It is an old shape. A very female shape. To my ear, in a big guitar there is more that you have to control, because of the size of it, so you have really got to be a good builder and know what you are doing. A small guitar is actually easier, because you can get away with…..your soundboard is stiff in any case, because it is small. The back is stiff in any case, because it is also small. The problem with that is to give it more sound.

That you have managed to do very well, though.

☺ Well, I don't know. It lies in the old principles, but don't ask me to list them, because I don't know. It's all in the pitch and the air volume and there is something going on there that I don't know what it is ☺.

Last time you told me that you would love to make guitars like the old masters. Are there, in your view, any 'young masters'? Any current luthiers in the world that are real masters of their craft?

Mmm…I saw an Estesa the other day and I was very disappointed. It was funny. There was something wrong with it. It was a flamenco, and had a VERY low action. It had no string angle over the saddle, was very soft. The guy actually had a little thing I didn't know what it was, because I have never seen it. It was like a little treble box that he ties to the bridge just to get this guitar to work. He then played over a microphone and it sounded very nice, but acoustically it sounds like an electric guitar, it is so soft. It is hard to answer your question, because one doesn't see the guitars. You don't see instruments that really say: 'Here I am'. You have to go on recordings, you have to go on pictures, you have to go on sound descriptions. New builders, I would say, are all moving in new directions. I think Smallman has taken the classical guitar quite a way. He had a lot of help from John Williams. There is a whole school of guys building those kinds of guitars in Australia. We were fortunate to hear a John Gilbert guitar played by Han Jonkers. He is an American luthier. That follows a modern principle again. A very stiff top and lots of braces. I think Robert Rake also builds like that as does Humphries. That seems to be an American way also going into a certain direction.

Han Jonker's guitar had a nice sound, though.

When Han Jonkers plays it, it sound like there is still 30% he can use that he is not using. The separation is beautiful. It projects well. All that lacks, I think, is a bit of Spanishness. That is subjective, though. Otherwise I can't fault the guitar. I think it is a superb concert instrument. That is a concert guitar.

Who are the commercial successful luthiers today that build in the traditional Spanish school?

I don't really know of any.

I think more performers today tend to go for the 'more volume' approach.

I know Charl's Ramirez and I know the 'Davis' project instrument. The Davis guitar you can play all day and you will still have nails left. If you play the Ramirez all day, you are not going to have nails left and

you are going to be tired. You have got to work at it. My way of thinking is the following: if you take Michael Schumacher's car, everything in that car is there to make it easy for him to drive it. He has got traction control and you name it, he's got it. There are little buttons that do everything. In the end, is that really what you want? As a professional, the best in the world, yes, you want that. Older guys, I think, are being left behind. It is like somebody said, why use an ox wagon to go to Cape Town. Nobody lives like that any more, so I think that the trend is to go with the modern thing. If you can say this is new, modern and an advancement…..you get it in computers too. Every month somebody comes into the office and tells us they have got something that we can add to our computers to make them better, but my computer still doesn't work faster than what I can think ☺. Eugene Clarke said a wonderful thing - he said that you must make a guitar breath. It must have a voice. He says that you can goof up on that and the classical guys won't know, but the flamenco guys are going to tell you that there is something wrong. The instinctive players are perhaps the ones that will continue to use old technology, but the ones that are more intellectually orientated, a new trend. An interesting fact about Eugene Clarke is that one of the guitar builders in America asked him to make him a guitar.

Why do you think he would do that? Does he want to see how someone builds in the strict traditional methods?

I think that he gets what the Spanish call 'duende'. I think his guitars have got 'duende'. He also doesn't use master grade or first grade wood. He uses second to third grade wood. He says that it is not necessary. If you build in the old way it is not necessary to have this fabulous everything else. He is an unbelievable luthier. I read an interview they conducted with him. He had a very bad accident and lost his memory and went back to school and he is just such an interesting guy.

You mentioned last time that you were busy with your first flamenco guitar, using Cypress. How did it come out?

Very nicely. I am still polishing it. It is a whole process. It has got a nice sound. I'll show you the instrument. I like the sound. It is a bit trashy. It takes my brother, who plays it, places he hasn't been yet, which is nice.

What are the big differences in terms of construction between a classical and a flamenco guitar?

In theory, not much. I use a different bracing pattern for the flamencos, but I don't know if it is entirely necessary. With the old instruments there were no differences in construction. It was just the action that was different. It is quite interesting to put a high saddle on the guitar and then a low saddle to hear the difference. The quality of the sound changes. With a high saddle you get an enormous separation of notes. If you lower it, it goes more towards a strumming sound and the individual notes get weaker.

What is that beautiful wood you use on the neck of your smaller guitars?

It is *Tambotie*. It loves French polish. It just starts glowing.

What do the players here generally think of your smaller guitars? What feedback do they give you?

One thing I can say is that people always want to touch it and pick it up. I think it is because of the size. It is like a baby or a small dog or something. I think your senses go in this order. You see it, then you touch it and then you hear it. That is the right sequence. I think a big guitar perhaps doesn't follow that sequence. Charl Lamprecht owns one and performs on it from time to time. I think he enjoys it, I hope he does ☺. His guitar is perhaps not as good on single notes as Kobus' guitar that I made. The one I am busy with now is closer to Kobus' with a slightly softer touch to it.

Tell me a bit more on Dr. Kasha and his more scientific building techniques.

There are a couple of guys that build with his philosophies on sound. I will show you some pictures of his bracings. He is a sound physicist or something like that, so he does all kinds of sound calculations and then gives feedback to a group of luthiers in America.

Can you expand a bit on your and Rodney's whole French polish craze and where it started. What are the advantages?

Well, the advantages are that is the best finish for the sound. The guys here really like using these two pack finishes and I tell you, they kill a guitar. Nitrocellulose is still ok, I think, but it is poisonous. This stuff is lovely to work with. It has got a lovely smell. It becomes in a sense a way of life. Eugene Clarke said that. Your little rag makes a soothing rubbing noise as you work.

Is it hard work?

It is, yes. Especially if you don't know what you are doing ☺. If I could choose, though, I would French polish.

Soundwise it is better, but easthetically?

I think I like the look of it as well. You can make it look like a scraped finish if you are really good.

What are the basic steps that you follow?

Your preparation is more important in French polish, because you can't cover up any flaws in the wood or flaws in your workmanship ☺. It just magnifies it afterwards, where as if you spray finish it, you can always hide it. You seal the guitar with shellac and then you start polishing and you build up these tiny layers of polish. Then every now and then, every third or fourth time you spirit the whole thing and flatten it out and start again. It is quite a process, but I have a suspicion that it is going to be quicker than spraying. Once you get better, I think it is going to go very quickly. That is definitely the route I am going to take from now on. The only problem is that alcohol dissolves the finish. Touch up is also a lot easier. You just blend it in again. Also, some people apparently have perspiration that reacts roughly with French polish, but I think you can take precautions.

What finish do you use on the neck?

This one is sprayed with nitrocellulose and that one I am busy polishing.

What influenced your rosette designs?

I went for this design, because it is not so critical to get your pattern right ☺. It is a semi easy and quick rosette. I am still going to make a magnum rosette one day. In one shot I made enough for quite a few guitars, so at the moment I use that same design on all my guitars. I am finished now, so I will have to make again for the next batch.

Is it based on anything specific?

No. It is just a shading.

Do you think that Smallman is going to continue to lead the way of in international luthiery?

Look, I think everybody wants one most probably. They just can't always get them. I think with the classical guitar it is the same with music. Very few people are interested in Tarrega. I am making a general statement, but I don't think there are a lot of people generally interested in Tarrega, which is guitar music to my ears. They want new music to go with new instruments and I think that is the direction that it is going. Hopefully there will always still be that part that plays the old stuff. It seems that there is quite a strong

flamenco movement in Cape Town. Building and playing. My brother is from Cape Town and is a flamenco guitarist.

The Torres outline you said you use, is that for the bigger guitars?

The small one is not really Torres. For the classics I mainly use the Torres outline, yes. I speak under correction, but I will find out for you in saying that the small guitar is based on an 1815 Martinez design. One has had to adapt it a bit, because it is not strung with gut strings and things and I think that as someone once said after playing on the smaller guitar that 'suddenly Sor made sense'. That is, of course, where it came from. That is what Guiliani also played. It has been adapted mainly in the soundboard for strength.

What makes a guitar stand out for you?

With a steel-string it is the loudness, good separation of notes and a presence. You can't put your finger on it. It just stands out and there is something about it that says 'here I am'. The same applies for classics, but even more so.

Is that by listening to it, or can a guitar stand out by just looking at it?

It can. You can sense it looking at you. You get guitars like that.

Have you built guitars like that.

Not really. This one is a bit like that in the sense that it is one of the first guitars that I have built that people don't like playing it. Classical players who don't play appoyando and can't rasguado struggle to get a sound out of it, but if you put it in the hands of a flamenco guitarist who has the technique, it opens out. So the guitar, in a sense, has something that says 'if you don't want to play me properly, forget it. I am not going to react'. If you play it correctly or with respect, it opens up. It is a playing thing.

So the guitarist plays as an important role as the guitar?

I think so, yes.

It almost sounds like you are contradicting yourself when you say like you did last time that in SA we have a freedom, because we are not bound by tradition, but yet you seem to want to cling to that tradition?

Well, one is looking for the old tradition, but there aren't a hundred guitar builders like, say, in Spain that you have got to compete with. So in a sense you are free. You can really build whatever you want and there is no one that looks over your shoulder and says that it is not as good as the tradition. That is more a guitar building tradition than THE tradition of guitar building.

You mentioned 4 categories of guitar builders. 1) The guys that build exactly like the old builders of past eras, 2) people who build in the school of these old guys, 3) guys who build in a new way of thinking like Smallman and Davis and I can't remember the 4th one you named. Would you say that most SA builders fall into the second category?

Yes. I think 'in the school of' implies that you use the construction methods of the old traditional Spanish builders. Another category could also be the modern builders like Gilbert and I would say Rodriguez and even Ramirez, who build differently to the old Spanish school. It is a powerful instrument, a good instrument and there is nothing wrong with it and perhaps if one has done the whole Spanish thing you would go somewhere else.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH HANS VAN DEN BERG ON 7 NOVEMBER 2004 AND 27 JUNE 2005 AT 3 HOOGENHOUTSTRAAT, KOKERUS, MEYERTON

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 7 NOVEMBER 2004

Biografiese agtergrond:

Ek is gebore in 1960 in Orkney. Daar opgegroei tot 12 jaar en laerskool daar voltooi. Toe moes ek Kroonstad toe en my hoërskool loopbaan op Kroonstad voltooi. 1977 Matriek geskryf en toe is ek van daar af Kempton Park toe en in die vliegtuigbedryf betrokke geraak. Was 'n vakleerling in vliegtuig plaatmetaalwerk. Ek moet sê…..om die ghitaar nou hier in te bring - dat ek in standerd 6 alreeds 'n ghitaar wou bou, maar daar was net nie inligting gewees nie. Toe het een matriek ou by die skool eendag probeer een bou, maar dit het geflop. Ek dink as hy geslaag het daai dag, sou ek al baie vroeër begin het. Dit was altyd in my agterkop gewees, omdat ek self so bietjie gespeel het. Die jare het maar aangestap tot einde '95, toe stuur my suster (klassieke ghitaar onderwyser) van Worcester in die Kaap vir my 'n tydskrif ("classical guitar") uit 'n boek oor ghitaarbou. Daai boek is waar ghitaarmaak vir my begin het. "Guitar making: tradition and technology." Dit gaan basies oor die bou van die klassieke ghitaar en dan hand aan hand met die bou van staalsnaarghitare wat ek nou nog nie gebou het nie.

So jy bou net klassieke ghitare?

Ja, op die oomblik. Ek is meer geïnteresseerd in die klassieke ghitaar, omdat ek meer van sy klank hou. Ek vind dit meer fassinerend en hy het ook 'n baie interessante geskiedenis. In elk geval, dis waar als begin het vir my. Ek het nie regtig gereedskap gehad nie. Ek het sommer by "merchants" ingegaan en gekyk watse hout ek kon kry. Ek het toe basies uit 'scrap' my eerste ghitaar gebou. Ek het Beachwood vir die klankbord gekry en Honduras Mahogany vir die sye. Op die oomblik leen ek daai eerste ghitaar van my vir my suster se kind, wat intussen ernstig begin het met musiek. Hy het nie 'n ghitaar nie, maar intussen, tot hy een kry speel hy maar met hierdie een.

Wanneer het jy hom voltooi?

1996.

So jy speel self van jongs af ghitaar?

Ja. My pa is eintlik die een wat ghitaar gespeel het. Hy't maar die ghitaarliefde by my en my suster gekweek. Ek het my tweede ghitaar vir haar gebou. Een van haar leerlinge het daarna 'n ghitaar by my bestel en dit was my eerste bestelling gewees.

Jy is nogal uniek in die opsig dat jy net klassieke ghitare bou. Al SA se ander bouers bou staalsnaarghitare ook.

Ek dink dis maar hoe die mense hulle ganader het. Stefan Joubert het my al genader vir wat hulle noem 'n 'tapping' ghitaar of 'touch guitar' waar mens met die 'finger tapping' tegniek speel en wat bestaan uit 13 snare en 'n dubbel nek. My belangstelling lê egter nie daar nie. Dit is alhoewel in die pyplyn, want dit sal 'n voorreg wees om vir so 'n 'performer' 'n instrument te maak waarop hy konserte kan speel. Soos Smallman met Williams en Ramirez met Segovia, het ons SA-bouers ook maar blootstelling van top voordraers nodig. Uit 'n ghitaarbouer se oogpunt kan ek vir jou sê dit is fantasties om wanneer die ghitaar klaar is, dit te hoor in iemand se hande wat kan speel. Dis die ou wat speel wat die klank maak aan die einde van die dag. As jy die snare opsit en daai 'meubelstuk' kry lewe en word gebore as instrument en hy kom in iemand se hande wat kan speel is dit absoluut die hoogtepunt vir my as ghitaarbouer.

Enige ander instrumente wat jy bou of aan werk?

Nee. Net ghitare

Jy het nie begin deur ghitare reg te maak nie?

Nee, ek het direk begin bou. In my lewe het ek maar weinig herstelwerk gedoen. Die bietjie wat ek wel gedoen het, is meer om klein krakies hier en daar reg maak, ens.

Dis nog iets waar jy uniek is. Meeste bouers het eers begin deur ghitare reg te maak. Waar jy egter nie uniek is nie, is die werk wat jy doen. So baie ghitaarbouers is argitekte of tekenaars, ens.

Ja. Dis ek, Garth Pickard, Colin Cleveland, Mervyn Davis. Ek dink teken is ‘n baie belangrike deel van die hele proses van enige vervaardiging. Enigiets wat gemaak moet word moet eers geteken word en deeglik beplan word. Ek teken al my instrumente voor ek dit bou.

Jy het geen fomele kurses of vakleerlingskap, ens. ontvang nie, neem ek aan, omdat daar nie regtig so iets in SA is nie?

Die boek wat ek vroeër genoem het, was my enigste handleiding gewees. Op ‘n stadium moes ek verbeter op daai boek, want dit was ‘n baie basiese ontwerp, gebaseer op Torres se uitleg. Ek het toe later ‘n ander boek bekom wat dieper ingaan in professionele ghitaarbouers en hulle werke soos….
Ek het lank ‘n studie gedoen oor Romanillos en Friedrich en ek dink ek sal lank bly op die Romanillos ontwerp met betrekking tot die ‘Spruce’ ghitare. Dit werk nie so lekker met ‘Cedar’ nie.

So boeke het die grootste invloed gehad op jou ghitaarbou?

Ja. Boeke en die feit dat ek die eindproduk vat na mense soos Charl Lamprecht en Abri Jordaan, wat groot kennis van ghitare het. Hulle sal vir my uitwys waar ek kan verbeter en dan gaan ek weer terug en doen my huiswerk en kyk of ek in daardie opsigte kan verbeter. Ek het baie aan hulle te danke vir hulle bydrae.

Is daar een persoon wat ‘n groot rol in jou ghitaarbou gespeel het?

Romanillos sal ek heel bo-aan die lys plaas. Sy roset ontwerpe het my baie beïndruk. In plaas van daai klein mosaïekblokkies, gebruik hy groter patrone wat my redelik beïnvloed het. My rosette verskil heelwat van die ander SA-ghitaarbouers s’n, wat meer die klein blokkies konsep gebruik. Dit vat redelik lank om te maak, maar dit maak dit spesiaal.

Is dit die patroon wat jy meestal gebruik om basies jou kenmerk te word?

Ja, alhoewel ek nou ‘n nuwe patroon ontwerp het op die rekenaar en besig is om te besluit watter houtsoorte ek waar gaan gebruik vir kontras.

Is daar ‘n SA-bouer wat ‘n groot invloed op jou gehad het?

Beslis, ja. Eintlik meer as een. Dis moeilik vir my om iemand uit te sonder. Ons is almal sulke goeie vriende. Mervyn is vir my wat kreatiwiteit aanbetref eenvoudig ongelooflik. Hy kom met absoluut unieke onwerpe vorendag. Die res van ons bou ghitare op die tradisionele metodes. Mervyn het dit ook gedoen, maar dit verveel hom amper, kan ek sê. Sy kreatiwiteit word aangespoor deur nuwe ontwerpe, soos byvoorbeeld die ghitaar wat jy op speel. Colin Cleveland in die Kaap is ook vir my ‘n aansporing. Sy klank van sy ghitare is baie sterk en kenmerkend. Hy bou al langer as enigiemand in SA ghitare. Het al ver oor die 200 gebou. Pragtige instrumente met goed gebalanseerde klank deur die hele spektrum. Garth moet ek ook uitsonder met sy klein ghitaartjies. Wat hy daarmee bereik het is fantasties.

As jy al die SA ghitaarbouers klassifiseer sal Mervyn definitief aan die een uiterste wees met sy radikale, ontradisionele benadering. Garth sal weer die ander uiterste verteenwoordig met sy hoogs tradisionele benadering. Waar sal jy jouself plaas? Nader aan Garth?

Ek is êrens in die middel, maar beslis nader aan Garth. Ek het nog te veel wat ek wil doen aan die tradisionele kant met die ‘fan bracing’ vir my om te eksperimenteer met ander metodes.

So jy gebruik 'fan bracing'?

Ja. Dit het natuurlik baie variasies. Ek het 'n boek by Garth gesien wat ek ook vir my gekoop het van Torres instrumente met 'n CD by wat elkeen se klank uitwys, wat ongelooflik is. As 'n mens na dit luister dan dink mens altyd jy's te modern en jy moet teruggaan na die ou tradisies. Ek kan in daai opsig Garth se inspirasie verstaan. Die kleiner ghitare wat hy bou is fassinerend, maar ek dink daar is te min belangstelling in dit by hedendaagse spelers. Ek bly graag op die 650 mm skaalgrote. Ek het een 640 mm ghitaar gebou. Tradisioneel Spaans bly my keuse.

Sal jy graag in die toekoms wil eksperimenteer met 'lattice bracing'?

Ja. Dit is die plan.

Is daar meer wat kan fout gaan met 'lattice bracing'?

Nee wat. Ek dink nie eintlik so nie. Ek dink net jy beweeg nader aan die 'disaster zone', want jy gaan baie dun op jou klankbord. 'n Tradisionele ghitaar se klankbord is byna dubbel die dikte van 'lattice braced' ghitare.

Het jy al Mervyn se heel nuutste modulêre ghitare gesien?

Ja. Ek weet nie hoe hy al hierdie goed uitdink nie. Weet jy hoevel sin maak daai ghitaar vir massaproduksie, omdat hy modulêr is en uitmekaar uit kan haal? As elke deel net sy eie 'jig' het waarop hy pas, kan daai ghitaar baie maklik in groot volumes gemaak word. Dit maak soveel sin. Mervyn doen dit voltyds en ek dink is baie meer gemotiveerd om kreatief te wees, want dit is sy brood en botter. Dit maak sin vir hom om geld te maak en ek hoop regtig dit werk vir hom.

Sal jy eendag voltyds wil ghitare bou?

Absoluut! Van die begin af. Ek droom al van die eerste dag daarvan. Die mark is egter klein, so dit kan moeilik wees. Daarom brei ek myself uit en begin navorsing doen oor staalsnaar instrumente. As ek dit moet bybring om my in staat te stel om voltyds ghitare te bou, dan sal ek dit doen.

Is daar spesifieke kwaliteite waarna jy streef, hetsy esteties, of in terme van klank in die bou van jou ghitare?

Ja. Die voorkoms van die ghitaar is natuurlik belangrik, maar ek dink nie dis die heel belangrikste nie. Ek dink jou 'fretwork' en daarom jou intonasie, is die belangrikste. Dinge soos balans en klank is vir my ook baie belangrik. Meer so as die voorkoms. Wat ek ook deesdae baie op konsentreer is die 'playability and comfort', wat te doen het met die aksie van die ghitaar. Jy as voordraer sal met my saamstem dat wanneer jy in 'n konsert speel jy in staat moet wees om redelik hard te speel, so jou aksie is absoluut krities wat my aanbetref. 'n 'Buzz' op 'n ghitaar wat hard gespeel word is absoluut vir my nie aanvaarbaar nie. Afhangende van hoe jy speel, gaan jy hier en daar 'n 'buzz' kry, so dit hang af van die kwaliteit van die speler om goeie projeksie EN goeie klank te kry. Ek sal graag 'n goeie balans wil kry tussen 'n goeie, gemaklike aksie en 'n mooi klank. Mervyn, dink ek, het dit goed reggekry. Hy bied die speler baie in daai opsig, selfs in terme van versterking. Sy ghitare breek in op 'n ander frekwensie, dink ek, wat dit in staat stel om saam met ander instrumente soos viole en klavier te speel sonder om verlore te raak.
Ek dink om die volume reg te kry met 'n lae aksie moet jy 'n vreeslike responsiewe klankbord hê. Dit is waar jou 'lattice bracing' voordelig is, maar ek moet sê, nadat ek na die Torres opnames geluister het, dink ek kan 'n mens selfs met 'fan bracing' baie meer responsiewe instrumente maak, so ek is baie opgewonde om nog te eksperimenteer.

Garth Pickard en Rodney Stedall is nie so positief oor die hele 'lattice bracing' konsep nie. Hulle is geneig om te dink dit is ghitare wat na 'n paar jare hul klank sal verloor.

Ja, ek het al gekyk na ‘n paar van Abri Jordaan se ghitare en ek weet ook nie hoe lank daai dun klankbord daai geweldige spanning sal kan dra nie. Ek moet ook sê dat ‘Spruce’ is ongelooflik sterk. Daar is nie ‘n ander hout wat daardie spanning vir so lank kan verwerk nie. Dit is absoluut fassinerend.

Is dit net ‘Spruce’ wat jy gebruik vir jou klankborde?

Ja. Ek het nog nie met ‘Cedar’ gewerk nie, maar ek wil baie graag in die toekoms. Ek het met ‘Sitca Spruce’ en Kaliforniese Rooihout gewerk. Die ‘Sitca Spruce’ word hoofsaaklik gebruik vir staalsnaar ghitare. Hy is bietjie swaarder as die Europese ‘Spruce’. Hy gee vir jou ‘n baie penetrerende klank. Kaliforniese Rooihout kraak maklik, wat hom moeilik maak om mee te werk. Hy is ook nie baie geskik vir klassieke ghitare nie. Hy klink mooi, maar het nie heeltemal genoeg responsiwiteit nie.

Hierdie hout is als van toepassing op die klankborde. Watse hout gebruik jy vir die res van die ghitaar?

My eerste ghitaar het ek van ‘Honduras Mahogany’ gemaak. Verder gebruik ek meestal Indiese Rooshout. Ek het Brasiliaanse Rooshout ook hier wat ek nog gaan gebruik. Verder gebruik ek ook ‘Maple’, wat ‘n baie indrukwekkende ghitaar maak soos Tarrega se Torres.

Jy gebruik glad nie inheemse houtsoorte vir jou ghitare nie?

Nee. Ek gebruik dit vir versierings. Ek gebruik byvoorbeeld Rooi Ivoor vir die patrone in my rosette.

Is daar ‘n rede waarom jy nie inheemse houtsoorte gebruik nie?

Ek is baie geïnteresseerd daarin. Wat my wel pla daarvan is die kwaliteit van die snitte is nie altyd na wense nie, tensy jy soos Mervyn ‘n klomp stompe het wat daar lê, wat al jare ge’season’ het en hy sny dit presies soos hy dit wil hê en dan het jy ‘n perfekte snit. Ek koop my planke en goed van Duitsland en jy weet jy kry ‘n goeie snit. Ek het byvoorbeeld Swart Ivoor gekoop wat ‘n vreeslike mooi hout is en dit maak pragtige vingerborde.

Mervyn is gaande oor Kiaat en kan nie ophou praat daarvan nie.

Ja, ek weet. Die ding is hy kry sulke ongelooflike resultate met dit, so ek kan dit verstaan.
Ek gebruik verder ook ‘Bird’s Eye Maple’ vir die voorkant van die kop van die ghitaar. Olienhout werk ook goed daarvoor.

So by die klankproduserende dele van die ghitaar gebruik jy tradisionele ingevoerde houtsoorte, terwyl jy inheemse houtsoorte in ‘n versierende kapasiteit gebruik?

Ja. Ek beplan om my volgende ghitaar uit Brasiliaanse Rooshout en ‘Maple’ te maak. Ná dit sal ek bly by Indiese Rooshout. Dan wil ek ook ‘n goedkoper model bekend stel waar ek ‘Honduras Mahogany’ gaan gebruik.

Ander bouers sukkel vreeslik om Brasilaanse Rooshout in die hande te kry. Hoe het jy dit reggekry en beplan jy om meer daarmee te werk in die toekoms?

Ek was gelukkig om in die Kaap by handelaars op ‘n verdwaalde stuk af te kom. Dit is altyd ‘n probleem om in die hande te kry. Die groot ding waaroor dit gaan is kwaliteit.
Ons ghitaarbouers gebruik slegs hout wat ‘quarter sawn’ is, maar as jy Brasiliaanse Rooshout in die hande kry vat jy dit, maak nie saak hoe dit gesny is nie.

Watse ‘machine heads’ en ‘tuning pegs’ gebruik jy?

Ek voer hulle in van Duitsland. Meestal ‘Schaller’s’. Ek hou veral van die ‘Ebony’ knoppe. Ek gebruik ook partykeer ‘Sloane’. Ek is baie beïndruk met die kwaliteit en die speling van die ‘Sloane’ a.g.v. die fosfor

brons en die ‘stainless steel’ wurm. ‘n Mens kan natuurlik duurder gaan en bv. ‘Rodgers’ gebruik, maar dan kyk jy na R11 000 vir die goedkoopste.

Is daar enige toetse wat jy doen wanneer dit kom by die seleksie van jou hout?

Omdat ek my hout van Duitsland af bestel, kan ek dit ongelukkig nie self kies nie. Wat ek doen is ek bestel top kwaliteit hout. As die hout hier aankom sal ek deurgaan en bietjie luister na die ‘tap tone’. So nou en dan kry ek ‘n stukkie wat nie topkwaliteit is nie wat ek dan nie gebruik nie, maar oor die algemeen is alles meester graad hout - egalige en gelyke grein en perfekte ‘quarter sawn’ stukke met goeie ‘run down’, wat te doen het met die rigting van die grein en wat bepaal hoe dun jy die klankbord kan maak.

Gebruik jy enige ander ornamentele materiale soos perlemoen?

Het nog nie perlemoen gebruik nie, maar ek stel baie belang daarin. Ek verkies egter om natuurlike kleur hout te gebruik. In my rosette gebruik ek houte soos Rooshout en Bubinga of ‘African Rosewood’, ‘Origon Pine’, ‘Maple’ en Olienhout.

Vertel my ‘n bietjie meer oor die verskillende ‘bracing’ ontwerpe wat jy gebruik.

Ek het geleer uit daai eerste boek se ontwerp en het toe oorbeweeg na Romanillos se ontwerp. Die groot verskil is Romanillos bou op die tradisionele Spaanse metode, waar jy op ‘n *solera* ghitaar sy vorm kan bou. ‘n *Solera* is ‘n werksbord waarop die klankbord se gedeelte uitgehol is. So jy forseer jou klankbord in ‘n ‘dome’. Dit gee hom ekstra sterkte, wat beteken dat jy kan dunner gaan. Ek speel nie baie rond met verskillende ontwerpe nie. Alhoewel als op die oog af dieselfde lyk, leer mens met elke instrument van die klein verskilletjies en hulle invloed. Ek sal sê ek ken Romanillos se ontwerp nou baie goed en voel gemaklik met dit, so ek voel nie ek kan baie verbeter daarmee nie. Ek begin nou uitkyk na ander ontwerpe. Ek het so paar van my eie wilde idees wat ek een of ander tyd sal wil toets ☺.

Met betrekking tot die spesifikasies en dimensies - is daar ‘n spesifieke standaard patroon of vorm wat jy gebruik?

Die vorm is vry in die sin dat ek forseer hom nie in ‘n ‘jig’ nie. Ek buig die sye maar op daai warm pyp en ek toets dit maar op die profiel van my ghitaar. Ek probeer binne ‘n millimeter van my profiel bly, maar dit is nogal ‘n groot uitdaging. Ek het al verskillende vorms gebruik. Het begin met my eie ontwerpe wat ek self geteken het, maar ek het nie baie daarvan gehou nie en het later meer na standaard proporsies beweeg. Die vorm is egter redelik vry.

Help of hinder die klimaat hier as dit kom by ghitaarbou?

Die klimaat is nie te veel van ‘n probleem nie. Veral in die winter is dit baie lekker, maar daar kom tye in die somer waar ‘n ou nie veel kan doen a.g.v. die humiditeit nie. Om egter ‘n omgewing te hê waar mens ‘n gemiddelde humiditeit van 50% kan handhaaf, kos te veel vir die amateur ghitaarbouer en ons stop maar. As dit so aanmekaar begin reën dan stop ons. Jy kan baie ander dinge doen as dit reën. Jy kan nie vernis as dit reën nie en jou kritieke lymprosesse kan jy nie doen as dit reën nie. Dit sal ‘n fatale fout wees.

Dink jy ouens in die Kaap het ‘n groter probleem in daai opsig?

Ek het al met Colin Cleveland en met Marc Maingard gepraat en nie een van hulle kla nie en hulle bly op die see. Dit is vir my ongelooflik. Ek weet byvoorbeeld nie van ‘n ghitaarbouer in Durban nie. Ek neem die plek waar my ghitaar heen gaan in ag as ek hom bou. ‘n Ghitaar wat byvoorbeeld Kaap toe gaan sal ek lym in tussen 50% en 55% humiditeit. My laaste een het Welkom toe gegaan en hom sal ek nie lym bokant 40% nie. Mevyn sal nou weer sê jy doen niks bo 20% nie.

Dink jy beginner SA-ghitaarbouers sal kan baat vind by een of ander kurses wat julle meer ervare ouens kan begin?

Ek dink die aanvraag is ongelukkig bietjie min. Ek het toe ek begin het vir Marc Maingard gevra of ek nie een ghitaar by hom kan kom bou nie, maar hy het vir my gesê dat hy kan my ongelukkig nie akkommodeer nie en dat sy werkswinkel te klein is. Noudat ek aan die ander kant van die tafel sit verstaan ek dat dit maar moeilik is om so iets te doen. Ek het maar met ‘n boek begin, toe later ‘n tweede boek en toe later ‘n video uit Amerika bestel. Ek het vir my vrou gesê dat as ek die dag regtig regkom met ghitaarbou en iemand kom na my toe en vra of ek hom kan help, dan sal ek hom help, maar ek het miskien maar ‘n bietjie gou gepraat. Dit is maar ‘n groot uitdaging om iemand anders te help ‘n ghitaar bou. Ek het dit reeds een keer gedoen. Ek het hom niks gevra nie, maar vir hom gesê dat hy ook iemand moet leer ☺.

Wat is jou opinie omtrent die algemene standaard van die ghitare wat in SA gebou word?

Ek dink wat vakmanskap en voorkoms aanbetref, sal ek Marc Maingard nommer een plaas. Sy ghitare is regtig baie mooi. Hy werk met baie mooi materiale en eksotiese hout en hy is al baie lank in die besigheid.

Ek het gehoor hy gebruik nie inheemse hout nie, omdat hy glo dat dit nie stabiel genoeg is nie.

Geen hout is stabiel as dit nie reg voorberei is nie. Selfs die duurste oorsese houtsoorte. Dis hoekom Mervyn sy hout so goed voorberei deur dit vir baie lank buite te los. Die hout haal dan asem, in dat dit kry vog, verloor vog, kry vog, ens. En dis ‘n baie goeie manier om die hout voor te berei. Dis die beste ding vir hout en hoe langer dit gebeur, hoe beter.

Colin Cleveland se ghitare het ‘n unieke klank. Ongelooflike instrumente. Mervyn Davis se kreatiwiteit is tops. Die klank wat Garth Pickard met sy kleiner ghitare kry is vir my ‘n inspirasie en iets wat ek na streef. Rodney Stedall is baie entoesiasties en vol idees. Sy instrumente klink baie goed, veral sy staalsnaar ghitare.

Hoeveel ghitare het jy al gebou?

Ek het al tien gebou, so ek het nog nie die ondervinding van ‘n paar ander nie.

Werk jy op meer as een ghitaar ter gelyke tyd?

Nee. Ek werk met een op ‘n slag. ‘n Mens spaar nie regtig tyd as jy twee op ‘n slag bou nie, tensy jy soos tien op ‘n slag bou. As ek begin en konsentreer op ‘n instrument dan wil ek hom klaarmaak. Ek het in Mei 2004 my vorige ghitaar klaar gemaak en het nog nie kans gehad om weer aan een te begin nie, met die geboorte van ons tweede baba. Gemiddeld maak ek so twee per jaar.
Allistair Thomson is ‘n eksperimenteerder in die ware sin van die woord. Hy sal geen twee ghitare op dieselfde manier bou nie. Dan probeer hy hierdie metode, dan daai een. Dan gebruik hy hierdie hout, dan daai. Hy bou baie mooi instrumente en is goed toegerus.

Die algemene kwaliteit van SA ghitare. Dink jy dit kan vergelyk word met internasionale ghitare?

Ek dink daar is ‘n paar redelike ervare bouers in ons land wat so nou en dan onaanvaarbare dinge aan hulle ghitare doen, so ons sal moet ontslae raak van daai tipe goed as ons regtig wil meeding met die oorsese mark. Ek dink die moontlikheid is daar vir ons om mee te ding in terme van vakmanskap, asook klankproduksie as ons net bietjie professioneel daarop toespits. Daar is bekende oorsese spelers wat baie beïndruk was met ons ghitare, soos Mike Wood, wat ek al ontmoet het.

So daar is iets wat SA bouers kan offer?

Ek dink so en ek sal graag wil sien dat SA-ghitaarspelers net meer sal kyk na wat kan hulle lokaal kry - nie net die instrumente nie, maar ook die diens - voor hulle in ander rigtings kyk. Baie spelers is naamvas en dis moeilik om hulle sienings te verander. Die geskiedenis is so ryk van die Spaanse klassieke ghitaar en Segovia het sulke diep spore getrap en daarom doen Ramirez en al sy studente-ghitaarbouers so goed vandag. Selfde het gebeur met Williams en Smallman.

Is daar 'n SA tradisie in ghitaarbou wat mens kan identifiseer?

Nie in klassieke ghitaar nie, maar wel in ghitare in die algemeen. Ons moet net meer mense kry wat belangstel in SA ghitare. Die probleem is dat 'n mens nie 'n lewe kan maak uit studente- of beginner-ghitare wat R1000 kos nie en daar is ook nie baie hoë vlak ghitaarspelers nie, so die Koreane is baie suksesvol met hulle goedkoper ghitare. As ons miskien 'n fabriek op die been kan bring wat op groot produksie ghitare kan vervaardig vir die opkomende student. Ek dink dit sal ons land se naam goed doen.

Wat is jou ambisies en/doelstellings vir die toekoms?

Heel bo aan die lys moet ek sê dat ek sal graag voltyds ghitare wil bou. Ek wil my ook beywer om die tipe ghitaar te bou wat 'n professionele speler soos jy sal verkies om op te speel bo enige ander een. Ek wil 'n baie hoë standaard handhaaf en hoë kwaliteit ghitare bou in terme van speelbaarheid en klank. Ek dink as ek daar is, dan sal die regte persone my die blootstelling kan gee a.g.v. die kwaliteit van my ghitare.

Dink jy jy sal ooit 'n stadium bereik waar jy voel jy is nou op daai vlak?

Nee, ek dink mens kom nooit daar uit nie. Dis 'n droom wat mens maar altyd na streef, om beter en beter ghitare te bou.

Watse tipe gereedskap gebruik jy meestal? Hand of elektries?

Ek gebruik die 'drum sander' baie. As jy regtig dun gaan met die hout sal ek die finale skuurwerk met die hand doen. 'n Mens moet die laaste afwerking met die hand doen vir twee redes: Eerstens omdat jy met sulke dun material werk en as jy 'n happie met die masjien uitruk, is dit 'scrap'. Ek gebruik 'n gladde staalplaatjie vir die finale, gelyke afwerking. Ek sal die hout voorberei met die masjien, maar ek doen meeste van die werk met my hand.

Watse afwerking gebruik jy?

Ek stel baie belang in 'French polish' maar ek sal nog baie huiswerk moet doen voor ek dit probeer. Op die oomblik gebruik ek 'n produk van Plascon. 'n 'Multiface wood laquer'. Hy krap nie maklik as hy eers hard is nie en jy kan hom dik opsit. Hy bied goeie beskerming en poleer pragtig. Die 'nitrocellulose', aan die ander kant, wat ek vir my eerste ghitaar gebruik het, is 'n blikskottel in dat hy krimp in die tydperk van 'n jaar, so na 'n ruk slaan die hout se grein deur, so ek is nie baie beïndruk met SA 'nitrocellulose' nie en 'n mens kan dit nie invoer nie want dit mag nie verskeep word nie, so nou gebruik ek maar Plascon.

Hoe sterk leun jy op jou planne en sketse?

Die planne dien meer net as 'n riglyn. Daar is diktes en gewigte wat jy nie kan vasstel op papier nie. Ek werk baie op gevoel, want geen twee stukke hout is dieselfde in jou hand nie al is hulle van dieselfde spesie. Ek maak maar staat op 'tap tone' vir die klankbordhout. Ek maak hom eers dood, dat hy amper klink na niks en dan as jy die 'strutting' opsit, dan kry hy weer lewe. Hy moet nie te veel lewe hê voor die 'strutting' nie, want die 'strutting' maak hom dat hy op sy styfste is. Ek het eers streng volgens planne uit boeke gewerk vir my eerste drie ghitare, maar dan leer jy die proses wat jou bietjie meer vryheid gee. Nou kan ek meer fokus op spesifieke resultate wat ek wil hê. Ondervinding tel dus baie.

Wat dink jy omtrent die toekoms van die ghitaarbou industrie in SA?

Dit pla my verskriklik dat sulke mooi instrumente so min belangstelling trek in SA. Ek sal graag wil sien dat iets gedoen word om die mense die regte opleiding te gee om die belangstelling te kweek. Ek self het nie eers van klassieke musiek gehou voordat ek die blootstelling daaraan gekry het nie. Omdat ek wou hoor hoe 'n klassieke ghitaar moet klink, het ek vir my 'n CD gekoop en daar word ek toe so mal oor die klassieke musiek. Ek wens ek het vroeer waardering daarvan geleer en ek sal graag wil sien dat meer mense 'n waardering sal kry vir klassieke ghitaar in ons land, maar ons sal moet baie konserte hou en blootstelling

kry, want nou is daar net nie mense nie. As ons bekende spelers en onderwysers net meer die bydraende gesindheid van Charl Lamprecht en Abri Jordaan kan openbaar, sal dinge al klaar baie beter gaan.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 27 JUNE 2005

Jy het in ons vorige onderhoud genoen dat jou suster vir jou 'n tydskrif gestuur het en dat dit is waar als begin het. Wat was die tydskrif se naam?

'Classical Guitar'. In die tydskrif was 'n advertensie vir 'n boek met die naam 'Guitar making: Tradition and technology' deur Campiagno en daai boek het my op die been gekry.

Wat omtrent die klassike ghitaar se geskiedenis waarvan jy praat fassineer jou so?

Ek dink omtrent van Torres se tyd af. Voor Torres dink ek weet ek te min om kommentaar oor te lewer. Ek het bietjie begin nalees van Torres se tyd af. Ek het natuurlik daai CD ook van opnames van Torres se ghitare. As jy dink wat gebeur in 'n ghitaar….niemand kan regtig vir jou sê nie ne, maar as jy hoor wat gebeur as iemand hom speel, dit is net ongelooflik. Jy kyk nou na daai klankbord en jy hoor wat kom daar uit en jy probeer dit wetenskaplik en fisies verklaar, maar jy kan dit nie regtig doen nie. Dit gebeur egter nogtans en dit is net fassinerend.

Sal jy sê dat vir deeltydse ghitaarbouers soos jy daai passie en opwinding belangrik is?

Baie mense kom na my toe met 'n Yamaha en ek kyk glad nie neer op Yamaha nie, maar hulle bring my 'n instrument van sê so R700. Dan moet ek 10 ure spandeer om daai ding reg te maak en dit maak nie vir my sin nie. Ek put nie bevrediging daaruit nie en doen dit slegs as ek iets daaruit kan leer. Stefan het na my toe gekom met 'n goedkoop ghitaar en gesê hy soek daai ghitaar in 'n agt-snaar. Ek het gesê ek kan dit doen en dit was 'n uitdaging gewees. Ek moes die kop verander en langer maak vir agt snare, maar ek het dit gedoen vir hom. Die snare was baie na aan mekaar gewees, maar hy wou dit so hê en dit het gewerk vir hom. Ek het dit gedoen slegs vir die ervaring wat ek daaruit kon kry. Dit is nie finansieël die moeite werd nie en ek is nie regtig 'keen' om daai tipe goed te doen nie en ek sal dit nie weer doen nie. As ek eendag voltyds ghitare bou verander dit natuurlik. Dan het jy 'n inkomste om aan te dink, so ek dink in daai opsig gaan jy alles vat wat jy kan kry. Selfs dinge wat onekonomies is om te doen sal 'n mens ook doen want daai kliënt is dalk net gelukkig en stuur iemand na jou toe wat uitloop op iets wat wel ekonomies gaan wees.

Jy is nie bang dat jy dalk jou passie kan verloor as jy eendag voltyds ghitare bou nie?

Geen gevaar daarvan nie, nee ☺. Daar sal miskien frustrasies bykom, maar dit is dit. Ek is nou volgende jaar 10 jaar al besig met ghitare bou en ek het 12 ghitare om te wys. Dit is eintlik pateties. Ek wil dit bou in een jaar. In 'n slegte jaar moet ek nie minder as 10 bou nie. Ek is nie regtig 'n goeie besigheidspersoon nie, maar ek sal enige raad verwelkom wat my kan help om daar uit te kom. As jy begin, dan is daar vrae soos: kan ek die tegniek bemeester? Hoe gaan die voorkoms wees? Klank dink jy nog nie eers aan nie, want jy weet nog niks daarvan nie. Nou, na 10 ghitare, is voorkoms nog steeds baie belangrik vir my en die vakmanskap, maar my fokus is meer op die klank en die tipe klank wat ek gaan kry en watter karakter die ghitaar gaan hê. Daardie tipe vrae begin nou vir my baie belangrik raak. Dinge soos speelbaarheid en klankkwaliteit.

Waar wil jy graag verbeter in terme van jou ghitare?

Die speelbaarheid van die ghitaar en altyd maar die klank, nè.

Kom mens ooit uit by 'n klank waar jy voel jy het dit nou bereik?

Nee, ek dink nie dis moontlik nie. Ek dink die rigting waarin Smallman beweeg het, het vir ons gewys dat waar jy wen in een veld, verloor jy weer in ‘n ander. Almal sal dalk nie heeltemal saamstem daarmee nie. Ek wil dit glad nie afkraak nie. Smallman maak uitsonderlike instrumente. Al wat ek sê is dat hy het nie daai tradisionele Spaanse klank waarvan ek so hou in ‘n ghitaar nie.

Jy se dat Romanillos se roset ontwerpe het jou sterk beïnvloed?

Ja. Ek moet sê dit het my nogal regtig beïnvloed. Die kontras wat jy kry met verskillende houtsoorte bepaal of jy dit regkry en dit werk.

Jy het ook laas genoem dat Colin Cleveland in die Kaap ook vir jou ‘n aansporing is, veral sy kenmerkende klank.?

Ja. Sy Torres ontwerp is ook baie goed, maar dit is veral sy eksperimente met ‘lattice bracing’ wat aan sy ghitare daai klank gee. Daar is ‘n astronomiese verskil tussen daai ghitare en ander. Die spesifieke ghitaar van hom wat aan Abri Jordaan behoort is net eenvoudig ongelooflik. Daar is net iets omtrent dit.

Wat wil jy nog doen in terme van ‘fan bracing’?

Ek begin nou met die volgende stap. Dit kan ook nou weer in ‘n ding van jare lank ontaard. Ek het ook nog my eie idees waarmee ek wil eksperimenteer wat totaal en al verskillend is van wat ek nou doen. ‘n Teorie of twee. Baie van hulle het ek al afgeskryf en nie eers uitprobeer nie. In die begin het jy allerlei idees wat jy dink kan werk, maar nou weet ‘n mens dit was eintlik ‘n klomp nonsens.

Jy het laas genoem dat jy voel jou ‘fret’-werk en daarom jou intonasie is die belangrikste aspek omtrent die ghitaar?

Ja. Die intonasie en die akkuraatheid van jou plasing van jou ‘frets’. Alles omtrent jou ‘fret’-werk is belangrik, insluitend die ‘leveling’ van jou ‘frets’. Jy weet self hoe irriterend dit kan wees as jy ‘n ‘buzz’ kry en jy moet so kompenseer om nie daai ‘buzz’ te laat hoor nie. Jy is so bewus daarvan. Ek wil hê die speler moet vry wees om homself te kan uitleef op ‘n instrument. Dis hoekom ek dink dit is belangrik dat die ghitaarbouer ook baie nou bande met die speler moet hê in die opsig van die vereistes van die speler. Die grootste uitdaging vir my is nog om die speelbaarheid heeltemaal reg te kry, want dit is die moeilikste deel. Ek dink my ervaring is nog bietjie beperk in dié opsig. Kyk Garth Pickard se ghitare ‘buzz’ almal vir my. Die hele lot van hulle ‘buzz’, maar hy het ‘n fantastiese aksie op daai ghitare. Ek praat nou van sy klassieke ghitare. Daar kom die voorkeur in. Vir enige ou gaan dit baie lekker voel om op daai ghitare te speel. Iemand soos Abri Jordaan sê hy moet die heeltyd terughou om te keer dat dit nie ‘buzz’ nie, so sy voorkeur is om nie so lae aksie te hê nie. Waar baat dit my as ‘n bouer om ‘n norm te kry? Daar is nie ‘n norm nie. As jy na my toe kom en vra om ‘n ghitaar te bou sal ek jou vra om ‘n voorbeeld te gee van wat vir jou ‘n ideale ghitaar is. As jy sê dit is wat jy soek, dan kan ek dit vir jou gee, maar ek kan nie vir jou iets gee en sê dit sal vir jou ideal wees en ek weet nie wat jy wil hê nie. So dit is moeilik. Ek het al mense gahad wat op my ghitare gespeel het en gesê het dit is te moeilik om op te speel. James Grace is ‘n voorbeeld. Hy het hom gespeel en gesê nee, dit is te hoog vir hom. Ek dink hy en jy is basies in dieselfde kategorie. Ek dink dit is absoluut ‘n persoonlike ding. Jy is bevoorreg as jy weet vir wie jy ‘n ghitaar bou. Jy kan dit dan reg doen, want dit affekteer die nek se hoek en dinge.

Mervyn sê die nek se hoek affekteer die klank meer as die ‘strutting’.

Jy sal sien met Colin Cleveland se ghitare hoe groot is die hoek van daai nek. Jy sal sien dat die vingerbord is baie hoog bo die klankbord. Die nek is heeltemaal gelig op ‘n baie skerp hoek. Hy het ook dubbel gaatjies op die brug, want as jy ‘n gewone knoop maak ne, dan kan die knoop net aan die bokant van die ‘tie block’ wees en dan die ‘saddle’. Met ‘n dubbel gaatjie in die ‘tie block’ kom hy van onder af uit boontoe, so dit gee vir jou ‘n skerper hoek oor die ‘saddle’. Hy moes dit doen, anders sou hy ‘n ‘buzz’ gehad het. Hy sê dit het ‘n invloed op die volume. Ek weet nie of dit die klankbord is wat dit doen of die hoek van die ‘saddle’ nie. Met Mervyn se ghitare is dit baie dieselfde. Waar ander ghitare se snare die klankbord afdruk, trek syne dit op.

Rodney Stedall forseer sy klankborde in 'n 'dome' vorm. Wat is jou siening omtrent dit?

Ek doen dit al vir die afgelope 10 ghitare en dit is absoluut noodsaaklik vir my. Ek het die eerste twee ghitare nie ge'dome' nie, maar my eerste 'dome' ghitaar het so 'n enorme verskil gemaak dat dit nie vir my debateerbaar is nie. Jy forseer die klankbord in piek 'tension'. Dit is die een voordeel sal ek sê. Die ander ding is dat omdat hy in 'n 'dome' is, kan jy hom ligter maak. Iets wat ge'dome' is 'collapse' moeiliker as iets wat plat is. Dit gee vir jou sterkte voordat jy nog eers begin kyk na die 'bracing'.

Wat is jou sienings omtrent 'French polishing'?

Dit is die ligste 'finish' wat jy kan opsit. Ek en Abri het oor dieselfde ding gepraat Saterdag. Ek stel baie belang in dit. Dit is natuurlik baie meer arbeidsintensief. Ek dink my 'custom' ghitare sal ek 'French polish', omdat dit so ardeidsintensief is. Ek gebruik 'n 'laquer' en ek probeer dit so dun as moontlik hou. Op die klankbord gebruik ek net 4 lae, waarvan ek die meeste afskuur. So ek kan nie vir jou sê in gewigtoename hoe dit vergelyk met 'French polishing' nie. Ek kan wel sê dat 'French polishing' is baie dun en baie lig. Dit is 'n minimum gewigstoename vir die ghitaar. Ek weet Alistair Thomson gebruik 'nitrocellulose'. Ek het dit ook gebruik, maar dit vat baie lank. 'Nitrocellulose' moet jy vir drie maande los voordat jy dit finaal poleer as jy 'n goeie resultaat wil hê. Ek het die fout gemaak om nie lank genoeg te wag nie. Dit is sleg vir 'n ou se ghitare as mense sê die ghitaar klink mooi, maar kyk hoe lyk die ding ☺.

Beide Rodney en Garth voel dat 'French polishing' nie noodwendig langer hoef te vat as ander afwerkings nie.

Ja. Dit lyk nie heeltemal soos 'n 'laquer' nie, so as dit jou voorkeur is sal dit moeilik wees om jou tevrede te stel. Die ouens wat 'experts' is op daai gebied se ghitare lyk ongelooflik.

Wat was die tweede boek wat jou beïnvloed het?

Roy Courtnall se 'Making master guitars'. Daarna het ek twee video's uit Amerika bestel. Een was oor 'French polishing for guitar makers' deur Fernandez en die ander een was deur dieselfde persoon - 'Classical and flamenco guitar making'. Alistair was vir my ook 'n groot inspirasie aan die begin. Hy het my baie gehelp met 'fret'-werk en daai tipe goed.

Dink jy die ghitaar se konstruksie gaan nog baie verander oor die volgende 100 jaar?

Nie regtig nie. Met die konstruksie van die klassieke ghitaar het daar baie nuwe dinge gekom en nou beweeg baie mense terug na die ou, oorspronklike goed toe. Daar is ontsettend baie variasies van Torres se oorspronklike ontwerp. Hulle almal sal maar rondom Torres kuier. Colin Cleveland is 'n voorbeeld daarvan. Ek het Colin ontmoet in dieselfde tyd wat ek Alistair ontmoet het - om en by 1997. Toe het hy ernstig begin kyk na die Smallman konstruksie. Eers met die ligte rugkant en toe met die 'carved back'. Hy het tot nog in dié jaar ghitare gebou op daai metode en het uitstekende resultate gekry, soos jy weet, maar toe ek laas met hom gepraat het, so 'n week terug, was hy besig om met Friedrich te eksperimenteer met 'n ligte rugkant - nie 'carved back' nie. Sy laaste ghitaar is 'n 'Cedar' in Brasiliaanse Rooshout, so ek is baie nuuskierig. Hy sê hy is so beïndruk met die ding, want ek het die planne vir hom gestuur. Daai ou is so vinnig. 'n Week nadat ek hom die planne gestuur het, het hy my gebel en gesê dat hy een gebou het. Hy het basies die 'top' gemaak en gelas aan 'n ander ghitaar. Hy sê die klank is fantasties. 'n Maand later praat ek weer met hom, toe het hy nog een gebou van Brasiliaanse Rooshout ☺. Marc Maingard se ghitare plaas ek esteties nog steeds bo-aan die lys. Ek het al 'n hele paar ghitare van hom gesien. Ek het Ann Ludwig se Marc Maingard klassieke ghitaar hier gehad. Sy het hom ingebring vir 'n verandering en die brug se posisie was uit met omtrent 3mm en ek moes die saaltjie vir haar verander om die intonasie reg te kry, want dit was totaal uit gewees. As jy egter kyk na daai ghitaar, dit het maar 'n skaallengte van 610mm. Dis 'n klein ghitaar. 'Cedar' met Indiese Rooshout en 'n 'cutaway' en daai ghitaartjie klink vreeslik mooi. Hy het 'n soet klank en hy lyk baie mooi. Tony Cox het ook 'n 'nice' Maingard wat hy op speel. Die speller, weereens, maak 'n groot verskil. 'n Mens moet versigtig wees as jy 'n ghitaar se klank beoordeel, want dieselfde ghitaar in 2 verskillende mense se hande klink anders. Charl Lamprecht maak 'n mooi klank, nè.

Wat my fassineer omtrent die ‘lattice’ ghitare is die krag van die instrument. Wat help dit ‘n ou speel fantasties maar dit klink soos ‘n gefluister in ‘n saal? Versterk jy ‘n ghitaar, dan verloor jy so baie, so as jy sy akkoestiese klank sterk kan kry, dan is dit ‘n groot voordeel en die ‘lattice’ doen dit onmiddelik vir jou.

Dit is seker die enigste rede hoekom ‘lattice bracing’ populêr begin word het. Die enigste voordeel wat dit inhou is die volume.

Ja. Dit is net die krag. As ek Charl mag aanhaal wat op ‘n Smallman gespeel het, sê hy omtrent die kleur van die ghitaar dat dit is opmerklik dat wanneer jy byvoorbeeld ‘n A op die eeste en op die tweede snaar speel, klink hulle identies. Daar is nie eintlik ‘n verskil in kleur tussen daai twee note nie. Of dit ‘n voordeel of ‘n nadeel is, weet ek nie. Ek hou van kleurvariteite op ‘n ghitaar. Ek verkies dit, want dit gee jou ‘n keuse. Note klink vir my die mooiste op die middelste register. Jou vibrato is ook baie meer effektief. Ek hou meer van die ‘sul tasto’ klank as die ‘ponticello’. Elke ou het maar sy voorkeur en ‘n mens moet ook nie te veel van ‘n tonnelvisie hê nie, sal ek sê. My benadering sal wees dat as iemand ‘n instrument by my wil hê sal hy vir my ‘n voorbeld moet gee waarvan hy hou en ek beskou dit as ‘n uitdaging.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH MARC MAINGARD ON 11 JUNE 2005 AT SCARBOROUGH

Biography:

A lot of it you'll get on my web. Born in Durban. Born in '49 on 31 July. Had French parents. I Spoke French at home. Catholic family. Went to school at a convent there at the Morris brothers. I didn't do well at Morris brothers and in standard 6 I failed and on my request my father took me to a technical high school which was way much more up my street, because being the type of guy that likes taking things apart and put them back together again. I did very well. Top of the school for the first few years, Standard 6, 7 and 8. Sex, drugs and rock and roll. Didn't do so well in Standard 9. I didn't even bother to write matric. It was a waste of space. I already had my own business, making and repairing surf boards. It just didn't make any sense to me to go further in school, because I was pretty confident in myself and what I wanted to do with my life. I went to military service in 1969 and '70, which was a waste of space. Good for discipline, though. It was a good experience for me and I was glad to go through it. It tightened up my act, so to speak. I came out of the military tighter and more together as a person, I believe. That's just a rough synopsis. In between all that….I started piano at the age of five and then I changed to violin at the age of ten. I was in the Durban Junior Philharmonic at the age of thirteen. I was good. At the age of 16-17 I injured my neck and then at the age of 19, I had a nasty motorcycle smash that fractured my scull and crushed my spine, so I couldn't play violin anymore, because of my neck. I turned to the guitar in the military in 1970. That's when I started playing the guitar. I always had a good voice. I had a big musical talent. The two major talents that I had were my musical ability and my mechanical abilities. My abilities to see and design. I worked a lot with colour as an artist. I worked a lot with paintings. I did a lot of work for a shoe maker. Did leather work, did silver smith work, advanced courses in wood work. A lot of things after school that I did just because. I was a pro musician, so by the end of '70 beginning of '71 I started playing pro. I played folk music. Not much jazz. I played a kind of African folk style music. Mainly laid-back lounge-type music like Crosby Stills, Simon and Garfunkel and the like. That was before T.V. Those days people listened to the likes of Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan, Donovan, James Taylor, Beetles, etc. Some of my friends played in rock bands, but I was always more of a solo performer, singing and playing guitar. Now I still get asked to perform. I do concerts.

You mention two of your great talents as being musical ability and mechanical ability. Would you say that those are important attributes for a luthier?

Yes, I would say music is important. A good ear is very important. Not to be egotistical, I'm considered to be one of the top ten in the world at the moment as a guitar builder. That's where I am in the planet of things. I am one of eight only that exports into Japan. I've been contacted by the Japanese. They've seen my guitars. They like what I do and I have been dealing with them now for two years. There is only eight of us. The others are guys like Sergei de Jonge, Roy McAllister, myself…..there are probably about twenty five of us in the world, I would say, that are all on a very, very high level. I don't want to say that I am better than them or they are better than me. There are probably about twenty five. When I really look hard on the web….those that I can see and find. I see their craftsmanship, and craftsmanship is very important. Having worked as a violin maker as well, you do get an extra edge to your miters and your purflings and many things, because you're working in a miniature little box as a violin maker. The guy that I studied with, stays in Kommetjie. His name is Brian Lisus. He's a wonderful man. I worked with him for a year and then I did more studies overseas in New York.

Can you expand on your studies overseas?

When I left S.A. in '72 to go and travel, I spent 3 years overseas -'72, 73, 74 and a bit of 75. I worked as a musician in the south of Spain. Again, I was singing folk. I was singing French - my mother tongue is French and I was singing a bit in Spanish, which wasn't that difficult. I would sing every night, so during the day I had free time and because I didn't know what to do, I started hanging out with the guitar makers in Malaga and Granada. That is where it really started for me. I did French polishing, shaping necks just for nothing. Just to chill out, hang out with them; drink wine, because they are really relaxed. Very chilled, very beautiful, beautiful lunch, siesta in the afternoon - beautiful lifestyle, you know.

Was it in an unofficial capacity that you worked for them?

Yes. Then, when I came back to S.A. after having done that for quite some time, having learnt very quickly and having been granted the gift of a mechanical….so to answer your question, yes mechanics is important. It's important that you can see how things fit and how they work. When you do this, that happens, so there is definitely a correlation between the top guys and guys that are just banging around. I must say that I've been into other guys' workshops and no one's is like mine. I was trained by a very meticulous man - Ron Stabbens in Natal. He was a cabinet maker. His workshop was meticulous and spotless. You always knew where the tools were. I have always been like that myself. A place for everything and everything in its place. It works, though. You could ask me for something in my workshop and I could send you with detailed instructions and you can go there and find it right there. That is important around safety and time. I look at other guys' workshops, no names mentioned, and there are bike parts all over the bench where guitars are going to live, you know. It doesn't really crack it for me. Overseas too. I think the most important thing I need to tell you is that it has been a journey for me. Not an outside journey. For a lot of people it is an outside journey. For me it's inner work. Where I was on a bench 12 hours a day, there is an amazing sense of calm I get. An amazing sense of self and inner satisfaction. I think that that is one of the most important things for me. I enjoy my own company. That's the way I train my two assistants. You have to have a passion for it. If you don't, you're stuffed. It's not about making money, because there isn't a hell of a lot. Even though I'm making beautiful guitars and they're all exporting, I don't make a hell of a lot of money. When I consider what I pay to go see a doctor or a dentist or even a motor mechanic, it's not terribly well paid and yet the only way in which I made it successful is by having employed other people and having grown it that way and having developed my own system. I've been doing this for almost thirty years now, having started in '75. It's always a labour of love. I still walk into the workshop and look at a piece of wood just to look at it, because it still intrigues me. My girlfriend pointed that out to me a few weeks ago while we were camping out somewhere. I was lying there and she could see that I was thinking of something. When she asked me, I said that I was just thinking of this back I am making for this guy. How nice it is and what nice tone it's got and maybe I'm going to make it thinner. She said that she is amazed that after thirty years of doing this every day of my life, I can still lay around on holiday and that is what I think of. I think of it with joy, not 'Oh no, I've got to go to work today'. Life is about where you place yourself. It's a planet of choice. I have placed myself in a very beautiful place. Lovely garden, lovely river running through it, all those kind of things.

So mechanics and music is important. Then what happened is that I played violin and changed to guitar, because I couldn't play violin after my accident, as mentioned earlier. I was playing overseas and came back to S.A. in '75, having spent a year in India, studying yoga, ayovetic medicine and things like that. I came back to find Durban very dry and the orchestra was disbanded. The classical music scene was dead. It was very sad. I had been in Cape Town for my military service in '69 and I thought that I'm just going to go visit Cape Town once more, so I packed everything, sold everything I didn't need. Put my scrambler on the roof of my combi, packed all my stuff, took my dog and basically left Durban. I came to Cape Town literally on my way out of the country. I really missed the intellect of Europe and the people I was hanging out with. I got to Cape Town and I just found it an incredibly stimulating place, not being in the military. It was difficult to get into. People were quite clicky, which I didn't mind, because why should everybody welcome everybody? You've got to work your way in and show who you are. I started doing my leatherwork here and silver smith work and carried on repairing guitars and that's how I really got more involved - doing repairs and getting more and more repairs. Then I started realizing, after getting married in '80-'81, that I was working on valuable instruments like Martins and Gibson's. There are guys out there right now ruining instruments on a big level. I would tell them to give me a call and I could give them some advice. I don't do repairs anymore, although I am qualified through Gibson, Martin….I've got all their certificates.

Why don't you do repairs anymore?

It's just not functional. To survive, I had to have quite a tight system. We work from 9 till 5 every day. My guys are lucky. They come in at 9, they're in a beautiful environment, they love what they do, and they're very talented boys.

How involved are you these days with the making of the guitars?

I do the critical stuff. I don't do the assembly anymore. Assembly just requires good wood work. That is all that a guitar is. The secret to a good guitar is the top, the selection of the top, the selection of the back and sides, the correct thicknessing of the top and of the back and the sides. Also, the selection of the braces and the correct scalloping and carving of the braces for tone. That is what I do. I select every piece that goes in the guitars. I select the back, select the top with Matt. Select the brace wood. He glues on the braces. I have patterns now that I don't really deviate from. I carve all the braces and thin the tops and then I resand the tops after I listen to the guitars again, because sometimes I take a bit more off and test the sound. That is all that I do. I have taught Matt and Dean for 6 years now. Everything else is done by them. Every day I follow the process and they come to me to ask what they should do with specific things. I also do all the design. I do all the overseas stuff. It all runs past me. The buck stops with me. They work exactly according to my templates and they both have their sets of notes that they did when they were studying with me. Whenever there is a stuff-up I'll ask: 'Where do you see this in your notes?'. They will go back and check the notes to see if it needs to be adjusted. We work to 0.2 mm accuracy. I work with clock gauges and digital readout veneers, so we work extremely accurately. That is one of the reasons why we are where we are and I get the sound that I get. We are very consistent. You can order a guitar from me today and three years from now you can come and order the same guitar from me again and I'll blend it and mach it. That is the alchemy. That is the magic that I create. That is the magic of Maingard guitars and that is what I do. That is what I've learnt. It took me 15 years. In America there are a lot of guys that use the stress method of determining sound for a guitar. Obviously every piece of wood has got a different tap tone. Tap tone is very relative to the stiffness, to the age and year lines of the wood. A wood can have a bright tone, because of x, y, z, or a bass tone, because of x, y, z. It is true that if you take a piece of wood and you subject it to a certain stress like a 10 pound stress in the middle, you are going to get a readout on your scale that is going to say when the thickness is down to 2.5, it is going to bend half and inch, for example. If I thin it down to 2.2 it is going to bend half an inch plus two millimeters. So you can kind of get an idea of where to go. I had to decide whether I was going to go that way, or am I going to do it in the Torres system? The Torres system - as he said when he was dying to the priest…. 'the knowledge exists between my thumb and my forefinger and that goes with me'. That is how I work. I feel a piece of wood, I thicken it to what I think it should be, I listen and I thicken it to that, what it tells me.

So you are more an intuitive builder?

Much more intuitive, rather than scientific. The proof of that is that when I was in the workshop of one of the top guitar builders in the world, (I won't tell you his name), he had a new model and he couldn't get it right. I happened to be visiting for two days after he invited me to come and stay. We had talked long into the night, because he works with the stress system, with clock gauges and weight gauges and reading of and weighing the wood. To a certain degree it takes away a lot of risk. It took me 15 years to get THAT. It was one day I just thickened a piece, I felt it, put it down and I went… 'I did that'. I knew that it was cool. I then went to all my pieces in the workshop and knew where it had to come down and how much. Suddenly I had it! It was like a miracle. I was almost in tears. It was like an amazing breakthrough for me. I felt like I had become enlightened, because I was enlightened at that point. My load was lighter in terms of knowledge. It had taken me 15 years to accumulate. Now I can do it all the time. I can take anything and know what to do with it. Matt and Colin don't have that. They have made 6 guitars between them and they have been nice guitars, but they've been nowhere near mine. Yet they used my wood, worked in my workshop, on my machines. I even helped them a little bit, but they had to work it out for themselves. There is an x-factor that you cannot give to someone. You get that for yourself and that's scary. The scary thing of this world is speed. People want things now. Electric cards all over the world. Everything is digital. It is frightening. That comes back to the Cedar and Spruce we spoke of earlier. One of the reasons Cedar is quite nice, is that it speaks quicker. People don't even want to wait for a year for their guitar to start speaking. They want it within three weeks or so sometimes and Cedar will do that for you.

I heard that it does not last as long, though?

That is bull. That is an old wife's tale and I don't believe in it. You still find Cedar chests build by the Egyptians in good condition. It is a fabulous wood for preservation against bugs and termites and stuff like that. People say it doesn't last that long. I think it is because the guitars weren't built properly in the first

place. My braces on all my Cedar tops are always Spruce as well. That may be one thing. I've got Cedar tops out there that must be 25 years old and they are still going and still sound fabulous.

Do you prefer Cedar?

I prefer Cedar for my classics, yes. I find it warmer and I leave it a little bit thicker, so it's brighter. That is the trick in building a classic - how to bring the brightness out. Having said that, I just got back from northern Italy where I bought some fabulous Spruce and I just made a guitar for Earl Klugh, the great jazz guitarist, and he's raving about it.

What percentage of your guitars is classicals as opposed to steel-strings?

That depends on my orders. Last year I sent… let me see…8 guitars to America, 10 went to Japan and 8 went to the U.K. and those 8 were classics. That's roughly a third. Japan just came back to me last week and they want an Earl Klugh model from me and I'm looking to promote my classical guitars. In fact, I will probably be going to the Frankfurt fair next year and promote my classical guitars with a chamfer. I designed a classical with a chamfer and it makes a big difference. They really are something special to play on. My classics have competed against Smallman and competed against some serious makers out there and I just had a marvelous review in the 'classical guitar' magazine in England. They did a lovely write-up on me with pictures and everything. That made me realize that there is space for all of us. There is space for Mervyn's guitars, for Smallman's, for the Maingard guitars…. There is actually a lot of space in the world. There are enough people who will take the one over the other.

What is your average output per year?

28 to 30 guitars.

That is quite a lot.

Yes, it is, but the other thing about being mechanical is that you use jigs and design new jigs to make your work go faster and cut out parts. It then gives you the time to focus on the sound. I spend hours on the soundboard, tapping and listening and carving the braces. I spend a lot of time on that. The rest of the work is just wood work. It is just gluing one piece to another piece accurately with the correct contour; the correct body shape….That's all that it is. There is nothing more than that. Complex angles - the way the neck comes in and the way the head stop goes back. There are many complexities involved. There is no room for error, especially if you are selling in Japan. They are extraordinarily meticulous. Your guitars get scrutinized like you won't believe.

Are there any qualities (aesthetic or soundwise) that make your guitars special or that you strive for?

Yes. To be in the league that I'm in, first of all volume is important. My guitars have a lot of power. My trebles are bright. I have been told that I have a Spanish sound. That is what they tell me. My guitars in England are selling at 4000 pounds (R50 000) a guitar and they are ordering, so that is the league that I'm in, but please don't mention money and prices in your writing. I work quite hard on my advertising. That is gold - interviews are free advertising. You work at that. If I do something special I give the newspapers a tinkle and they send somebody over to take a few pictures. Advertising is very important - especially if you've got a good product. I've had some lucky breaks. For example 3-4 years ago I was in London delivering a lovely herring bone Brazilian Rosewood back and sides made in the style (a copy) of a 1936 Martin. I was in the shop delivering it to the shop keeper at the 'vintage guitar emporium' in London, when a guy walked in. I was still unknown in the world back then. Very well known in S.A., but in the rest of the world I was unknown. He walked in as I took the guitar out of the box. Shows you how life is. I just flew in the day before. I could've missed him by half an hour or something. It was just synchronicity that this guy should walk in right there and then. He looked at the guitar and said that it is a fabulous guitar. He asked if he could play it. I looked at the shop keeper and said that I'm just delivering it to a customer who placed a custom order. The owner of the shop said that it's OK for him to play it and he did. He was a very fine guitar player. He said that it was an unbelievable instrument and wanted to know who made it. I replied that

I made it. He looked at the label that said Maingard and asked me 'Who are you?' I said that I'm Marc Maingard from S.A. He said that he's never heard of me, but that that guitar was something else. I asked him who he was. He turned out to be the editor of 'guitar magazine' in U.K. and Europe. You don't get a gap like that too often in your life. He loved the guitar. We had an instant rapport. I kept in touch. He had just had a baby, so when I returned to S.A. I sent a little African toy to him. Two months later he phoned me and said that the magazine is doing an article for the January 2003 edition. They were doing a profile on what they thought are the 8 or ten best guitars in the world and he wanted me to feature. The article was called 'dream guitars'. They asked me to send them a guitar. I phoned my friend in London and he suggested that I don't send the guitar, but deliver it personally. He said that 'You are Maingard' and that I should come see the bloke face to face. I did that. I got a beautiful review of my guitar. Within three months of this article the guys from 'acoustic guitar' wanted to find out about me and suddenly I was on the map. Just like that I went from a business that was almost floundering, battling in a S.A. economy that was almost falling apart, to having agents in America. Japan came on board. They all looked at my work. I did put up a beautiful web. That's one of the secrets today, I think, of running a successful business - to have a fabulous web. I just had a writer friend of mine from the U.K. proof read my new web. He has corrected lots of things. That is important, because we are digital and it's made a huge difference in my business. Anybody can take a look at your work from anywhere and it cuts out a huge load of schlep.

You mentioned the volume of your guitars as a characteristic you are proud of. What else?

Oh yes. Let's get back to that. The volume….balance between treble and bass. Of course the woods that I use for the backs and the sides make a huge difference. I'm working quite a lot with African Blackwood now and the sound of an African Blackwood guitar….to me it is one of the best timbers in the world.

I thought you don't really use indigenous woods?

I didn't until I started rethinking African Blackwood. The woods make a big difference because your backs and your sides are reflectors. What also makes a difference is that I only use double sides on my classics. It is laminated two pieces. I have Rosewood on the outside and I have Canadian Cypress on the inside. It is double side laminated. When I first saw this, is when I repaired the very, very best Ramirez guitar. All the top guys use double sides. The reason for that is this: when you strum a guitar the soundboard obviously excites and it bounces up and down. If your sides are not rigid, you lose vibrations down the side. I saw a picture 30 years ago of a guitar and of a violin. They called it craylin photography whereby the vibrations are represented by colours of different intensities. The guitar with the single side was like a house falling down - how much the sound vibrated. The double side guitar was hugely different and about 80% improved. As soon as I started using double sides with my guitars they went from nice guitars to rather fantastic. It made a big difference to the sound. Obviously I changed my bracing slightly to compensate, but that made a difference. I also changed the depth of my body. Double sides really improve the sound. I have done my first steel-string now using a double side. The difference is a note. A lot of guitar builders don't know what they are supposed to be hearing. For me as a player, what I would like to hear with a note and what I don't like about a lot of other guitars, is the sound comes out at you in a jumble. It comes in a big mass of music. With my guitars you will find that the notes are separate. The edges of my notes, when they decay, are not wrapped up in the others. There's a lot more separation, so when you play my guitars, there is a lot of separation. My guitars are also very accurately set up. The intonation is perfect with my guitars. You will see all my bridges are slightly compensated, so the intonation is spot on. I have been blessed with perfect pitch, so that helps to hear. I only realized that about two years ago. We needed a note in the work shop and I sang a note. It was a perfect E. I have good ear. I don't know if I really have perfect pitch or what it really means, though, but apparently you can hold notes really well. So the guitars have got volume, clarity, good separation, nice basses and crisp trebles.

Does the Cedar or Spruce have an effect on this?

Yes. The Cedar has got a warmer sound across the board; whether it is a steel-string or a nylon-string, you get a warmer sound. Having said that, when I join my steel-string on the twelfth fret, I get a very warm sound - even with Spruce. That has got to do with joining frets at the twelfth fret. Martin changed the neck from the steels and pushed them 2 frets out so that the body joins at the fourteenth fret. The bridge is then

20mm higher up, closer to the middle of the guitar. It's like throwing a stone into a pond. If you throw the stone into the middle of the pond, you'll get a perfect ripple right across the pond. If you throw it on the edge you get a ripple that goes sideways out. That is exactly how I work with the guitars and how I work with the bridges and braces and stuff like that.

Anything or anybody that you can describe as a big influence in your guitar building career - luthiers, players or otherwise?

I would say that the influences were more other makers. I could hear what I wanted. The question was: 'how do I get that sound for myself?'. As a steel-string guitar player myself, I always wanted to get that sound for myself. That is how I evolved as a guitar player. I am now at a point where when I play, I don't want to hear a mass of messed up notation. In '97 I was invited to exhibit at the Hillsburg festival in San Francisco. There were a hundred other makers from all over America and quite a few from overseas. I was amazed at the quality of the guitars. I was horrified, though, over how bad most of them sounded. They all looked amazing and fantastic, but there were very few that sounded great. Those few are exactly the guys I see that are running professional webs and are considered the top makers in the world. The rest of the guys are nowhere, because the most difficult thing is to get the sound. The easy thing to do and which a lot of guys are doing in this country, is to build beautiful looking guitars, but soundwise they just don't crack it. The sound and how you arrive at the sound is critical. So my influences were other guitar makers. Guys like Jose Oribe - a Spanish maker from San Diego, Southern California. A beautiful guitar maker. A huge name in guitar. As big, if not bigger, than Ramirez amongst people who know. He makes classical guitars in the Spanish tradition. He must be about 75 now. He doesn't make much anymore. He sold me a lot of wood that he doesn't need anymore a year ago when I was overseas. The other guy that impressed me was Santa Cruz guitars. I studied with them for a year. The Martins, of course, are fabulous sounding guitars. Their new guitars are horrible, though, and don't crack it anymore. They are up against what we are all up against - what I am up against. They get their woods sent to them. They are all mass produced. There lays the difference. Why are people prepared to pay $2000-$3000 or more and come to me? It is the attention to detail. They get a guitar from me that sound like that. That's what they hear, that's what they get. It is not a hit and miss. I was in London a few weeks ago and I played 8-10 Martins and they all sounded rubbish. They sounded like good quality Japanese guitars of the 70's. I've been with Martin I worked with them and studied with them. I know their techniques. I hung around with some of the older guys there and those old guys are not there anymore. It's a factory production.

Do you think the older guys' leaving is where they lost it?

Yes, they lost it there, because….let me tell you a story. A good guitar relies on fabulous timbers. It's a combination of fabulous timbers. A good cook….I cook a lot and my mother is a good cook. She makes a stew, I make a stew with different ingredients and they will both be good stews. It's a blend. You can take amateur makers and have them select the best wood that I've got here. I'll invite them and their guitars will sound different from mine. They won't have that top, top quality. That is the magic bit that we all hold between the thumb and forefinger. That is my thing - to make the tree sing again, is a magic little piece. What happened is that a friend of mine wanted a guitar about twenty years ago and the agents of Sigma guitars were here. He wanted a dread naught guitar and they had 40 guitars here. They had 40 of the same model in stock, because they supplied the whole of S.A. They were very popular and were R300 a guitar. I went through 40 guitars. I got it down to 3, 2 and finally to 1. This one guitar of R300 would have stood next to one of my R30 000 guitars, no worries. The reason is that the soundboard was beautiful. The bracing….whoever braced it didn't even know, they just carved it as per normal, but it was the right amount of carving for that top. That guitar was stunning. That is what is required. That is why I spend so much time selecting my soundboards. I have just spent hundreds of thousands….if you look at my new web site, go to my wood visit. You'll see Rivolta. In fact, my whole visit is there. I selected woods overseas that were cut specifically for me and was busy drying, so that when I return in a few years' time they will be ready. I selected these woods with Fritz Calitz. That is the degree to which I'm going to, to get what I want. I searched through thousands of pieces of wood - enough to make a grown man cry. My son, Nathan, came with me. I spent two nights in every place. The story on how I selected is all on my web.

What kinds of wood do you use?

I use mainly Spruce, but varieties of Spruce. I use Sitka Spruce. I use Engelmann, which is not a Spruce, but it looks like a Spruce. I use them for different purposes. I also use Bulgarian Spruce, as well as Spruce from Russia - a Caucasian Spruce Redwood. It is light pink in colour and a beautiful Spruce. I use various Spruces from the Alps. I use a northern-Italian Spruce where I have a supplier from the same area where Stradivarius got his woods, out of that exact same forest. I fly to Italy to hand select the wood myself. That is one of the reasons my guitars are expensive. People are shocked when they hear of a R35 000 guitar, but they don't realize that even some of the very best guys just have their woods sent to them, whereas I go there myself. I spend weeks. It's a lovely thing to do. I'll give you a saying that you can use. It's a saying by Fernando Pessoa. He said: The traveler is the journey. What you see is not what you see, but who you really are. That is my philosophy in life. I'm not a catholic or anything. I'm a universal man. My belief is that the universe will provide. This is my journey. This is who I am. The traveler is the journey. I am this person speaking to you. I am completely the guitar man. I do everything for my guitars. I travel and select logs. I go to forests to select trees.

What do you look for in the woods that you select?

I look for the grain to start with. I also rely on the knowledge of the wood cutters. The guys I deal with are fourth generation wood cutters. I spent almost a year trying to find these people before I went to visit them. *Herr* Gleissner and *Rivolta* and *Bachmann* and *Kollitz*.
I rely on their information passed on from generation to generation and what they tell me when we are looking at the trees and what I have learned. I also tap the wood and listen to the tone. How this came about is about four years ago, when I started using up my wood and I started having wood sent to me like everybody else and I was sending wood back all the time. I realized that I would have to go and look for myself. I knew that I knew enough by then to do it. So I started going for myself. Going to Italy, going to the forests, going with the people and its wonderful! You spend a week with people. You may only buy 40 pieces, but they are so happy to have you there and they love wood. I love wood just like Mervyn loves wood. That is one area where Mervyn and I have always connected. Die hout gogga het hom ook goed gebyt. I can feel that and I know that. That is why I can excuse all Mervyn's bullshitting ☺. His unreliability and his scrambling and everything else that he does. I love him, because of the fact that he has a passion for what he does. He does his thing and he believes in it. His new design did not come out of nothing. It came out of a place of thinking and of knowing.

Those are all the Spruces that you use. What about the other woods?

With the Cedars I use Western Reds, mainly. I don't use any other Cedars. I've tried the German Cedars and I don't like them. I prefer the Western Red Cedars. They come out of Connecticut up north towards Canada, they tell me on the New York side. Of course you get Cedars on the east and west coast. You get the big Redwood trees. I've used Redwood - very nice for steel-string guitars. It is a little bit sharper and brighter than the Cedar. A little bit more prone to tonal inflections. A little bit more colour. A little bit more inventive. You can find many words to describe wood. It is more colourful in a way and contains more layers. I can get more tonal variations out of Redwood than from Western Red Cedar. When selecting a specific kind of wood for a guitar, I am led by what the client wants. I just had a guy email me now. He is a finger picker and he is looking for separation. I said there is only one wood to go for and that is African Blackwood. It will give you the most stunning tonal separation I have ever come across. The change from trebles to mids to bass is phenomenal. It is extraordinary subtle, but it's there. You can hardly hear it. It just shifts across like an automatic gear box. Other guitars are often too blended and you don't get that subtlety.

What woods do you use for the back and sides?

Brazilian Rosewood, African Blackwood, Cocobolo (from pacific Mexico) and Indian Rosewood. Those are the four main ones I use. I've done a bit of Maple. It is very dry. A lot of wood I buy raw and cut it myself. I've got a big band saw. I studied band saw technique in America something like 30 years ago with a master band sawyer, knowing that I was going to come back to S.A. where none of this knowledge existed. How to cut a piece to an accuracy of 4.5 mm, you know. Your whole band saw has to be

remodeled. You have to take off your arms, take out your table and take it to engineers. They reskin them and reset them. I depend on nobody and I trust all that comes through me. If I'm not happy with a soundboard, I will leave it in the humidity cupboard till the next day. That is something I've learned to do. If something goes wrong, don't deal with it immediately. Wait for the next day, sleep on it and think about it, send a letter or make a phone call. It is the same with wood. The same principles apply. You have to be patient with wood. For the tree to sing again you have got to have the patience to go with it.

What do you use in terms of tuning pegs and machine heads?

I use the best. I use Waverley. They are the second best, I would say, I the world. They are mass produced, but hand mass produced. They are hand engraved and hand cut. They really are gorgeous. They are very expensive. You are talking $200 a set. There are better ones than these. There are the ones from England called….I think Robson, but he is very unreliable in delivery. I can't deal with that, because I've got clients waiting. My Japanese agents told me in New York last year that they appreciate my reliability in delivery so much, because they are used to deliveries of guitars that are months overdue. Why I'm getting custom work and repeat work from Japan is because I'm so reliable. Occasionally I might be three weeks late, because of weather changes and the like, but the bottom line is delivering on time, or at least within three weeks of the due date. I am accurate to within three weeks and I normally know halfway through the cycle whether I'm going to be late. Something might happen like a back will crack and there's nothing I can do about it. A piece of Brazilian Rosewood might look and sound great, when I put it through the machine it looks great and then halfway through it, it cracks. That is one of the problems with Brazilian Rosewood and African Blackwood. They are very temperamental. They are not stable. Guys who own Brazilian Rosewood guitars know that. Five years down the line little indentations might appear and change. Because I know that, I actually secure all those places before I glue it up. I run a cinnamon water solution I get from America over it to fill all those possible future cracks. These are some of the tricks you learn, working with Brazilian. I've got a reputation for being good with Brazilian. One of the reasons is because I've been working with it for so many years. It does have an aura about it. It is a wonderful tone wood and it is beautiful. You just cannot deny the beauty of a wood like that. There's no other wood that looks like it and to go with its looks is that beautiful tone. It's a hard wood and that's what you need. You need a reflective surface for your sound to bounce off. That is why the double sides work on the classics. They hold the side rigid and so the soundboard, when it vibrates, the note is purer. It's all that it does.

What machine heads and tuning pegs do you use for your classics?

I use the Sloane hand made. They are very expensive, but that is part of the joy of what I do. I only deal with the very best. My machine heads, my timbers, my bridge pins….whatever I do, it comes from the very best makers on the planet. My pearl inlays and other materials are all the very best that money can buy. When a person buys from me, they are making an investment. That is one of the reasons people like Brazilian Rosewood. I can remember selling Brazilian wood guitars for R6000 about 30 years ago. That same guitar today is worth about R60 000. It's just the Brazilian Rosewood. In your lifetime you will almost see the wood become extinct. I've been very lucky in finding some bundles of Brazilian and I actually still know where there is some, but that is a secret. I actually literally took a bond on the house to buy it. All over the world guys are struggling to get hold of Brazilian. When you actually cut the wood open it is a nightmare. There is such a lot of it that you can't use, because it is full of cracks. A lot of it is scrap. I took a bond on the house and bought the whole bundle on spec.

I read in an article a few years ago that you don't use indigenous woods, because they are unstable?

That was true then, but it was before I came across African Blackwood. I was relying on Mervyn to kind of advise me. I saw a couple of Mervyn's indigenous wood guitars with cracks in them, initially. I think he sorted it out now. *Kiaat* is not a bad wood. I have made two guitars using *Kiaat*. It results in a sort of Mahogany sounding guitar. I, though, cannot compete in the world with a guitar that sounds like a Mahogany guitar, unless somebody wants that tone specifically. It is a very open sound, lovely for blues guitars - a lekker wood, you know. Pretty and nice. Another good African wood is Babinga - African Rosewood. It's a very nice wood and comes from Zimbabwe/Mozambique. Guys worldwide are using Babinga as an alternative. There again I find that Babinga didn't give me that crispness. My first concern is

always sound and I'm looking for a particular note and any wood that I use must give me that. I've built a reputation and people buy from me, because they love my sound. I just got an agent now in America and we are parting company, because I'm working through other agents now, but he said that my guitars are some of the best he has held in his hands. He deals with Jeff Truguard, Kevin Ryan and all the big guys. I just received the following letter as well:
'Marc. I have just received your concert number 187 from Mike Joyce. What an exceptional instrument. This is the one I've been looking for and I've seen them all - Ryan, Olsson, Tippens, Simoge, McAllister, Walker – Gee, has it been that many? This is by far the finest. My compliments to the chef and Mother Nature'. I just put out an ad in the American magazine 'acoustic guitar' that contains this and other letters written to me over the 30 years of building guitars from different clients. I actually started in '72, but 75 feels like the right date. Here is a letter from Earl Klugh. He loves his guitar. I made him a beautiful guitar. I can look back on my life and feel fairly comfortable with what I've achieved as a businessman and a guitar builder and combining the two. I go for a surf when I feel like it, work some more in the evening, you know.

What do you think of the S.A. climate in terms of guitar building?

Cape Town is perfect for me. Specifically Scarborough, because it is the driest spot in the Cape. We get the least rainfall here in Scarborough, so even though I'm by the sea, it is perfect for me. I also have a humidity cupboard. That's where the guys blow it. They work in Jo'burg or Pretoria and when they are working at, say, a 10% humidity and send the guitar out, it's just going to explode. They have to humidify in stead of dehumidify. Same with the guys in Durban. If you build there, you need to take moisture out so that their guitars are built in that environment, because good owners of good guitars know about dehumidification. You can look on the web and see that there are heaps of dehumidification equipment out there that you can put in the soundhole, for example.

Do you use standard construction methods and bracing techniques?

No, not standard at all. It is based on the Torres pattern. Fan bracing - seven strut fan. I have two extra basses at the bottom, though, and one long one that holds my trebles tight. It goes three quarters of the way across the lower bout. Where I got that from is when I did my repairs, I noticed that all the loud guitars, especially the ones made by an excellent and well known Japanese guitar maker, that I had to repair because they were cracking in Jo'burg, lacked soul. There is a fine balance between volume and soul. I was very pleased when some of the top English players like Ray Burley and Amanda Cook, who were both sponsored by my agents in London and who play on my guitars, said that my guitars had a very Spanish sound with a lot of volume and soul. Jonathan Crossley was a very good player for me. He was sponsored by me and played on my Maingard guitars. He won the ATKV playing on one of my guitars and he was playing against some hectic people. He was playing in a big hall of 800-1000 people and you could hear him to the back row. I moved there to check the volume and without amplification I could hear every single note. Charl Lamprecht likes my guitars. I met him in Grahamstown in 1988. He was playing a Ramirez and he loved my guitars straight off. I said that he could borrow them. He wasn't used to people like me who would be willing to let him play on the guitars without knowing him. He borrowed my two guitars, a ten string, I think, and a six string and he said people came to him afterwards and said that they could hear the guitars at the back where they were sitting. I rely on players' feedback and I knew then that I was doing the right thing. I love Charl; he is a very special person. I don't know whose guitars he plays on these days, but I must have sold 15 guitars to students of his. Others to Abri Jordaan's students, Ron Dowland….quite a few guys up there have bought guitars from me. In those days I was mainly making classics. When I was in S.A. I was mainly making classics and, funnily enough, I was actually taking old Mervyn's work away from him right in his own back yard. Mervyn was unreliable, you see, and the teachers didn't want to order from him, because they couldn't rely on him and from one guitar to the next it would change so drastically. Mervyn was his own worst enemy in terms of his lack of commitment and to be really professional, and I'm the opposite. My birth sign is Leo, I'm very professional. I know what I'm talking about. I study, I read books and I go overseas. I'm completely immersed. That's why I don't do violins anymore, because they are in another world completely on their own. I have dedicated my life to exploring the guitar. That's what I have done.

These days, though, you lean more towards the steel-strings?

Yes, much more, because the market dictates, but my nylon-string will hold its own in any concert hall. Amanda Cook played in the Wigmore hall with an orchestra using one of my guitars, so my guitars are now being played with orchestras. I know that if you came to me and asked me to build you a classic, I could build one of superior quality, so I'm not worried about that. Right now my concern is running an effective business, making a fabulous instrument which is top of the line, which is why I chose not to go bigger. I could choose to move to town. Imagine if I was somewhere in central Cape Town right now. I could have 5 guys working for me. I could be producing a middle of the line guitar. There is a huge gap in the S.A. market for a R15 000-R18 000 guitar. I can't afford to make it in that gap. If something like a war happens overseas and I'm forced to fill that gap in S.A., I don't have a problem. There is a huge gap there. I could start repairs. My phone rings all the time and 90% of the time it's for repairs. Guys are begging me to do repairs, so I could run a very effective repair business doing everything like changing the strings. You come to a point in your life, and fortunately so for me, where I financially have made enough of a go of it. Going overseas was the best thing I ever did. Starting to explore the overseas market and getting that chance encounter happen to me in that shop, was God's gift to me. If I'd been a Christian, I would have blessed Jesus. If I'd been a Mohammedan I would have blessed Mohammed. Whatever it is, I just thank the universe that it was seen to be so that I should be at that right place at the right time. Bless whoever you want, I just give thanks to the universe that I was there, but I have already sold 5 guitars in that shop. I was already exploring the overseas market; you know what I'm saying. It wasn't just pure luck. I already worked very hard. The way I work in London is to cart 4 guitars around in a trolley and carry one more in my hand and go around from shop to shop. I've done my leg work and I've been on those busses. I've done my dues. I've dragged those guitars up and down tube stations to go to all the guitar shops in London, Bristol and all over the place. I worked very hard and that is what is required. None of the Jo'burg luthiers would do that. I've told them to go overseas and do a course or something, seeing that they all have bucks being ophthalmologists and what not. Go and do a 3-month or 6-month course over there. The traveler is the journey. Always for me I come back to that.

Rodney Stedall just went to America for the American Guild of Luthiers' conference. He learned a lot and is very excited about French polishing in particular.

That's good to hear. I've told him before to fly me up there the next time he has a Christmas party and have all the questions ready. I don't have secrets, Rudi. I really don't. If you want to know how I do my braces, I will show you the pictures. I've got the pictures on my web, but I know that you've got to tap and listen and know how much to cut off. That's the bottom line. That is the essence of it. When I was working with my uncle, who was a French chef in Paris, my food would always come out slightly different and I would watch him and sometimes he would put the bread in a different corner of the oven. I would ask him why he puts the bread in that specific corner and he would say that that oven requires the bread to go in that corner and it doesn't work in other places. It's the same with the guitar. You need to know what that specific piece of wood requires to know what to do with it. That is what I'm talking about. Once you've got it between your thumb and forefinger and you're listening to it, you know when and where you need to remove wood from the braces.

Can you tell me a little about the finishing of your guitars?

Yes, sure. Look, I think the French polish is the ultimate finish. There's no doubt about it. We are in a world, however, where people just don't know how to care for that kind of a finish. Also, French polish doesn't like heat. If you just put your arm on a French polished guitar, it will change. You can see that with French polish guitars. I'm an expert French polisher. It was part of my training as a cabinet maker. I used to be able to French polish a grand piano top and you have to be really good to do that. It is a graft and there are secrets to it. Not secrets as such, but you need to know exactly where to rut some oil on the rubber and the like. In fact, I don't know if I'm an expert anymore, because I haven't done it in such a long time, but it is not something that you lose. So many guitars that are French polished have come back and the guys have wanted a proper finish on them.

Why do you say then that French polishing is the ultimate?

Because it is so thin. Having said that, I use a varnish that comes from Germany and consists of a two part mix and when I scrape out to fit my bridge, I'm almost sure that it's not much thicker than French polish. It's a miracle kind of a finish. It's is, unfortunately, quite toxic to use and you've got to use a mask. It can cause cancer and it is nasty stuff. It is quite a paradox for me to see that French polish on the one hand is completely harmless, apart from inhaling the fumes of mentholated spirits and the other varnish that's so toxic to use. It sprays so thin and it's hard. You can put a hot cup of coffee on that and it doesn't even leave a mark. I also think it's one of the reasons why I have a good sound. It's part of why I have such a crisp sound, because my varnish doesn't hold my sound back. I know the guys in Pretorea and worldwide mainly use nitrocellulose. That stuff takes forever to go really hard. It never goes really hard. It's always slightly rubbery and it shifts and cracks. If you look at old guitars with cracks on it, it's nitrocellulose. The German varnish I use exclusively.

What are your thoughts on the whole S.A. luthiery industry?

I believe that as South Africans we have as yet hugely undeveloped talent, but I believe that South Africans need to recognize that we don't need to reinvent the wheel here. There are people that have gone before us and it would be wise to go and train and study with them. That is in a nutshell how I see us moving forward as a country on every level. To bring it down to luthiery - I'm glad that you tell me that Rodney has gone overseas, because that is what I did. I went and sought out the top masters in the world. It is such a beautiful thing to aspire to. Just to be in the presence and the energy of one of the masters in his field on the planet is such an experience. That is what I did. What also then happens to you as a person is that you are not so individualized anymore. I realize that I'm one of many people that share a huge passion for this thing. I'm not just some weirdo. People ask me if I don't get lonely working at the bench for hours and hours. I hear in their voice that they would be lonely doing this and would miss their T.V.'s. I don't even have a T.V. I haven't got the time for that crap. With all due respect to anyone who might enjoy watching T.V. I've got better things to do. I read books, I play music, I focus on my guitars and woods and I look at stuff like that. I believe we've got big talent here in S.A., but there is a lack of traditional expertise. There is a lack and I don't think they see the magnitude of it. Maybe for a hobby it is cool to just bumble along out of books and get ideas or look at the S.A.G.L. mails. That drives me up the creek. I see all the mistakes they are making and there is a part of me that doesn't like to just give it away. That's not because I'm tough or hardcore, I believe you've got to earn it. You need to earn that respect from the universe. You respect that tree and feel that passion for that wood. I cry and get emotional even now when I see a tree being cut. It hurts me in my being. I feel it, the tears come to my eyes. Even an ordinary Pine tree. So for me, I'm a wood person. I feel passionately about it. Every piece is a tangible part of something. Some of these trees are hundreds of years old - these Brazilians. They've experienced the energy of the planet. They've experienced the world wars, the Genghis Kahn's, the misery of the world. I feel that. So to answer your question, South Africans need to spend a bit of money. That's the other side of the coin. They need to be less like woosies, you know. They need to get some kind of direction. One of the things I do is run men's groups. I work with men that have been abused, bruised and wounded in life. Part of what I try and give in life is my passion. People tell me that I'm so passionate and it's so lovely being around someone like that. I inspire people. Very few people come in here to buy a guitar and don't buy a guitar. Part of my passion just captures them and they see what it is about. People need to work together. That is what is wrong with our rugby. People get changed too much. My son toured Argentina with his rugby team and there I saw the value of a team being formed and experiencing things together. They came back and beat every team in Cape Town and they were loosing before they went, just because of the spirit built. Wood and guitars are like that. So I think guys in S.A. need to start understanding that they need to visit more. In stead of celebrating or visiting with their wives in Rome, they need to visit with their wives a wood supplier. See where the wood comes from. The traveler is the journey. I came back to that again. That is my motto in life. I am that and I give that to you. I don't know what you are doing with your life. I don't know anything about you, but I give you that saying. Be who you are. That is the most important thing that you can do. If you're not happy with something, get out of it. Trust whoever it is you kneel down to and trust that it works for you. It's about faith. South Africans need to have the faith that they can do it. I've seen some of Rod's work. He can do it. Hans van den Berg - lovely. He's good and there is a lovely feel. He could do with working in my shop with me for a few months. He would be Cracker Jack! I like him, because he's committed and would like to do better. The other side of the coin is that South Africans are very brand

orientated. What needs to shift here is the guitar shop owners. They need a klap. On one hand they were good for me; on one hand they were bad for me. They were bad for me in the sense that they refused to take my guitars and offered me so little money for the guitars; I couldn't even feed my family. Where they were good for me is by refusing me, they forced me to go overseas and look elsewhere to sell my guitars. I'm that kind of a person. Hans may not be that kind of person. I'm outward. I surf hard being a competition surfer. I know that the winner is not decided in the first heat. Even with fishing; sometimes you're out there the whole day and catch nothing, but a 'boer maak 'n plan'. I think that South Africans need to make a plan. They need to get the information. They don't need to sit here and struggle like what Rod's doing and I don't mean any disrespect. He started the guild and I see some of the guys' letters going back and forth and they are trying this and that and some of the things they are doing is ridiculous. They are going to waste so much time. Every now and again I'll say 'guys, you don't have to do it', like trying to dome their convex shapes. What they don't seem to realize is that if you work with a humidity cupboard, your guitar will naturally dome by the string pulling. When I carve my linings they are all at an angle, they are not square. I would say 90% of steel-string makers in the world today work in dome shapes. I still work on a flat pattern, but I have other little tricks that I do. That you only get from 30 years of experience and going to the big boys. I formed beautiful relationships with the masters. It's about networking; it's about spending some money. South Africans can be quite tight. They would rather buy a car than spend $2000 to do a course. I believe we've got the people here. There's a guy called Vorster out in Stellenbosch. He is a SABC camera man, but he is passionate about what he does. He could go far. The challenge, though, is once you've got that info to keep the balance of feeding your family and making guitars, because they are so time consuming. Even now I spend 80 hours per guitar. That's a lot of graft. Then you shift it. For 25 years I was doing it all by myself. Then you shift and you are suddenly making 6 every 2 months, delivering every 3 months. You have got to get the orders in. I've got 2 guys working for me now, so my whole thing has shifted now. They rely on me, so I must take care of all their things.

You mention that you use a variation on the Torres fan bracing. What are your thought on lattice bracing, Smallman and the like?

I think the guitars lack soul. I've heard a few of them and they all have huge volume, but they have an edge to them that I don't like. They are very heavy and rely on very thick backs. Colin's lattice bracing guitars are very heavy. They feel like they are going to break your leg. I have no desire whatsoever to go that route. I've had 3 here that came in. One was a small repair, so I spent a lot of time looking at them. What I do like about them is the theory in the Smallman lattice brace that states that when you flex it, it flexes multi-directional. I don't like the fact that they don't last long. They really don't last long. A few years and the tops break. You are dealing with a very thin top, very thin bracing and a lot of money. Again, we are talking professionalism here. I've had guys compare my guitars to them and had mixed feedback. Some people say my guitars are way better than those and others say that the Smallman is better. Both of our guitars sell. Mine sell because they've got a warm, soulful, Spanish sound with a lot of volume with nice trebles and clarity and a good bass. His has a lot of volume that appeals to the guys who like that. I don't like the weight and I don't like the price. They are very expensive. One thing I learned at Santa Cruz with a guy called Bruce Ross, who I did the design with and also because I was doing violins, is that part of design is functionality. Something must be functional on different levels and I don't see lattice braced guitars as being very functional. They are quite heavy and that is what I don't like about Mervyn's guitars. They are quite weighty and out of balance. I know plugged in they are amazing, but unplugged they don't crack it for me. I'm quite an acoustic man. I'm into the boxes, not onto plugging them in. When I do fit pickups I fit state of the art. The pickups are worth thousands. Each string has its own little pickup. I have pickups made for me overseas. I only deal with the best. If somebody comes to me, they know they are getting the best that's available on the planet. The pickup that I put in Earl Klugh's guitar is like a hand made pickup. Each string had its own individual saddle piece under it. R.M.C. pickups from California. The top guys in the world use them for a good reason: they are very expensive. You pay R8000 for the pickup. What South African is going to pay that? But you plug that thing in and play and it's like an orchestra. It's another story and on a different level.

What are your ambitions or goals for the future and what do you see as your greatest achievement as a luthier?

I think my greatest achievement is having perfected a system of guitar making that I've been able to pass on to so far two people who have taken it and are doing well with it. They work to my identical system and do nothing different from me. They have made modifications that they have shown me and which I have approved. They were better than mine, which I love, because I'm not perfect and don't know it all. I can improve. I have reached a level, though, where I am moving out of the industry, which is why they are taking the business over from me. I will still be fully involved with what I do, but I would like somebody else to run the day to day maintenance of it. They are coming into a partnership with me in a few months. I am going more into men's work and psychology. I've been studying psychology and I'm going more into the humanitarian side and social work. Working one on one with people. I work with young and wounded men. At the moment I don't charge, but there will come a point where I will run weekends here. I'm moving this workshop to one as beautiful closer to Cape point, where Colin lives with his pregnant girlfriend. A similar space to this where there is water, sunshine and flowers and a beautiful ambience. The reason for the move is so I can get my peace back. I brought up 5 children - 3 of my own and 2 that I've parented. My two sons are both studying. One is doing business science and the other photography. My daughter is still at school. Her name is Lucinda. I've had a black child that I adopted and I put him through school. He came out a first team rugby player and cricket captain. He was my son Joshua's best friend and he was falling through the cracks. In a way I feel that that is the contribution I have made to S.A. I took a black person into my home. He lived here and it felt better than just giving money. He is now studying to be a teacher. Other ambitions are to start playing again. I've really let my playing slide. I made a CD last year of my work. I rehearsed for three months to get it ready and since then I've hardly touched a guitar. I fiddle around, I sit and I've forgotten a lot of words, even of my own songs. I was quite well known for all my work, in fact I was right up there with Steve Newman and Tony Cox. We played together, in fact. We were all very competent players. So I want to bring the music back into my life. Back to where it started. I want to simplify. I'm 56 now. More and more I'm simplifying what I want and what I owe to the planet. I want to run a small yoga studio here after I've moved the workshop. That is my call. I have a lovely girlfriend with 2 little girls. She lives in Constantia and I live here. That's how I kind of like it. Simplifying - not getting too caught up in things of life. I don't watch T.V., but if I want to see the Springboks play, I'll go down to the restaurant. I've been in this village for 30 years and I know everybody here. Rudi, if I can give you anything….but I think you've got it. Just try and have the most magic with whatever it is that you do. Don't wait 'till you get older. I've done it my whole life. I know people who are 70, but still not happy, because they've never done anything for themselves. Do stuff for you. Make yourself very important in your life. When you are first in your life, your wife, children and everybody else benefits from that. We all have a karma, a pattern to work out. I'm giving you good advice. My goals are to simplify, to concentrate on my music and consolidate my relationship with friends and my girlfriend and to spend even more time with my kids. When I went to Italy, I paid for my son, Nathan, who was in London, to meet me there and we had a great time in Italy. For two weeks we traveled around and spent time together, traveling to the different wood shops. That is what life is about. I don't have a lot of money and had to take out a bond to go overseas, but you can't put a price on it and you can't take that away from me. That's magic and parents need to see that. It's about praising God, praising the universe and asking for what you want. My goal is to continue to live a beautiful life with my kids and detangle myself from the guitar making business. My days are done here. My guitars are considered the best in the world amongst many people. I'm fitting into a group of 25 makers and we are the best on the planet. Better than that is so subjective. I don't need someone saying he is the best. 10 people are going to have 10 different opinions. They had this blindfold test at Petrus Gous' house. It was a stuff-up, as far as I am concerned. I was there. I couldn't even hear what my guitar sounded like. If you play the same piece 10 times, you are going to change and shift all the time. I wasn't convinced of the success of that experiment. It's a subjective thing and totally in the eye of the beholder. To answer your question, it is an inner voyage. There comes a time where you become enlightened. I don't say that in a small way and I don't say that in an egotistical way. Some guys are struggeling to find enlightenment. Enlightenment is a piece of immence self satisfaction. It's not about ego or arrogance. It's about achieving something and arriving at a certain place where you feel an immense sence within yourself of having done something. I got that when my babies were born. I delivered my children with a midwife here in this house. For me, that is the closest you can come to it. I was in tears. You must have had it in certain areas where you caught a fish or tied a perfect fly and you feel that is

enlightenment. For me, I'm trying to get that more and more. As I talk to you I'm having a very cool day. Many of my days are very relaxed. I'll sit by the river and have my breakfast. There's a form of enlightenment in all that. If you take the word enlightenment, it means to make lighter. So we don't need to carry the weights of the world or anybody else. I've given you my time, because I see that you have a passion. You went to see all the other luthiers and there's a part of me that says that you deserve my time. The universe demands that I respect you, because it is also a give and a take. I could be doing other things with my time, but I choose to do this, because it is a form of giving. What I said to you here is powerful stuff. There was a survey done in America a year ago and Richard Hoover of Santa Cruz guitars sent me an email a while ago, saying that there's been this big survey of all the guitar makers. It said that the 30 or so guitar makers that will survive and people talk about them in future, I was mentioned 3 times and Santa Cruz only once. People have said that Maingard guitars will travel through to 3000. That's a huge compliment. It's easy to go egotistical. The sense that I get is that it releases me to do something else now. To go into psychology and help men. I've been doing it for a couple of years now and have been quite successful at it. I feel that the world is screwed up because of men and men beating women and abusing even their kids. It's a whole other world on its own, which terrifies me, but one which I'm happy to walk into.

How heavily do you lean on planning and sketches?

I lean more heavily on my ear and the knowledge that exists between my thumb and my forefinger. That is my heaviest lean. I have done my designs. I don't need to redesign them. I know what works. I know that if, for example, you want a guitar to be a little bit brighter, I know that I'm going to choose a slightly different tap sound in the wood. Different woods have different tap tones. When I'm tapping and listening to wood I put the wood into 3 different categories - bass, mids and trebles. A lot of this information is on my web site, which you should check out to help fill in the gaps. I rely on my designs and I trust them. They work for me. What I shift is the dimensions of the body according to what you want. There are lots of little things I can do to change the sound totally intuitive. That's why only I can make my sound. The trick is to do that consistently. You can't be consistent using spring gauges, as far as I am concerned. The only way you can be consistent is when you trust yourself. That tells you something about me. As a person I trust myself. I trust the decisions that I make in my life. Part of what holds South Africans back, to come back to that topic, is fear. We don't get it in our education system. We aren't taught in our schools to be individuals. We are taught to be part of a big plan and that's dangerous.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH MERVYN DAVIS ON 4 NOVEMBER 2004 AND 24 JUNE 2005 AT BROEDERSTROOM

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 4 NOVEMBER 2004

Kort Biografie:

Ek is in Pretoria gebore. Hier gebly tot ek 7 jaar oud was. Toe het ons Oos-Kaap toe getrek (Queenstown) en ek het myskoolloopbaan daar voltooi (Hoërskool Langkloof) en gaan studeer by U.P.E. Argitektuur studeer waarvan ek die eerste vier jaar klaar gemaak het, maar het toe nie die finale tesis gedoen op die ou einde nie. En toe weermag toe en so het ek weer in Pretoria beland en het toe maar hier vasgehak en van toe af is ek maar hier.

Hoe het die belangstelling in ghitare begin?

Dit kom maar van kleintyd af. My pa het my vertel toe ek ‘n kind was, dat in die tweede wêreldoorlog hy in Italië beland het in ‘n krygsgevangenekamp en het toe vir homself ‘n mandolien gebou van ‘n teekis. Die soldaatwagte het vir hom ‘n ou teekis in die hande gekry. Al gereedskap wat hy gehad het was ‘n sekel se punt wat afgebreek het, wat hy toe as ‘n mes skerpgemaak het. Hy het die instrument voltooi en in ‘n ‘band’ gespeel in die gevangekamp. Hy het toe later ontsnap met die mandolien en het saam met partisane in die berge gebly en toe op ‘n solder van ‘n plaas weggekruip. Die mandolien het ongelukkig daar agtergebly.
Sy liefde kom ook van kleintyd af. Sy ouers het sy liefde gekweek. Die storie word vertel dat sy pa (my oupa) het viole gemaak op die plaas in Namakwaland. Het egter nooit die viole gesien nie. My pa het egter nooit instrumente gebou toe ek op skool was nie. Net daarvan gepraat. Ek het maar op my eie aangekarring en blikghitare begin maak. Ek het eers vir my ook ‘n mandolien gebou en het toe in St. 9 my eerste volgrootte ghitaar voltooi. Ek wou altyd ghitare gebou het. Was mal oor die klank van ghitare wat ek op die radio gehoor het. Het myself leer speel op my eerste ghitaar. Ek was in St. 9 toe Laurindo Almeida saam met KRUIK die land se skole getoer het. Hy het by ons skool kom speel en het ‘Herinneringe aan Alhambra’ gespeel. Dis die eerste maal wat ek dit gehoor het en dit het my absoluut aangegryp. Ek het so ‘n goedkoop, ‘cheap’ Gallo staalsnaar ghitaar gehad wat ek gewysig het, sodat ek nylonsnare kon opsit. Ek het myself toe ‘Alhambra’ geleer speel van ‘n bandopname wat ek van die radio af opgeneem het op daai ghitaar. Ek het later die bladmusiek in die hande gekry en toe die stuk ordentlik geleer speel nadat ek eers op my eie die tremolo tegniek bemeester het.
Daarna het ek vir my ‘n ordentlike klassieke ghitaar gebou. My eerste regte ghitaar. Ek het daai ghitaar ‘n paar keer herbou. Hy het ek op ‘n stadium by U.P.E (einde ’78), toe ek wou teruggaan na my ouers se nuwe huis toe (Potchefstroom), by ‘n pantjieswinkel gaan verkoop om petrolgeld te hê. Ek het hom verkoop vir R50. Ek weet waar hy is. Ek het die pantjieswinkel se kaartjie vir ‘n pel van my gegee, want ek het nie geld gehad om dit terug te koop nie. Hy het daai ghitaar gekoop en hy’s nou in die Kaap êrens. Dit is basies my eerste ghitaar. Ek het hom in 1971 gemaak.

Jy het op daai stadium nog nie voltyds ghitare gebou nie, nè?

Nee, maar die gogga was maar toe al in my gewees. Ek het nog studier, maar het elke vakansie as ek huis toe gegaan het, iets probeer maak. Ek het later een of twee bestellings begin kry terwyl ek in die koshuis was. Toe trek ek uit die koshuis (Unitas) uit in 1978. Ek trek toe stad toe - het in Sentraal gebly in Western Road. Toe het ek genoeg plek om ‘n ‘workshop’ te vestig. Ek was toe 4de jaar gewees. Toe gaan ek huis toe en vat al my gereedskap saam en daarna was dit ‘n kwessie van maande toe skop ek universiteit op.
Destyds was die vise-rektor Prof. Schoeman gewees. Ek het Filosofie sommer as ‘n ekstra vak geneem en hy was een van my dosente. Hy en Bert Olivier. Ek het met hulle meer gekuier as met die studente. Prof. Schoeman leen toe vir my sy bakkie en ek het vir die konservatorium ‘n kwotasie gegee op al die herstelwerk wat nodig was op hul instrumente. Daar was ‘n groot klomp viole en goed wat herstelwerk nodig gehad het. Ek het ook vir Howard Nock toe ‘n barokghitaar gemaak wat ek vir die universiteit gaan wys het om my werk bloot te stel en het toe die kwotasie vir die herstelwerk gegee. Prof. Schoeman het toe gesorg dat ek vooruit betaal word vir die hele kwotasie en het my sy bakkie geleen om daar noord van die Baai by Carbon Black verby by een of ander hout ‘recycle’ plek planke te gaan optel om ‘n werksbank te bou en het toe ook geld gehad om die hele werkswinkel goed toe te rus met ‘power tools’, ens., wat ek nie voorheen kon bekostig nie. Toe was ek sommer dadelik aan die gang en het al die orkes se strykstokke, ens.

begin herstel. Ek weet nie of jy vir Hillary Robinson (tjello speler) ken nie, maar hy en sy vrou was strykers in die 'Royal Philharmonic' gewees. Hy was al 'n ou man gewees en het vertel hoe hy vir John Williams tjello lesse gegee het in Londen. John Williams het altyd by lesse aangekom met 'n groot, ou jazz guitar en het vir Hillary gespeel net om die tyd om te kry en toe het hy al vir John Williams gesê hy sal nooit 'n tjellospeler wees nie. In elk geval, hy en sy vrou het baie werk verwys na my toe. Ek het daai tyd eintlik meer aan strykinstrumente gewerk as ghitare, maar ek het so stadig maar seker bestellings begin kry vir ghitare – staalsnare, ens.

Deesdae werk jy uitsluitlik op ghitare?

Ek werk van tyd tot tyd aan ander instrumente om aan die lewe te bly, maar daar is soveel ander eksperimente wat ek graag nog wil doen dat ek voel ek mors eintlik my tyd om ander goed te doen.

Wat sal jy sê is jou gemiddelde jaarlikse 'output'?

In al hierdie tyd wat ek gebou het, van reg van die begin tot en met 2003, sal ek sê die gemiddeld is 6 per jaar. Daarby het ek 'n geweldige klomp herstelwerk gedoen, soos wat die aanvraag maar vereis. Deesdae kan ek baie vinniger werk, want ek het nou 'jigs' vir hierdie nuwe ontwerp. Die aanvraag wissel maar nog steeds. Wat ek wel ondervind nou is dat ek baie meer staalsnaar bestellings kry. Ses teenoor die een nylonsnaar bestelling sover. Selfs twee basghitare. Die mark is net groter. Meer mense speel op staalsnaar ghitare. Klassieke ghitare is 'n baie klein, gespesialiseerde mark.

Het jy jouself geleer? Geen kursusse of iets bygewoon nie?

Nee. Het myself geleer. Ek was 'n paar jaar lank al 'n voltydse ghitaarmaker voor ek die eerste boek daaroor in die hande gekry het. Ek dink dit was 'n goeie ding gewees, want in daai aanvanklike stadium was ek onbeïnvloed gewees. Ek het van die begin af nie ge'copy' nie en het dadelik geëksperimenteer. Ek dink as jy onbewus is van die reëls gee dit jou 'n helse vryheid wat op goeie dinge kan uitloop.

Wie het die grootste invloed gehad op jou loopbaan as 'n ghitaarbouer?

John Williams. Die klank van sy vroeë opnames. Hy het op 'n 'Fleta' gespeel. As jy gaan luister na die klank van die 'Davis Classic' soos joune en jy luister na die klank van John Williams se vroeë opnames, sal jy hoor jou ghitaar het al daai eienskappe. Daai dofgeid wat 'n mens op 'n gewone klassieke ghitaar kry, het hulle op die 'mix' van sy opnames uitgewerk. 'n Lewendige klassieke ghitaar klink nie so nie. Die opnames het 'n helderheid in sy klank wat ek absoluut slaafs nagevolg het.
John Williams was absoluut my 'hero' gewees as 'n speler. Daar is net nie 'n gelyke vir hom nie. Sy skoongeid en 'timing' en klank is net ongelooflik. Mense sê hy is klinies, maar ek dink hy is nie. Hy is baie ekspressief, maar op 'n baie subtiele manier en dit is vir my wat klasieke ghitaar is teenoor flamenco.

Is daar huidiglik enige werkswinkels, kursusse of boeke vir beginner ghitaarbouers?

Kyk, die inligting is so maklik beskikbaar. Selfs voor die internet kon 'n mens katalogusse kry. Wêreldwyd het ghitaarbou gebloei. Ek het 1988 eerste maal Frankfurt toe gegaan en het daar ouens ontmoet. Hugh en Andrew Manson, wat omtrent my ouderdom is en in Engeland ghitare maak. Hulle het ook omtrent dieselfde tyd as ek begin en hul verhaal is ook omtrent dieselfde as myne. Mense het gedink hulle is half 'outcasts' - 'n mens bou nie ghitare vir 'n lewe nie. Die Mittenwald en Cremona skole vir viool maak bestaan nou al bitter lank, maar ghitaarmakers was maar 'n ongehoorde ding. Dit het egter gegroei en hulle kan dit bevestig. Hulle het baie goed naam gemaak en ek het geweet wie hulle is voor ek hulle ontmoet het. Ek het hulle werk in tydskrifte gesien. Die rede daarvoor is dat al die groot 'rock bands' en goed het daai tyd geblom, wat die staalsnare populêr gemaak het. Die punt wat ek maak is dat die bedryf wêreldwyd so gegroei het dat dit deesdae maklik is om materiaal en boeke te kry en met die internet is die kommunikasie soveel makliker, so wat inligting betref is dit maklik om vandag te begin.

Hoe sal jy jou ghitare beskryf? Is daar enige spesifieke kwaliteite waarna jy streef of spesifiek trots op is?

Ek dink dit kom terug na die John Williams punt toe. Dis wat ek probeer regkry in terme van klank en waaraan ek werk. Om al sy patenteerbare punte uit ‘n speler se oogpunt te verbeter. Uit ‘n speler se oogpunt sal ek sê my ghitare se speelbaarheid is verhoog. Die toegang wat jy het tot al die ‘frets’ op die nek. Die feit dat hy goeie volume produseer, wat beteken dat jou regterhand nie so hard hoef te werk aan projeksie nie. Ek dink vir ensemble spel is die ghitaar ook ideaal in terme van klank en toonkwaliteit. Die ‘trebles’ raak nie weg soos met ‘n gewone ghitaar nie. Die ander voordeel is ook dat die ‘Davis’ ghitaar baie minder ‘feedback’ gee wanneer dit deur ‘n ‘amplifier’ versterk word. Klankingenieurs het ook al vir my genoem dat die ghitaar baie maklik opneem.

Is hierdie nuwe onwerp jou grootste prestasie en waarop jy die trotste is?

Dis moeilik vir my om te sê. Ek sit nou al my tyd daarin, maar ek voel of ek nog net geraak het aan die ontwerp se moontlikhede. Ek dink ek het ‘n deurbraak gemaak in die sin dat ek die tradisie nou totaal en al gebreek het. Ek het myself losgemaak daarvan. Nie dat ek krities is t.o.v. tradisie nie, maar dié is nou ‘n nuwe wending wat ek gemaak het in die sin dat dit ‘n klomp deure vorentoe oopmaak, terwyl op die ou manier van dink is jy half vasgevang. So lief wat ek vir ‘n klassieke ghitaar is (en ek is) - dit is ‘n pragtige instrument met inlegwerk en als - wil ek dit nie meer maak nie. Daar is ouens wat dit net so goed of beter as ek doen en wat in die tradisie wil bly. So ek hoop my beste werk kom nog en dat ek my ‘crowning glory’ maak voor ek die dag doodgaan.

Watter ander SA ghitaarbouers val in jou kategorie in terme van eksperimentering en watter van hulle is meer tradisioneel?

Dis moeilik vir my om te sê. Ek ken nie almal se werk so goed nie, maar in al die jare wat ek Colin Cleveland ken, en dis nou al baie (hom ontmoet in 1979), het hy altyd by klassieke ghitare gebly. Anders as ek, wat baie ander instrumente gemaak het. In die klassieke konteks het hy altyd geëksperimenteer. Met dinge soos ‘bracing’ het hy altyd probeer om die klank beter te verstaan en ons het altyd daaroor gesels en ek het definitief van hom baie geleer. Ek hoop die situasie is wedersyds. Nou onlangs het hy met die ‘lattice bracing’ begin werk. Omdat sy ondervinding so lank en wyd is, is hy die ou wat die meeste te sê sal hê. Allistair Thomson het i.t.v. estetiese eienskappe eksperimenteer met Afrika motiewe in sy inlegwerk en hy het ‘n heel unieke styl wat vir my pragtig is. Wat die inheemse houte aanbetref, dink ek was ek en hy tot ‘n groot mate pioniers gewees en ek het basies op sy kennis in die begin gewerk. Ons het bosse toe gegaan en bome gaan afsaag met ‘n kettingsaag en met dit eksperimente gedoen, so hy het ‘n baie lang pad daar geloop. Wat die ander ouens nou doen……hulle het nou intussen bygekom. Marc Maingard, miskien, doen dit al amper so lank soos ek en Colin. Ek dink Marc hou hom hoofsaaklik by wat hy geleer het oorsee. Ek weet nie hoeveel hy eksperimenteer nie. Ek het nog nie baie na sy ghitare gekyk nie. Die ander ouens hier rond het elkeen ‘n unieke styl ontwikkel van wat ek sien, maar dis als visueel. Ek kan nie rêrig kommentaar lewer oor die klank nie, behalwe dat daar wonderlike instrumente gemaak word. Hoe eksperimenteel hulle egter werk, weet ek nie.

Dink jy daar kan meer geörganiseerde strukture wees tussen ghitaarmakers in SA?

Ek dink dit sal wonderlik wees as ons meer bymekaar kan kom. Daar is ek ongelukkig skuldig. Ek gooi glad nie my gewig in nie. Dis net van slap wees. In my gemoed ondersteun ek die gulde 100%. Ek dink hulle doen wonderlike werk.

Vind jy dat die ‘Davis’ ghitaar werk goed vir jazz?

Ja, ontsettend goed. Sy klank is helder en die hoofeienskap daar is die ‘separation of notes’ wat vir dissonansie baie goed werk. As mens daai groot ‘extended chords’ speel en jy het in die middel twee semitone langs mekaar, dit raak net nie weg nie. Mens hoor elke noot. Wat ek nou wil doen is om te kyk of ek binne die raamwerk van die nuwe beginsel weer by die klassieke klank kan uitkom, want slegs dan kan ek sê ek weet 100% hoe om hom te manipuleer. In ‘n mate dwing hierdie nuwe ontwerp homself af op my.

Hoe belangrik is die estetiese kwaliteite van die ghitaar vir jou?

Uiters belangrik. Ek dink dis wat in die eerste plek jou inspireer as jy na ‘n ghitaar kyk. Weereens, daar het ek ook weggekom van die reëls af deurdat ek hoef nie nou meer inlegwerk te doen op hierdie ghitaar nie. As jy die inlegwerk op ‘n klassieke ghitaar uithaal, dan gaan dit verkeerd wees. Met hierdie ontwerp maak dit nie saak nie, maar dit is vir my net so belangrik dat hy moet mooi wees.

Verduidelik

Die hout speel ‘n rol, want dit verskaf die kleur, maar meer belangrik is die geheel ontwerp. Die vorms waarin ek werk en die afwerking. Met die ‘Davis’ is sy estetika in ‘n groot mate ingebou en nie ná die tyd bygvoeg nie, so dis nogal ‘n groot ontwerpsuitdaging.

Watse houtsoorte verkies jy en hoekom?

Vir klankborde gebruik ek maar nog steeds ‘Spruce’ wat wereldwyd gebruik word om bekende redes. Vir die rug en sye, asook die nek gebruik ek hoofsaaklik Kiaat. Hy is verwant aan Rooshout. Hy’t klankgewys baie dieselfde eienskappe as wat Rooshout het. Hy is sekerlik die stabielste hout wat ek ken. Jy kan hom basies nat gebruik en hy word droog sonder om te trek of te kraak. Nie dat ‘n mens dit moet doen nie, natuurlik. Hy is ook redelik beskikbaar. Ek het nie eintlik Kiaat se akkoestiese eienskappe nodig in die ontwerp wat ek nou gebruik nie. Die ‘body’ van die ghitaar speel nie hier so groot rol akkoesties nie. Ek mag weer in daai rigting beweeg.

Dink jy oorsese bouers sal opgewonde raak oor iets soos Kiaat?

Verseker. Die plek waarvandaan ek die ‘Spruce’ kry in Amerika bied al klaar ‘n ‘pterocarpus’ spesie aan van Afrika. Dis nou nie Kiaat soos wat ons dit ken nie, maar dis al klaar in daai familie. Hulle weet egter van Kiaat en praat en is op soek daarna, ja. So dit is nie meer geheime inligting nie. Kan nie meer geheim bly nie. Die hout in Afrika word ontgin deur mense wêreldwyd.

So jy gebruik nie regtig ander houtsoorte op hierdie stadium nie?

Wel, dis vir my gerieflik om met Kiaat te werk oor die beskikbaarheid daarvan en dis lekker om met Kiaat te werk. Hy maak ook baie goeie nekke en is daarvoor ‘n baie goeie plaasvervanger vir ‘Honduras Mahogany’. Goeie gewig en baie stabiel.

Werk jy nie regtig meer met Rooshout nie?

Nee, dis duur en ek moet dit invoer en dis nie naastenby so lekker om mee te werk soos Kiaat nie.

As jy sê lekker om mee te werk - wat bedoel jy?

Op jou gereedskap is hy baie gemaklik en hy ruik lekker ☺.

‘Tuning pegs’ en ‘machine heads’, ens. Enige voorkeure daar?

Daar is ‘n groot verskeidenheid beskikbaar en dit word maar als ingevoer op dié stadium. Niks word hier vervaardig nie, maar mens kan gaan van goedkoop tot ontsettend duur.

So is Kiaat jou gunsteling houtsoort om mee te werk, al sou verkrygbaarheid en prys nie ‘n faktor wees nie?

Absoluut. Ek dink as ek ‘n standaard tipe klassieke ghitaar moet bou sal ek spesifiek Kiaat gebruik om bogenoemde redes. Hy’s net so goed soos Rooshout.

Is daar enige inheemse hout wat kan gebruik word vir die klankbord?

Nee. Definitief nie vir ‘n konvensionele ghitaar nie. Ek sal sien of enige inheemse houtsoorte vir my nuwe ontwerp voldoende sal wees. Ek maak staat vir die styfheid van die klankbord meer op die ‘strutting’ as die houtsoort. Gewig is daar belangriker. Kafferboom, of soos hulle dit nou noem, Koraalboom kan werk. Hy het ‘n totaal ander tekstuur as ‘Spruce’, maar is ook lig. Het ‘n rooierige kleur. Ek het nog nie dit probeer nie, maar ek dink ek sal dit kan maak werk. Van sekere palmbome se hout kan dalk werk, maar dit is als eksperimente wat ek nog in die toekoms wil probeer en het nog nie tyd gehad daarvoor nie.

Het ander SA ghitaarbouers al eksperimenteer met dit?

Nee, nie waarvan ek weet nie.

Hoe kies jy jou hout? Wat laat jou een stuk Kiaat bo ‘n ander een kies? Enige toetse of iets wat jy doen?

Ek toets hom maar net vir sy gewig rêrig.

Hoe doen jy dit?

Ek werk maar op gevoel, nie enige wetenskaplike toetse nie. Ek dink as ek eers in groot produksie ingaan sal ek ‘n kwaliteit ‘check list’ moet saamstel net om eweredigheid van kwaliteit te verseker.

Enige spesifieke behandeling of afwerking metodes wat jy gebruik?

Op my konvensionele ghitare gebruik ek maar wat almal gebruik. Ek gebruik polyester, party ouens gebruik ‘laquer’ en party ‘polyeurathane’ vir glans afwerking. Met my nuwe ghitare se ontwerp speel dit egter nie so ‘n groot rol nie, want die estetika van die ghitaar vereis nie van hom ‘n glans afwerking nie. Daar gebruik ek ‘n ‘penetrating wax’ afwerking wat deur Woodoc gemaak word wat die ghitaar waterdig seël, alhoewel hy nie ‘n glans afwerking het nie. Nog ‘n voordeel van jou ghitaar is dat as hy ‘n krappie kry, is dit redelik maklik om net weer af te werk met ‘n kwassie en Woodoc.

So die ghitaar is in geheel baie ‘user friendly’?

Absoluut. Dit is die hele idee agter die ontwerp. ‘n Speler hoef nie bang te wees om met sy ghitaar te speel nie. Hy is baie ‘solid’ orals, behalwe die klankbord, maar daar is enige ghitaar maar breekbaar. Daar weereens, met my ontwerp, is die klankbord vervangbaar, terwyl ‘n gewone ghitaar amper vernietig is as iets met sy klankbord gebeur.

Wat in jou ondervinding is die groot verskille tussen’ Spruce’ en ‘Cedar’?

Ek het met die eerste prototipe ‘n ‘Cedar’ klankbord gebruik, maar ek het nie spesifieke voorkeure nie. Tradisioneel debateer baie mense oor die verskille tussen ‘Spruce’ en ‘Cedar’, maar daar het ek nie ‘n baie sterk opinie nie. Ek hou van die voorkoms van die ‘Spruce’ op my nuwe ghitare en ek dink hy leen hom ook goed aan die nie-glans. Die ligte kleur kontrasteer vir my mooi met die Kiaat. Saam met Kiaat, wat bruinerig, is gaan ‘Cedar’, wat ook bruinerig is, ‘n bietjie ‘n vaal voorkoms hê. Rooshout is baie donkerder as Kiaat so dit gee ‘Cedar’ darem ‘n kontras.

Is ‘Cedar’ en ‘Spruce’ nou verwant?

Nee. Hulle is altwee naaldhoute, maar nie verwant nie. ‘Spruce’ en Dennebome is verwant.

Jou konstruksie metodes is so ontradisioneel en uniek. Is daar enigiets wat jy daaroor kan uitbrei?

Wat ek wel kan sê is dat my ghitaar se sye is dik, soliede hout. Dis nie gebuigde, dun hout soos ‘n gewone ghitaar nie. Dit gee vir my gewig. My rug en klankbord is konvensioneel in die sin dat dit ook dun hout is wat ‘bracing’ benodig.

Die tipe 'bracing'?

Ek gebruik maar 'n geweisigde 'fan bracing' op jou ghitaar. Op my nuutste ghitare het ek die klankbord se grein weer 90 grade gedraai.

Wat is die rede vir my ghitaar se diagonale klankbordgrein?

Dit gee maar net meer effektiewe verstywing. Die 'braces' loop almal vorentoe. Hulle word versterk deur die brug wat dwars lê, so dit gee jou 'n raamwerk. Om die klankbord so dun te kan kry moet jy hom effektief kan versterk deur die grein dwars te draai met die 'bracing'.

Hoe kry jy dit so dun?

Ek het 'n skuurmasjien wat ek gebruik. Ek begin redelik dik en werk hom dan af.

Hoeveel tyd gaan in beplanning en sketse, ens. in?

Ek werk die hele ontwerp op 'n tekenbord uit, so ek ag dit redelik belangrik. Ek het nou die nuwe model redelik gestandardiseer. Ek doen deeglike studies en teken dit aan, stap vir stap, al vir jare nou al, so ek het nou 'n 'workshop manual' met sketse en afmetings en als. Dit het my jare gevat, maar ek het dit gedoen omdat dit nodig is as jy in ernstige produksie wil ingaan. As jy ouens oplei, dan het jy 'n handleiding nodig waarteen jy hulle oplei. Hulle moet elke stap kan sien en ontleed.

Hoe lank werk jy al aan die ontwerp?

Die eerste prototipe is in 1988 gemaak. Ek het nog 'n foto van hom. Hy het die meeste eienskappe van die nuwe ghitaar in hom.

Dink jy SA se bouers kan enige bydrae lewer aan die internasionale industrie?

Ek dink in terme van inheemse houtkennis defnitief. Ontwerpsgewys kan ek nie rêrig sê wat die bydrae sal wees nie. Ek dink die meeste ouens volg eintlik nog maar oorsese tradisies op hierdie stadium.

In terme van kwaliteit?

Die kwaliteit, dink ek, is absoluut op internasionale standaard. Ek het gesien by die laaste byeenkoms van die gulde in Pretoria. Ek onthou hulle het al die bouers se ghitare op die verhoog uitgestal as 'n 'backdrop' terwyl die konsert aan was. Daar was seker 50 ghitare op die verhoog en ek onthou ek het daar gesit en besef dat dit absoluut internasionale standaard was.

Dink jy mens kan 'n SA tradisie identifiseer wat uniek is van internasionale tradisies?

Dit is dalk nog te vroeg om te sê dit bestaan al wel, maar ek kan met groot sekerheid sê dit is aan die gebeur. Ons moet net meer kontak onder mekaar hê, maar dit het nou begin. Die ander ding is natuurlik die estetika - die Afrika gevoel. Ek sien dit in almal se ontwerpe. Rodney Stedall, byvoorbeeld, het 'n roset wat hy maak - ek dink hy noem dit sy 'leopard skin' - dis 'n tradisionele mosaïek. Hoe de fok hy dit regkry, weet ek nie, maar dit lyk soos 'n luiperdvel. Allistair se ontwerpe is weer heeltemal Afrika-juwele ontwerpe, Ndebele onwerpe, ens. Almal se werk is so uniek en pragtig, so miskien is daar al klaar 'n wegbreek in tradisie. Ook die bereidheid om te eksperimenteer maak van SA-bouers 'n unieke groep. In Europa word ouens vasgehou deur tradisie. Die ouens wat na dié skole toe gaan is onsettend tradisioneel.

Dit is gevaarlik om té tradisioneel te wees, want die klassieke ghitaar tradisie is nog so jonk in vergelyking met viool en tjello dat daar nog baie veranderinge kan plaasvind.

Ja. Ek dink jy verseker die dood van 'n tradisie deur hom te vas te hou.

Hoe groot rol speel die SA klimaat in die bedryf?

Ek dink dit speel ‘n groot rol orals en nie ‘n rol wat altyd aangespreek word nie. Die grootste probleem waarmee jy te doene het in die maak van die ghitaar is die humiditeit. As jy ‘n instrument aanmekaar sit onder droë omstandighede, soos hier in die winter. (In die somer is dit ‘n helse probleem). As die humiditeit hoër as 20% is, dan doen ek nie my ‘strutting’ nie. As jy dit so doen, dan het die ghitaar die vermoë om vog te absorbeer. As jy die ‘strutting’ doen wanneer dit nat is en dit word dan droog, dan krimp hy en kraak, want hy word weerhou daarvan om vog te verloor. Dit het ek al gesien met ghitare soos Fleta, Bernabe, Ramirez en al daai groot name. Hulle kom Gauteng toe in die winter en kraak dan langs die fingerboard aan albei kante en selfs erger krake agter die brug.

Het die Kaap ghitaarbouers dan nie ‘n probleem in daai opsig nie?

Wel, ek het al van hulle ghitare gesien wat hier kraak. Hulle moet staatmaak op ‘dehumidifiers’ in hulle werkswinkels. Ten minste kan ek in die winter redelik veilig werk en in die somer verder beplan en aan ander dinge werk. In die somer fluktueer dit ook, maar ek het al vir maande gesit wat ek niks kan doen nie.

Maak jy baie staat op elektroniese gereedskap?

Nou veral, ja, met my nuwe ontwerp. Ek het hom ontwerp om hom so ‘machine friendly’ as moontlik te maak. My ‘setup’ is nog steeds redelik primitief. Ek gebruik standaard houtwerkgereedskap. Ek het nou baie ‘jigs’ gemaak, maar voor dit sou my nuwe ontwerp baie goed gewerk het met CNC masjiene (waar jy die masjien programeer en dan ‘shape’ hy die stuk hout volgens gegewens). CNC is vinnig, maar sy grootste waarde is hy kan aanhou bly loop soos deur die nag, so hy kan produksie en geweldige akkuraatheid hanteer. My nuwe ontwerp is uiters geskik daarvoor.

Wanneer weet jy of die ghitaar ‘n sukses is? Eers as hy heeltemal klaar is of sien mens in die middel dat iets gaan nie werk nie?

‘n Mens ontwikkel oor die jare ‘n gevoel om sekere dinge te kan voorspel. Mens sal nooit als weet wat daar binne aangaan nie. Met hierdie spesifieke ontwerp het ek die mure uitgeklim!! Vir jare eksperimente gedoen. Dag en nag. Party dae die klankbord 20 keer afgehaal en ander ‘braces’ opgesit. Daar is tye wat ek nie ‘n ‘clue’ gehad het nie. Later het ek agter gekom hoe dit werk. Ek het nou ‘n staalsnaar gemaak met geen ‘struts’ nie as ‘n eksperiment en dit het aaklig geklink. Ek het toe vinnig in ‘n halfuur 2 ‘struts’ ingelym en toe is dit baie beter. Op daai manier begin ‘n ou agterkom wat werk en wat nie. Watter ‘struts’ jy moet insit en hoe jy dit moet vorm om ‘n sekere reaksie te kry.

Watse toetse doen jy op die klankbord?

Op die oomblik doen ek nie veel meer spesifieke toetse met saagsels, ens. nie. Ek verstyf die klankbord met die ‘bracing’. Dis wat die ‘bracing’ doen en hoofsaaklik wat jy daarmee doen, is jy beheer die beweging van die brug en dit gee vir jou die toonkwaliteite en die toonvolume, ens. Ek sal veranderings daaraan teweeg bring met ‘n spesifieke doelstelling t.o.v. klank. Die klank is nou vir my die toets. Ek sal hoor of ek gekry het wat ek wou of nie en hom ooreenkomstig aanpas. Gelukkig kan ek met my ontwerp die klankbord afhaal en wysig sonder veel moeite. My nuwe ghitare kan heeltemal uitmekaar gehaal word.

Enige spesifieke snare wat goed werk op jou ghitare?

Nie regtig spesifiekes nie. Ek persoonlik hou maar van D’addario Pro Arte. Hoë spanning snare werk nogal goed op my ghitare, heel toevallig.

Dink jy daar’s ‘n toekoms vir die SA ghitaarbou industrie?

Die liefde gaan altyd bly. Hoe groot die mark ooit sal raak om ‘n klomp professionele bouers te ondersteun, kan enigiemand raai. Die groot bedreiging, maar ook geleentheid vir ghitaarmakers, is massaproduksie

kwaliteit ghitare wat vir goedkoop geproduseer word. Ons sal verbruikers iets ekstra moet bied om te kan meeding.

Jou planne en doelstelling vir die toekoms?

Ek sal graag my nuwe ghitare in produksie op groot skaal wil vervaardig. Sal ook later dalk terugkeer na meer klassieke klanke in my ghitare. Ek plaas my huidige nylonsnaar ghitare meer in die jazz of moderne klassieke kategorie as klassiek.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 24 JUNE 2005

Enige nuwe verwikkelinge sedert ons vorige onderhoud?

Ja, ek is op die oomblik besig met 'totally unchartered territories', wêreldwyd. Ek dink nie enigiemand het al dinge aanmekaar gesit soos wat ek op die oomblik doen nie, of weet hoe dit werk nie en die hoofrede… kyk Smallman en daai manne is die rigting waarin ek werk. Om meer volume uit die ghitaar te kry en beter benutting van energie, maar sover ek weet doen die ander ouens dit net op nylonsnare. Ek pas nou daai beginsels toe op basghitaar en staalsnare en dit bring nou ander goed in die lig wat as jy op nylon alleen werk, nie vir jou gaan gee nie, want jy het totaal ander 'energy management' met staal as met nylonsnare. Die twee teenoor mekaar begin goed uit te wys vir my.

Die probleem wat dit egter vir jou gee is dat geen ernstige klassieke ghitaarspeler op staalsnare sal speel nie. Dit sal nie eers streng gesproke 'n klassieke ghitaar wees nie.

Nee, maar wat ek bedoel is dat die inligting wat ek bekom kan ek op die een of die ander toepas. Dit veroorsaak dat ek die inligting wat ek bekom beter kan ontsyfer, omdat ek dit op altwee doen.

Ek wonder of Smallman een of ander geheim het waarvan hy niemand vertel nie en of dit maar net 'n besonderse talent is wat hy het.

Ek dink dit is geen geheim nie. Ek dink dis net daai spesifieke ontwerp van hom, want daar bou ander ouens net so goed soos hy wat daardie ontwerp gebruik.

Daar is twee ghitaarbouers wat Alistair Thomson baie hoog aanskryf en dit is Smallman en jy. Hy het self al op 'n Smallman gespeel en gesê dat hy nog nooit op so 'n 'responsive' instrument gespeel het nie.

Jou heel eerste ghitaar wat jy in die vorige onderhoud genoem het wat nou êrens in die Kaap is. Sal dit moontlik wees om foto's van hom in die hande te kry?

Ja, ek het foto's van hom. Ek dink amper daar is foto's van hom op my 'web site'.

Sal jy nie ooit daai ghitaar wil terugkoop nie?

Dit sou nogal 'nice' wees, ja. Miskien later. Ek is nog nie regtig sentimenteel oor my werk nie. Ek het nou vir die eerste keer in my lewe 'n ghitaar gebou wat ek sal wil hê en dis toevallig 'n konvensionele staalsnaar. Ek het hierdie nuwe beginsels op hom toegepas en hy is absoluut in 'n liga van sy eie. Ek het in my lewe nog nie op so 'n staalsnaar gespeel nie.

Het jy Kiaat gebruik vir die rug en sye?

Nee, ek het Swart Ivoor gebruik vir die rug en sye, maar dit is wat ek met die 'struts' gedoen het wat die klank so besonders maak, nie regtig die hout nie. Dis waar die 'predictability' nou in my eksperimente inkom.

Jy het laas genoem dat jy so nou en dan aan ander instrumente werk, maar dat dit amper inmeng mat al die eksperimente wat jy nog op die ghitaar wil doen. Praat jy van enige spesifieke eksperimente?

Kyk, op die oomblik wat gebeur is met hierdie modulêre ghitaar van my wat basies joune se beginsels gebruik, het die ding nou baie meer 'versatile' geraak, so ek is nou besig om te eksperimenteer met verskillende modelle daarvan. Soos ek sê, daar is basghitare by en staalsnare by, maar selfs binne die nylonsnaar ghitaar konteks is daar verskeie 'tonal variations'. Die ene wat ek nou gemaak het wat die hoogste verfyning proses deurgemaak het is eintlik 'n jazz ghitaar. Selfs joune is eerder 'n jazz ghitaar, dink ek, as 'n klassieke ghitaar. Nou is ek besig om na sy 'tonal range' te kyk binne die geometrie van daai ontwerp. Ek wil probeer terugkeer na die klassieke klank binne daai raamwerk. Ek het dit nou na die een uiterste gevat. In 'n gewone klassieke ghitaar sit 'n ou met hierdie kas vol 'bass' en 'mid range' resonansie en die 'trebles' klink of hy agter 'n toe deur uitkom. Nou het ek dit na die ander uiterste toe geneem ten koste van die 'bass' tot 'n sekere mate. Ek wil die proses nou omkeer, sodat ek al die 'variables' verstaan daaromtrent. Dis waarop ek hoofsaaklik konsentreer op die oomblik.

Ek het nou die Bolling concerto op daai ghitaar gespeel. Die werk is so 'n kombinasie van klassiek en jazz en ek moet sê dit voel of die ghitaar gemaak is vir daai werk.

Ja, die resonansie op daai ghitaar is 'beautiful', veral in 'n 'ensemble setup'.

Gebruik jy dan nog dieselfde 'jigs' om jou in staat te stel om vinniger te werk noudat die ghitaar nog eksperimente ondergaan?

Nee, ek verfyn dit die heeltyd. Die ander ding wat ek nou mee besig is is 'n model wat ek teen die helfte die prys kan verkoop. Ek bou hulle vir so R6000. Dit vat seker 'n derde van die tyd om hulle te bou, want dit is nou so eenvoudig en hy's ideaal om in produksie in te sit. Dan sal 'n ou hulle vir 'dirt cheap' kan verkoop en hulle sal dieselfde klank kwaliteit hê. Die hele wêreld gaan in daai rigting van massaproduksie en goedkoper pryse. As ek hierdie ding gedoen kan kry, dan…'the sky is the limit'. Dan kan ek dieselfde kwaliteit goedkoop aan almal verskaf.

Wat presies is 'n 'jig' en watse funksie vervul hy in die bou van die ghitare?

Ek sal sê 'n 'jig' is 'n gereedskapstuk wat jy maak wat jou in staat stel om 'n stap herhaaldelik te doen. Elke keer identies aan die vorige keer. Daarin neem jy op al die afmetings. Die dimensies van die ding is in die 'jig' se werking vasgevang in die beheer wat die masjien gebruik. Dit kan enigiets wees van 'n 'template' tot 'n groot stellasie waarop jy jou 'rotor' sal monteer. Hy gee jou 'n reeks bewegins wat altyd dieselfde is, so jy hoef nie te dink of te beweeg nie. Al jou dinkwerk is ingebou in hom.

Die 'nuwe' ghitaar waarna jy die heeltyd verwys in die vorige onderhoud, is dit my ghitaar en die daaropvolgende ghitare?

Ja, dis basies die nuwe ontwerp wat ek op jou en die latere ghitare toepas. My latere modulêre ghitare het basies dieselfde beginsels. Hulle produseer die klank op dieselfde manier.

Wat is die eerste boek waarna jy verwys wat jy in die hande gekry het eers jare nadat jy al voltyds ghitare gebou het?

Irving Sloane se 'Guitar Construction' dink ek was die boek se naam, of 'Classic Guitar Construction'. Hy het 'n ander een ook, 'Guitar Repair' of iets.

Waarom verwys jy na die Manson broers as 'social outcasts' in die vorige onderhoud toe jy hulle met jouself vergelyk? Sien jy ghitaarbouers as 'social outcasts'?

Ek het afgestuur op die feit dat in daardie vroeë jare daar 'n persepsie was dat 'n mens nie veronderstel is om ghitare te bou vir 'n lewe nie. Dit het egter totaal verander as jy kyk na hoe die bedryf deesdae gesien

word. Daardie persepsie wat destyds selfs in Engeland geheers het dat ‘n mens ghitaarbou slegs as ‘n stokperdjie doen en nie as ‘n beroep nie, het totaal verander. Dit het ‘n hele industrie geword as jy kyk na wat jy als op die internet kan bestel. Planne, ‘tools’, ens.

Enige ekstra kwaliteite wat jy nie laas keer genoem het wat jy na streef of waaroor jy spesifiek trots op is in jou nuwe ghitare?

Wat vir my ook belangrik is, omdat dit een van my uitgangspunte is en wat ek dink mens moet by sê, is die feit dat hy esteties ontneem is van enige dekorasies. Sy dekorasies is intrinsiek in hom ingebou en word nie bygevoeg ná die tyd nie. Dit is ‘significant’ omdat dit vir my ook ‘n aanduiding is van die tyd waarin ons leef. Ek sê nie dat dit was verkeerd om dit in die verlede te doen nie. Dis belangrik om niks te verloor in die ghitaar nie. Die term ‘klassieke’ ghitaar impliseer dat hy ‘evolve’ het tot waar hy is en dat hy ‘lasting value’ het. In my opinie is die ander betekenis van ‘klassiek’ as ‘n ‘exemplary model’ ook van toepassing op die klassieke ghitaar. Hy het tot op so hoë vlak ontwikkel tot waar hy is. Dis vir my nog een van die mooiste goed wat daar is. Esteties en klankgewys. Ek is mal oor tradisionele klassieke ghitare.

Jy noem in die vorige onderhoud dat jy voel jy het nog net geraak aan die moontlikhede van die nuwe onwerp.

Ja, met my nuutste eksperimente sien ek wat ek vroeër net vermoed het en dit is dat ek op ‘n kwantifiseerbare manier die formasie tussen die ontwerp van die instrument en sy klank kan kry. Wat nou natuurlik moeilik gaan wees is…hoe omskryf mens klank? So ek sal een of ander skaal of iets moet uitwerk. Dis nie die grootste probleem nie.

Watse tipe eksperimente het jy laas na verwys m.b.t jou en Alistair se bome afkap om eksperimente te doen?

Die eksperimente was maar basies om ghitare te bou en te kyk watter houtsoorte doen wat.

Voel jy nog steeds dat SA nog nie regtig ‘n kenmerkende ‘klank’ het nie en dat die uniekheid van SA ghitare basies visuele implikasies het?

Ek moet baie versigtig wees om daar te oordeel, want ek weet nie genoeg omtrent wat die ander ouens doen nie. Al maatstaf wat het is wanneer ek kyk na die ‘chat forum’ van die gulde op die internet. Waaroor hulle ‘chat’ en ek kom nie agter dat daar geëksperimenteer word enigsins anders as net afwerking en ‘tools’, ens. Met ander woorde dit gaan oor die ‘craft’, maar aan die ander kant is ek seker Garth maak die heeltyd veranderinge as hy soveel sukses uit sy klein ghitaartjies kry, want hy sal presies weet hoekom. Ek weet dat Alistair net so sterk bevraagteken soos ek, want hy’s ‘n wetenskaplike en hy sal analities dink.

Ja, veral ‘arched-back’ ghitare spits hy homself baie op toe deesdae. Hy sê dis ‘n helse lot werk want die rugkant word basies uit solide hout uit gekerf.

Ek dink Collin Cleveland is ook eksperimenteel. Jy weet die ander ding wat my deesdae opval en wat ek graag wil oor skryf of ‘n brief op my ‘web site’ sit of iets, maar ek moet versigtig wees om nie arogant voor te kom nie. Daar word ‘n ontsettende lot kak gepraat wat aanvaar word wêreldwyd as feite omtrent ghitaarbou. Ek kan nie nou aan voorbeelde dink nie, maar ek sal moet begin notas daarvan maak. Die ouens sal byvoorbeeld stellings maak omtrent klank wat ‘creep’ in die kante van die instrument in, maar niemand sê hoe nie en dan skryf hulle dit toe aan die verskil tussen die ‘linings’ binne-in. Of dit soliede ‘linings’ of ‘curved linings’ is en dit is eenvoudige fisika om te sien dat daar nie ‘n verskil tussen die twee is nie. Maar dit is een van die standaard sêgoed - ‘curved lining’ doen dit en die ander ‘lining’ doen dit. Ek wil daai tipe goed begin bevraagteken en miskien kan ek dit doen, want my hele uitgangspunt in my eie werk is ook ‘waar lê die waarheid eintlik’. Ek voel skaam dat ek nie meer aktief betrokke is by die gulde nie, maar ek is in die proses om ‘n rekenaar te koop en dan sal ek ‘n groter bydrae wil lewer.

Jy het vantevore genoem dat Kiaat is seker die stabielste hout wat jy ken. In terme van wat?

Ja, daar's baie min beweging in hom, selfs in sterk humiditeitsverandering.

Is dit die grootste voordeel wat jy put uit die gebruik daarvan?

Dit en die feit dat dit so 'n resonanse hout is. Die resonansie speel egter nie so 'n belangrike rol in my nuwe ontwerp nie. Ek gebruik Kiaat dus grotendeels vir sy stabiliteit en die bekombaarheid daarvan. Prys is redelik en hy's lekker om mee te werk. Dis 'n baie 'forgiving' hout om mee te werk.

Jy se Kiaat is net so goed soos Rooshout. Dis 'n groot stelling om te maak!

Ja, maar ek is 'happy' om dit te maak. Selfs vir konvensionele akoestiese aanwending. Ek het gehoor dat daar nou Kiaat plantasies oorsee ook geplant word. Ek het baie Zambiese Kiaat gebruik en het op die oomblik 'n klomp Mosambiekse Kiaat. Ek weet nie of daar genetiese redes daarvoor is nie. Dié wat ek het is baie lig en het minder rooi in die kleur, maar nog steeds baie goed.

Jy het laas genoem dat jy kyk na die gewig van die hout wanneer jy dit vir ghitare gebruik. Hoekom?

Weet jy ek kan nog nie vir jou onomwonde sê watse verskil dit aan die klank gaan maak nie. Daar sal 'n mens moet konvensioneel werk om te kan sê dat 'n swaarder rug of 'n ligter rug 'n verskil gaan maak aan die klank. Waar gewig van toepassing is op my nuwe instrumente is ek maak gebruik van die 'inertia' van die sye, die gewig met ander woorde om die energie in die klankbord te hou. Hoe wegsypeling wel soms plaasvind in 'n konvensionele ghitaar, is dat in die eerste plek is die instrument te lig om die klankbord heeltemal stil te hou en die ander ding is dat die sye self, daar waar die 'joint' is, as die klankbord beweeg, dat die sye dan saam beweeg en dan vind wegsypeling plaas. My ghitare se sye is heeltemal solied, so as die hout lig is, sal daar bietjie meer wegsypeling plaasvind as wanneer die hout swaarder is, maar dit het ek nog nooit gekwantifiseer nie. Jou ghitaar het byvoorbeeld lood in sy 'rim'. Die klankbord self sit mos op 'n aparte elipsie en om meer 'inertia' te gee het ek 'n dik stuk lood in die rimbord ingesit.

Nog 'n kenmerk van jou ghitare is die feit dat die klankbord vervang kan word, alhoewel dit is seker nie iets wat mens baie doen nie, nè?

Nee, die voordele daarin lê maar slegs in die feit dat hy makliker herstelbaar sou wees en ook as jou klankbord heeltemaal breek is die hele ghitaar nie daarmee heen nie. Dit maak die waarborg opsie makliker en dit sal jou sak pas as jy die ghitaar laat val om op daai ghitaar 'n nuwe klankbord te sit as op 'n konvensionele een. Dit is dus meer 'n voorsorgmaatreël. Wat dit makliker gemaak het vir my is dat ek kan eksperimenteer deur een 'strut' te verander en kyk hoe dit klink, aantekeninge maak en dan weer die klankbord verander en iets anders probeer. Dit het die navorsingsproses werklik wetenskaplik gemaak in my geval, want jy het 'n verwysingsraamwerk wat dieselfde bly en jy verander een ding op 'n slag, so ek kon letterlik 'n hipotese maak, die eksperiment doen en 'n resultaat kry. Die proses het nou meer formeel begin raak.

Jy het laas vir my gesê jy gebruik 'n gewysigde 'fan strutting'. Hoe is dit gewysig?

Dis gewysig in die sin dat die 'struts' is parallel.

Dan is dit mos nie regtig 'fan bracing' nie?

Dit val maar onder 'fan strutting'. Baie ouens doen dit met die klassieke ghitare. Dit is gebasseer in 'fan strutting'. Ek dink 'lattice bracing' is nou weer 'n totale weg beweeg daarvan. My 'bracing' is baie meer konvensioneel met almal wat in dieselfde rigting lê. Ek het geen van die 'cut-off bars' wat hulle gebruik op gewone klassieke ghitare nie, want my 'rim' van die ghitaar is die 'cut-off'. Ek behandel nie die rug van die ghitaar as aktiewe rolspeler ten opsigte van klank in my ontwerp nie, terwyl met 'n konvensionele ghitaar speel die rug 'n definitiewe groot rol….die hoeveelheid kurwes en 'bracing', ens. wat jy gebruik.

Waarom ag jy ontwerp en sketse so belangrik?

'n Mens kan baie meer akkuraat werk en jy los baie probleme op die papier reeds op. Teen die tyd wat jy begin hout saag is die hele ontwerp in jou kop. Ek dink 'design skills' is definitief 'n groot voordeel en die ander ding is jy werk jou proporsies op papier uit. Mens kan dit nie regtig uit jou kop uit doen nie. Jy moet die ding kan sien om die regte lyne te kry.

Jy sê die eerste prototipe van hierdie nuwe ontwerp ghitare van jou is in 1988 voltooi met Boesman-motiewe in die ontwerp. Kan jy my 'n kort oorsig gee van die evolusie van die ontwerp en hoe hy ontwikkel het? Wat het veroorsaak dat jy in daai rigting beweeg het en wat het jou beïnvloed?

Reeds voor 1988 het ek begin kyk na die 'variables'. Ek het vreeslik met 'strutting' eksperimenteer voor daai tyd en agtergekom dat die een 'strutting' patroon nie 'n baie groot verskil aan die klank maak van 'n ander patroon nie. Soms nie eers hoorbaar nie, al is die patrone visueel totaal anders. Toe het ek gewonder wat is die kritieke 'variables' wat 'n wesenlike verskil aan die klank gaan maak. Ek het toe uitgevind dat een van daai kritieke 'variables' is die nek se hoek. Ek het dit agtergekom toe ek 'n klein verandering aan die nek van 'n konvensionele ghitaar aangebring het en 'n groot verskil in beide die kwaliteit en volume van die klank kon identifiseer. Hoe hoër jy die nek lig, hoe meer 'harpagtig' begin die klank van die ghitaar word. Wat ek daarmee bedoel is die onmiddelike of die eerste klank wat jy hoor as jy die snaar 'release', is baie volume en dan kom die 'sustain' daarna. Daai effek gee 'n spesifieke tonale kleur. Die 'continuum' of skaal waarop dit lê is volume en 'sustain'. Hoeveel van die klank laat jy toe om in die klankbord in te gaan? Hoeveel van die energie hou jy in die snaar? Hoe meer jy in die snaar hou, hoe minder aanvanklike volume het jy, maar hoe meer 'sustain' gee dit jou. So dis als oor 'energy management'. Dis een van aanvanklike kritieke goed wat ek agtergekom het. Ek het dus besluit om daai eerste instrument se nek-hoek, nie soos 'n Ramirez van 2mm nie, in sy moer in te lig en te kyk wat gebeur. Die eerste wesenlike stap in hierdie nuwe ontwerp was dus die hoek van die nek.
Dan ook die verkleining van die lugvolume. Ek het nadat ek 'n barokghitaar of 2 gebou het gesien dat die lugvolume nie regtig 'n wesenlike verskil aan die klank maak nie. Toe dog ek wel, jy kan die ghitaar kleiner maak, m.a.w. die klankbord van die ghitaar verklein, want die gedeelte bo die klankgat op 'n klassieke ghitaar word só gebruik dat hy nie saamwerk nie. Eintlik gebruik jy dan net die gedeelte wat die elips is. Toe het ek die ghitaar kleiner gemaak en hom só ontwerp dat jy die hele 'top' gebruik. Dit is die ander wesenlike verskil in die onwerp - die feit dat die hele klankbord gebruik word. Die konvensionele ghitaar het dus 'n klomp vermorsde elemente in terme van 'energy management' wat ek begin afskaaf het.

Verander 'n 'cut-away' dan glad nie die klank van 'n konvensionele ghitaar nie? Baie mense glo so.

Dit verander nie die klank nie, nee. Dit bring ons terug by ons vroeëre gesprek omtrent wat snert is en nie. Daar is 'n hele wêreld vol persepsies en dan is daar die ander wetenskaplike wêreld van waarhede. Dis waarna ek soek. Die persepsiewêreld is ook baie nouer gekoppel aan die bemarkingswêreld. Dis hoekom party ouens 'n helse lot geld vir 'n ghitaar gaan kry en 'n ander ou nie. Dis alhoewel nie die enigste rede nie. Kwaliteit, ens. speel ook 'n rol.

So jy sê dat klassieke ghitare kon net sowel met 'cut-aways' ingerig gewees het om speelbaarheid te verhoog en 'n mens sou nie die verskil in klank kon hoor nie?

Ja. Ek sal 'n 'cut-away' vir enige ghitaar kan inbou en jy sal nie die verskil hoor nie.

Dit beteken een van die moeilikste tegniese uitdagings (om hoog te speel) kan maklik vermy word op die ghitaar?

Ja. Ek sal sê dit vorm die derde punt van die 'eerste' ghitaar in hierdie ontwerp wat ek in 1988 voltooi het. Die speelbaarheid is baie verhoog. Klassieke ghitare veral gebruik die hele nek. Dis die hele doel. Nou hoekom sit jy met 8 'frets' wat vreeslik moeilik bekombaar is? 'n Mens speel lekker tot op 'n sekere punt by die 12de 'fret' en dan's daar hierdie groot struikelblok wat mens moet oorkom. Dit is 'n groot struikelblok, so hoekom oorbrug mens dit nie? Daai eerste ghitaar van 1988 se nek het jy volle toegang tot bo. Jy speel 'n oop nek tot bo. Tog dink mense jy verloor iets van die klank met 'n' cut-away'. Wys jou

maar wat persepsie doen. Persepsie en die feit dat ek dink ons almal het verlief geraak op die pragtige vorm van die tradisionele klassieke ghitaar. Daarom sê ek koop my ghitaar ook, maar moet hom nie die tradisionele een laat vervang nie. Die rede hoekom daai 12de 'fret' 'n probleem raak, is die komponiste het opgevang met die ghitaar. Torres het die ghitaar geweldig verbeter en toe het die komponiste a.g.v. die beter speelbaarheid en klank ingehaal. So eintlik is die tyd ryp vir aanpassings om die instrument by die musiek te laat aanpas.

Jy noem dat jy frustrerende dae gehad het waarop jy die klankbord van die ghitaar tot 20 keer in een dag afgehaal het om te eksperimenteer. Kan jy bietjie uitbrei daarop?

Ja. Dit het gegaan oor die styfheid. Die groot stap tussen die eerste ghitare wat ek in 1988 gemaak het en die nuwes, die een element wat ek nie in die vroeëres gebruik het nie, is hierdie 'inertia' wat ek van praat waar ek die sye dik gemaak het en op 'n stywe raamwerk gesit het. Toe het ek 'n helse lot probleme opgetel. Die nekhoek het gewerk, die speelbaarheid was daar en toe ek dit doen het ek ewe skielik 'n groot klomp meer benutbare energie in die klankbord. Ek moes toe weer ernstig terugkom na die 'strutting' toe, want toe het dinge begin hand-uit ruk. As jy baie energie het, maar dit nie reg gebruik nie tel jy groot probleme op. Wat gebeur het was party note was reg, ander het 'n helse lot volume op gehad, maar geen 'sustain' nie, so daar was 'n groot wanbalans van een noot na die volgende toe. Dis toe ek moes begin soek en kyk hoe moet die 'struts' lyk vir die ghitaar om orals te werk. Ander eksperimente het weer sterk 'treble' en niks bas gehad nie. Ek moes uitvind waar beheer jy die bas, waar beheer jy die 'treble', want dit als word bepaal net deur die 'struts'. Toe kon ek nou gerieflik die klankbord afhaal. Die hele instrument bly dieselfde en ek verander die 'struts' een vir een en maak tekeninge en toe het ek begin agterkom hoe werk dit.

Jou heel nuutste ghitare is heeltemal modulêr. Sien jy dit enigsins as 'n voordeel?

Nie regtig nie. Die konsep van uitmekaar haal het begin met die afhaalbare klankbord. Ek het dit toe na sy uiteindelike ekstreem geneem. Die voordeel wat wel daarin lê is die vervaardigheid daarvan, want ek kan die onderdele afsonderlik afwerk en dan aanmekaar heg. Dit is egter meer 'n voordeel vir die bouer en die vervangbaarheid daarvan asook ontwerpswysigings en alternatiewe. Ek kan op dieselfde sisteem bou, maar verkillende modelle.

Jy noem dat hoë spanning snare werk besonder goed op jou ghitare. Enige spesifieke rede daarvoor?

Ek kan nog nie definitief die rede daarvoor gee nie. Het nog nie genoeg tyd daaraan spandeer nie. Dit is egter nie iets waarna ek spesifiek werk nie. Ek sal nog moet gaan kyk waarvan is dit 'n funksie.

Waarom sê jy dat jy plaas jou huidige klassieke ghitare meer in die jazz of moderne klassieke katogorie?

Hy het minder bas. Is minder 'bass biased'. Ek dink hy is perfek gebalanseer. Ek dink ook die 'note separation' is in die jazz wêreld 'n groot voordeel en dis nodig, want hulle speel 'extended chords' waar jy binne 'n groot akkoord byvoorbeeld twee semitone langs mekaar in die middel van die akkoord het, wat verlore kan raak op 'n klassieke instrument. In klassieke musiek is dit selde dat daai eis gestel word aan die ghitaar, so hy vind beter toepassing in die jazz wêreld. Ek dink egter wel dat klassieke musiek net so mooi daarop gespeel kan word, maar dit verander die karakter en dit is 'n persepsie ding. Mens is gewoond dat 'n klassieke ghitaar SO klink, so hulle assosieer dit daarmee.

Jy hou egter ook van die klassieke klank? Watter aspek van die 'klassieke klank hou jy van?

Die warmte van hom.

Wat veroorsaak daai warmte? Die 'bass range' wat sterker is?

Ek dink so, ja. Jy het die heeltyd so 'n 'vloer' van bas, so hy begelei homself amper.

Ek dink dit is die rede waarom party spelers 10-snaar ghitare verkies.

Ek glo so, ja, alhoewel die logika daaragter lê meer daarin dat jy meer botone tot jou beskikking het, nie soseer meer basklanke nie. Daai ghitare het maar een ekstra bassnaar wat laer is as gewoonlik. Die ander word mos so tussenin ingestem. Ek weet nie so baie omtrent daardie ghitare nie, maar ek hoor hulle is redelik moeilik beheerbaar. ‘n Mens kry partykeer dissonansies wat onwenslik is.

Baie ghitaarkenners voel dat i.t.v. konstruksie het die ghitaar sekere inherente probleme. Speelbaarheid, lae volume, ens. Dink jy die onwikkeling van die klassieke ghitaar het sy ‘pinacle’ bereik, of dat hy potensiaal het om te ontwikkel in sekere opsigte?

Die bouers spreek dit wel aan deur dinge soos ‘cut-aways’ in te sit en in my opinie bly dit nog steeds ‘n klassieke ghitaar. Sommige ouens verander ook die nek-hoek waarvan ek vroeër gepraat het.

Waarom behou die ghitaar nie sy akoestiese eienskappe soos bv. ‘n viool, oor ‘n lang tydperk nie?

Ek dink die hoofrede daarvoor is dat die snaarspanning by die ghitaar trek direk aan sy klankbord en dit plaas hom onder ‘n spanning wat teen sy klank produsering werk. Daar is dus ‘n teenstrydigheid daar. Ek dink dis maar die hoofprobleem daar. Dis ook ‘n probleem wat ek uitgestryk het met die ghitaar wat jy op speel. Die spanning word deur die hele raamwerk opgeneem en die klankbord word ‘n bietjie opwaarts getrek.

Verder is daar ook nie konsensus oor die ideale konstruksie van die ghitaar soos daar by die viool is nie.

Ja. Die viool het ook meer as een skool, maar dis natuurlik ‘n baie ouer instrument. Hy is die toonbeeld van klassiek. Ek dink nie die viool kan baie verander nie, want daai sisteem waarop hy werk is hoogs ontwikkel. Die f-gate, byvoorbeeld, is absoluut met ‘n doel daar. Jy kan hulle wel reguit maak sonder dat die klank sal verander. Die f-vorm pas natuurlik by die estetieka van die viool, maar die plasing en die grote daarvan is kritiek vir sy klank. Die ‘sound post’ doen ‘n ongelooflike slim ding. Die brug staan mos op sy twee voete. Onder die bas kant (die ‘bass bar’) en onder die ‘treble’ kant staan die ‘sound post’ regop, so wat jy kry is dat die bruggie staan op die stokkie. By die bas kant kry jy dus groter amplitude en aan die ‘treble’ kant kleiner amplitude. Jy het ook ‘n skarnierpuntjie wat kan verskuif en sodoende jou bas en ‘treble’ kan beheer. Die viool-ontwerp as sisteem is dus tot ‘n groot mate vervolmaak. Die rede hoekom die volume groter as dié van die ghitaar is, is dat jy die heeltyd energie in die viool instuur deur volgehoue kontak d.m.v. die strykstok.

Speel grote ‘n rol in die volume?

Nie so groot as wat mens sou dink nie. Kyk wat kry Garth reg met sy kleiner ghitaartjies. Hauser en dié van myne is ook kleiner as die tradisionele standaard grootte. Almal het kleiner geword en ek dink dit raak meer in fokus.

Dink jy die gebrek aan ‘n sterk vasgestelde tradisie is deel van die tradisie van die ghitaar?

Ja. Op hierdie stadium is dit so. Ek sou amper wou sê dat dit gaan lank vat om by ‘n tradisie uit te kom, maar ek dink die ander filosofiese aspek hiervan is dat die ghitaar se ontwikkeling het op die verkeerde tyd gebeur. Die wêreld is nie meer tradisievas nie. Verandering is baie meer kenmerkend van ons tyd as wat tradisie is en die tempoverandering versnel die heeltyd. Daar moet dus ‘n tradisie gebou word om ‘wat doen mens met verandering?’, nie meer ‘wat doen ons met die feit dat als dieselfde bly?’ nie. Dis ‘n helse groot wêreldsvraag. Ek dink dis ‘n groot filosofiese kwessie. Die ghitaar het nou ontwikkel te midde van dit en ons het elektriese ghitare en allerlei verskillende goed, so ek dink Torres het ‘n vernouing gebring en dat dit nou weer begin verbreed.

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH RODNEY STEDALL ON 6 NOVEMBER 2004 AND 26 JUNE 2005 AT 726 VERCUEIL STREET, GARSFONTEIN, PRETORIA

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 6 NOVEMBER 2004

Brief biography:

I was born in '56 in Pretoria. I've lived here all my life, except when I studied in Jo'burg. I went to Pretoria Boy's High. I'm an optometrist. I'm one of the non-architect, non-draughtsman luthiers ☺.

How did you start with guitar building?

Played folk-guitar since the age of 11 and never had lessons. Guys like Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen inspired me, so I used to sing and play. I only recently, in 1998, started to build guitars. I saw a guitar in a shop that I particularly liked and I thought I'm not prepared to pay so much money for it. So I started looking around for something like a Martin, for a seller who doesn't really know the value of the guitar. In the 'stoep-chatter', one of those little newspapers where one can place an ad to say what you're looking for, I advertised for old music instruments, thinking I can get something and I ended up with a few ukuleles and other funny things that I repaired. I repaired a guitar, a banjo and a ukulele, and I did nice repairs and then I thought: 'well, I might as well start building them on my own'. And that's how I started, with repairing.

It seems to be a logical order. Most of the luthiers I spoke to started with playing, then repairing then building.

Yes, I decided not to make a guitar first, but a dulcimer. It's a slightly easier thing to build. It gives you an idea of how to bend wood, the fretwork, et cetera.

So the thought process behind building a dulcimer first is that it's easier to start off with?

Yes, I thought it would be an easier introduction. A guitar would be too complicated to start with. I can do the bending, gluing, fretting, everything I would need to build a guitar, just slightly easier. I made a very nice dulcimer and have since made another one. Thereafter I went ahead and made my first guitar.

Your experience as a luthier: what is your output?

What I've done? My first dulcimer, a steel-string guitar… In fact, the steel-string was made to emulate the steel-string that I saw in the shop. And I'm still to this day very pleased and impressed with the sound of that guitar. I'll never get rid of it. It will stay in the family. And then I made (can't remember the sequence exactly) 3 steel-strings, small bodied steel-strings (concert models), 4 classical guitars, 2 dulcimers and an electric bass guitar.

In your experience, what's the difference between building a classical and building a steel-string guitar?

Steel-string is a more forgiving construction and I think that one can do a lot more experimentation with steel-string, for example I'm making my steel-strings with indigenous woods. The last 2 that I've made, I've used indigenous woods. I don't see why one can't try it with classical, but the classical guys are more specific and more traditionally orientated. I might not be able to sell a classical guitar if it is made from unusual wood. Whereas the steel-string, if it sounds good and looks good, it will sell.
I've finished 10 instruments, and now working on 11 and 12: 2 classicals.

As you become more proficient, do you think you'll lean more towards classical guitar building?

The way the sales are going, up until now I've been getting classical orders, and the steel-string market is not as popular. I have one steel-string that I've made that's really beautiful, but I don't have a market for it.

That's strange, Mervyn thinks that the opposite is true.

Mervyn might be thinking along the lines of the American market. The American market is very big on steel-strings. Almost all the luthiers in America are making steel-string guitars to try and break into that market. My orders up to now: I've got 2 orders at the moment, which means that I've got a demand for classical.

Mervyn spoke very highly of you, especially concerning your leopard-skin rosette.

Yes, I'll show you later.

Are you self-taught?

Yes, totally self-taught. I got a book and I started from the word go, according to that. I've never attended any courses. I've had my own workshops that I organized, because I'm the coordinator of the guild of SA luthiers. We've had our own workshops where we've done some French polishing amongst other things. The only course or lectures that I've gone to is in June/July 2004. I went to the American Guild of Luthiers conference and attended one of their courses.

That must have been very exciting.

Yes, there are so many guys, and they are just keen to talk music instruments.

Where was it held?

It was in Tacoma, in Washington. That's where they always have it at some University there. A lot of luthiers! Every night there was a concert according to a specific theme and the lectures were amazing. It was a 4/5 day conference, but I only got there on the second day, my wife and I.

No other SA luthiers attended?

No, just us two.

Who has influenced you as a luthier?

Mervyn Davis started me out. He was the guy I would contact and say: 'the soundboard is doing funny things' and he would say: 'that's just the humidity', for example. And he was also someone I could just go to and say: 'how do you do this?' or what have you. Not that he's taught me a lot, but he's given me a lot of info, especially on finishing. He helped me with my first guitar. And Garth Pickard. We are forever talking about things. What to do, how to do it, what the best way is to do them.

Are you as traditional as he is?

No, but he is influencing me a lot in that direction. I've got two classicals to make that I'm making in the semi-traditional method. I've got a new solero to work on. That will be new for me. It will be the true Spanish tradition. I follow the fairly traditional approach. The steel-string guitars are not traditional. I've got a bolt-on-the-neck joint that I've started to use recently. And it's working very well.

If you can draw a diagram of SA luthiers, Mervyn would be at the one extreme, because he's absolutely not traditional (revolutionary), Garth puts himself at the other extreme - the highly traditional side. Where would you put yourself, closer to Mervyn or Garth?

Closer to Garth in that I'm not experienced enough to experiment with extreme design. I would say that I'm a traditionalist. I build traditional classical guitars and I always will. With steel-strings I'll experiment with different woods, though I probably will stay pretty much traditional.

Are there any specific qualities that you strive for in your guitars? Aesthetic or soundwise?

I think we all try. All luthiers are looking for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We're looking for THAT sound that sounds fantastic. Whatever you try is sub-consciously a way of getting the best sound out of that instrument. Even if its means shaving a little notch out of a brace, for example. It's something that's unique to you that might just one day result in THAT sound.

Is there a specific sound that you are aiming for?

I'm the worst person on sound. I think I've got a very good musical ear, but I haven't yet learned to identify different aspects of sound. Some guys will pick up a guitar and say: 'it's got excellent harmonics' or 'good overtones' or whatever. I'm still learning. That's probably the thing that I'm furthest from: describing the sound. I will pick up a guitar and tell you it's a lovely instrument and has a good sound, but I don't know why. I can hear a buzz or a lousy string and can say: 'that's not good', but I don't think I can classify the sound of the instrument yet.

Seeing that you're a traditionalist, I take it that the classic Spanish sound is what you aim for in your classical guitars?

Yes, though I'm not a classical guitar player and I've only recently started coming into the classical world and listen to classical guitar music. Thanks to Garth and to the guild and Abri Jordaan and Charl Lamprecht. All these guys are playing for me. That's the kind of thing that I'm so exposed to at the moment. I'm starting to learn these famous classical tunes. But I'm far, far, far from getting there. That's why I love to make good classical guitars.

Do you think there should be more official luthier courses offered in SA for those who want to start?

Yes. At the moment there's no support base and as long as there's part-time luthiers like myself, I can't see it happening. I can't see myself teaching, but I believe that teaching is a good way of becoming a master. I believe a true master is one who gives away information. It doesn't mean that someone is going to build better guitars than Mervyn, it just means they'll have a better influence. I believe in giving. That's why I put so much into the guild. The luthiers give me a lot of info and a lot of input, but some of the professionals give nothing. There's a kind of professional jealousy thing that exists. That's the reason why you won't get a course off the ground, because no one will teach a young guy if it means that he's going to take his work away.

Tell me more about the woods that you use: traditional and indigenous woods.

The most unusual and untraditional wood I've used so far is a steel-string guitar made from *Mopanie*. Beautiful guitar, lovely guitar. Beautiful sound as well.

Is Mopanie easy to work with?

Easy to sand, not so easy to bend. It's nice in that it doesn't clog up sand paper. It's a pleasure in that respect. Bending is a problem.

Any other woods?

Yes, *Kiaat*. Makes a very nice guitar. It's a lovely wood to work with. Garth will tell you more about that. Mervyn as well. Mervyn works with *Kiaat* almost exclusively. It's a lovely wood to work with and it's got the stability that you're looking for. I think that *Kiaat* will become the SA luthiers wood. The trademark of SA guitars.

Are there any indigenous woods that can be used for the top of the guitar?

None that I know of. The growth rings in SA wood are too far apart.

What machine heads and tuning pegs do you use?

I import them, but I don't use the most extravagant. I use Schaller's. I don't have a problem with using Schaller's, but if the client asks me to use more expensive ones, then I do so. There are no local manufacturers of machine heads.

Do you think that overseas luthiers will be impressed with SA wood, eg Kiaat?

Sonically they might, but it's not a particularly attractive wood. I've got a guitar made of beautiful orange *Kiaat* that disproves that theory. But the normal *Kiaat* is rather dull, not ugly, just not as striking as Rosewood.

Do you think that Kiaat has something to contribute in the international setup?

Yes, absolutely! If they hear about *Kiaat*, we'll be in trouble. All our stock would go overseas.

Would you say it's an ideal wood?

Yes, I think so. Soundwise, workability, bendability… everything. In species it's not related to Rosewood at all.

The selection of your woods? Do you have any special methods or tests?

The wood must be as quarter-sawn as possible. I've thought of using something like Australian Blackwood that is the wood of choice for Australian luthiers. It grows here as an alien species. It's actually quite invasive but readily available. It's a beautiful wood to work with. You get it in Knysna as well.

But you do get African Blackwood.

I use African Blackwood for my bridges and my necks. It's a very heavy wood, but beautiful. What's so special about African Blackwood is that it's the same family as Rosewood. So the Indian Rosewood, Brazilian Rosewood and African Blackwood are all the same family ('del burgia'). It's a very heavy wood. It actually sinks in water. The *Mopanie* I use has almost the same specific gravity as African Blackwood.

Any special testing?

Guys still claim that they tap wood and it works. A good wood will resonate when you tap it, whereas something like Meranti won't. So you can hear it. I think there's a lot of bullshit about tapping, though.

It's a romantic notion: the wood speaking to you.

Yes ☺. I tap all the time while building, but you never really know if it's good or bad. I might change my mind in a few years time when I've done 100 guitars. I might tap a wood and say: 'it's nonsense'.

Is the SA climate conducive to guitar building - specifically here in Pretoria?

No, 'cause half the time we sit around doing nothing, because we can't glue because the humidity is too high.

If you compare Pretoria to others places, isn't it better than most?

Yes, I wouldn't be able to build guitars in Durban. In Pretoria at least you can raise the humidity and the big part of the year the humidity is between 40 and 50 %, which is good.

Cape Town?

I don't know. The guys are building in Cape Town, but I don't know what role the climate plays there. I was surprised to hear that Mervyn glues at 20% humidity, which is very low. But I can almost start to go with that. I glued up my *Mopanie* guitar and *Mopanie* is a very dimensionally unstable wood, because I did all my gluing religiously. I'm talking about cross-brace where you glue a brace across the grain. I did all my cross-grain bracing religiously when the humidity was around about 40%: and that particular guitar sometimes almost flatten down at the back (which is in a dome shape). It will almost flatten until it's totally flat. At 20%. Had I glued it at 20 - 30% it would have then been at its flattest. I think Mervyn's got a point there. Yet, I think if you land up taking that guitar down to Durban or Cape Town where there's more humidity, you'd land up with that guitar doming more. I don't know if that's a good or bad thing.

Is it just coincidental that there are so many luthiers staying in Pretoria?

Yes, probably just coincidental.

Your bracing and construction methods - do you also follow the traditional methods?

I'm still a learner. I did some weird little notches on my first guitar, purely out of speculation to try and thin out the base area. I used the thinner Spruce for my base area. That guitar had a beautiful sound.

The specs and dimensions of your guitars - is there a set pattern that you use?

The *plantilla* that I'm using is from the Hauser pattern. It's a 1947 Hauser. But I don't rigidly stick to it.

Do you employ the fan-bracing method?

Yes, lattice bracing would be too premature for me. I think you need to build quite a few guitars using traditional fan bracing first. You need to understand things like expansion and top splitting and that kind of thing. There's always the potential of all these lattice guitars' tops to start splitting. They'll start off sounding nice, but later their tops are going to split. John Williams can throw that guitar away in 5 years time when it's depleted and get another one, but most people can't.

What do you think of Mervyn's new guitar design?

I think it's a very disposable guitar in the sense that you can replace the top very easily. I honestly think that Mervyn is one of the greatest guys around. I have just such a high regard for him. I really do admire him. I think that he is a true, true, true luthier. You can go to him and ask him: 'can you make me something like this?' and he would be able to. The mark of a true luthier: he understands the working of the instrument.

What do you think is the general standard of guitars made in SA?

From what I've seen, we're all producing stuff of a very high standard. Hans van den Berg is just amazing. His craftsmanship is absolutely incredible. His attention to quality and finish is just unbelievable. On the other hand I'll say that Alistair Thomson is much more sound orientated. Garth is just good all round, though I don't think his finishes are as fine and meticulous as Hans's and mine. It might be the materials we are using. Hans and I use a different type of lacquer than Garth. A two part lacquer with catalyst, although I'm not sure if it's the best stuff at the moment. I'm having my doubts.

Why?

My guitars preserve very beautifully, but Petrus, who owns some of my guitars and plays them a lot, says that the sweat caused by playing doesn't work well with the finish. There's something unusual about my finishes: I finish the back, the sides and the neck with the lacquer and I French polish my tops. I think I'm the only guy in the Guild who French polishes. It's very exciting learning new things and improving them.

Are you sad when you sell a guitar?

Yes, sad and glad. Sad, because you would love to hear the sound grow and glad 'cause you're just so happy it's finished. It takes me more than a year to finish a guitar, because I'm a part-timer. Though it is nice to finally hand it over to the new owner, but then a week later you're missing it again ☺.

Do you work on more than one guitar at a time?

I think that 2 guitars at a time is the ideal: it's more efficient in time management. If, for example, you've got the sander set up to sand a piece of wood, then you might as well push through two or three pieces. I like to work on 2 at a time.

What are your thoughts on Spruce as opposed to Cedar?

I've only made one Cedar guitar. It had a beautiful sound. Warmer than Spruce. I heard it about 2/3 years later and it was still sounding good.

Why not build a second Cedar guitar?

I will. At the moment I'm veering towards the flamenco and those guitars are generally made of Spruce.

Are they both fairly easy to get hold of?

Yes, I've got a supplier in Germany that I'm ordering my European Spruce from and he does have Cedar as well. I've got about 3 pieces of Cedar in stock at the moment.
I use more Spruce than Cedar. The first 2 classicals I made concurrently and I made them exactly the same, but one had a Spruce top and one had a Cedar top. So essentially there you've got two of my guitars that were built in exactly the same way, but with different wood tops, so I would love to hear what they sound like now next to each other.

Do you think that SA luthiers have anything to offer international players?

I think SA has got everything to offer.

In terms of?

In terms of brilliant quality guitars. I think it's a big-kept secret. I think we're making marvelous guitars. I'm not necessarily talking about myself, although I would like to be included in that group, but the guitars of Hans, Mervyn and Garth are world class.
I sometimes wonder why Garth is on his mission to make smaller guitars. They do sound beautiful, but maybe there's a market I don't know of. I wonder why.

Is there a SA tradition in guitar building?

Not really, we're too different and varied.

If there's one thing that you've all got in common, it's the use of indigenous woods.

Yes, but that doesn't change the construction of the guitar too much. The indigenous woods are just brought about by economics and why should we use another wood if the *Kiaat* works so well? And it's a hell of a lot cheaper. Hans doesn't use indigenous woods, he uses traditional woods only.

Do you have experience in working with Brazilian Rosewood?

No, it's difficult to get hold of. Expensive and not readily available. My experience with Brazilian Rosewood is that it's got this aura about it. You can charge double and the guitar will 'sound better', but the Brazilian Rosewood that you get now is so inferior. Some of it is not even quarter sawn, its flat sawn, so the chance of it warping and doing funny things is great. It's become a bullshit story. To find a decent plank of Brazilian Rosewood that's quarter sawn is almost unheard of these days.

Would you like to work with it one day, though?

I don't really have an inclination to work with it. I've heard too many well-known luthiers saying that Indian is as good as Brazilian Rosewood. And I'd like to believe that.

What are your ambitions and goals for the future?

My ambitions are to consider myself in a learning phase of guitar building. Learning and experiencing; gaining experience. I do intend retiring from my profession in the next ten years, and then going into full-time luthiery, but the proviso is that my pension that I've been paying a lot of money into should keep me alive so that luthiery will become my hobby with a little bit of money coming in. I'm not going to make luthiery my livelihood before a good 7 or 10 years from now.

Risky?

Yes, it's risky. The prices you have to ask and the chances of getting commissions are not always guaranteed. Look at now: every time I've made a guitar I've sold it. The two I've got now are orders, so well, we'll see what happens after that.

How much do your guitars go for?

They go for about R14 000.

Do you use electronic tools?

I don't have lots of electrical tools, though I do have a band saw and a router, drill and I've got my sander. I think that there are certain jobs that you should use electric tools like sanders and things. I've got a rotary sander and a drill press, which I use a lot for various sanding jobs as well. I've got a lot of old tools. Tools that my dad had. Old dowel jigs that I use for drilling my holes. I quite like my dad's old tools like the hand chisels.

Do you lean heavily on planning and sketches?

Less so than the guys who are architects and draughtsman. I have a very basic plan or pattern that I use for the classical guitar, the Hauser. It's got a 650mm scale length and that's the Hauser shape. I work to the book of Campaigno, which has the classic and steel-string designs. I follow the instructions there, but I use this as my shape.
I've got a very nice piece of equipment that measures the water content of wood to see whether it's dry enough.

And testing it for acoustic qualities?

No, I do tap it and listen to it, but it depends on how thick the piece of wood is.

Do you work according to your intuition or by feel?

Yes, it's what that wood does in my hands that I go by.

What do you think of the future of SA luthiery?

It's growing. I probably see the most amount of growth, because the Guild gets new members all the time. It's growing very fast. I can't say about the quality. A guy who builds his first guitar is not too big on quality, it takes a while.

What are the biggest challenges in building guitars?

There are certain jobs that I just sweat when I do them. Bending wood is something that you learn to get a feel for. You can't tell someone what to do, it's a feel thing. The wood starts to move in your hands: it's a magic thing, but you have to understand it. So I'm learning that. It comes through experience. Attaching the neck to the body of a steel-string is difficult. You build it in two pieces and eventually you have to put those two together, which can become scary. Fretting is also something I'm not fond of doing. Rotoring is always a worry. I've made some terrible mistakes.

Do Charl Lamprecht and Abri Jordaan contribute a lot to the guild from the player's point of view?

Yes, they give a lot of input as critics. Abri is probably my biggest source of clients. A lot of his students order guitars from me.

Where would you like to improve/excel in?

I'd like to excel in my finishes. I'd like to think that my construction is getting there. I'd like my guitars to look like the guitars I saw overseas. I saw guitars that were French polished like you can't believe; it looks like lacquer has been sprayed on.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON 26 JUNE 2005

In our first interview you mentioned that when you started getting interested in guitars you placed an advertisement for a guitar in a magazine called 'stoep chatter'?

Yes. I was hoping that someone on a farm somewhere might read it and say that they have an old guitar lying there somewhere not knowing what it was. I did find an old guitar I can show you, which is really an interesting guitar. It is a 'Josh White' signature model.

What role do you see indigenous wood fulfill in luthiery in South Africa?

I think steel-strings are more open to indigenous wood experimentation. That it is not a rule, though, just my opinion. The guitars are more forgiving and I would almost say user friendly. I don't think, though, that you can't make a classical guitar out of indigenous wood, but the traditional player wants more of the traditional woods. Most of my orders are for Indian Rosewood. Not many people are interested in trying something else.

Have you used indigenous woods for classicals?

No.

Do you think it will influence the sound?

No. African Blackwood or *Kiaat* would be fine. Garth uses it all the time and Mervyn as well. I'm keen to get into Australian Blackwood. It is like a weed here and there are many plantations they are getting rid of at the moment. The guy who imports African Blackwood has got a saw mill in the Olifantsfontein area. He imports three truck loads of the stuff. Those big logs and he only gets about ten or so guitar backs and sides out of that whole truck load. He actually makes clarinet woods out of the smaller pieces, which he sends to Europe.

So it does have good acoustic properties then?

Oh, fantastic! It is the top clarinet wood in the East block. It is the best exporter, but to get a piece big enough to make a guitar is the big problem. It is a very difficult wood to get hold of. I have got lots of it. It is very dark and heavy and actually sinks in water.

What do you think makes you a better luthier now than when you started?

The interaction that I have had with the luthiers in this country. It has been an incredible learning experience to share my building with other builders in the country and in that regard having the Luthier's Guild has been for me the most stimulating thing about building guitars. I have always had someone to look to, to ask and also someone to critique. The criticism has made me far more critical of my own work. I think it has been an amazing thing to have a guild.

Can you give me a brief history of the guild of South African luthiers?

It has been going for about 4 or 5 years now. Alistair was involved with starting it, but it never got off the ground, because no agreement could be reached on who the chairman should be, who should pay, what the monthly fee would be…eventually I said that we must leave the payment or membership fee. Anybody who has got internet will be a member if they want to be, so it is purely by internet. It is just communication. There is no cost involved. That is why I am prepared to do it. I am not loosing any money by being the coordinator of the guild and I love doing it. I love writing and sharing. To get back to your question on what makes me a better luthier now than before. I went to the American Guild of luthiers' conference or convention last year and I spent time with Eugene Clarke. He taught me how to build in the true Spanish tradition, using the domed *solera* and I've been using his methods. I am using old things like hide glue in stead of normal everyday glue. I have been doing very different stuff now. The first guitar I made that Petrus Gous now owns was made unknowingly and out of a book just like following a recipe. Now I am starting to understand what I am doing and why I am doing it. The guitars I build now have got qualities that go back to the tradition of building and there are certain things that make it easier to build a guitar now that I've been doing since I have had correspondence with Eugene Clarke. He is an amazing man. He is an old American and must be nearly 70 and he has pulled apart a lot of traditional guitars and he has looked how they were made and has tried to copy them.

Is that the route you want to go?

I don't know. I won't say forever, but for now it is nice to have the background that you can work on from there in future. I will never say that I'm going to stay with a certain thing. I think one should always change and try to improve.

You should be really proud of your rosettes. I have never seen anything like it.

I am. I like my rosettes. I will show you some pictures as well. My first rosettes were bought rosettes. I bought them in a factory in Germany that makes rosettes, back strips and organ pipes. It is an amazing three generation business. They made all the back strips and things for the Martin Company.

What are the differences between the American and South African cultures of luthiery?

They are totally instrument crazy. They have got more implements than they know what to do with. I have got a lot of traditional saws. There everything is mechanized. Most of the guys have jigs for everything. If you look through the Stew Mac catalogue there are a million things you can buy to make guitars that have all been invented by the Americans to make things easier. They are a lazy bunch ☺.

How many luthiers were there at that convention?

I can't remember. It could have been about 200-300.

What kind of themes and lectures did they have at the convention?

The one night, for example, Kenton Youngstrom played… I think… an 1884 Torres guitar that one guy had repaired. The restoration of this old Torres had been the feature lecture of the morning before and the concert that night featured that guitar. He played a few Tarrega compositions. It was the guitar that belonged to Tarrega and had been restored. The other night featured a strange couple that played a few weird instruments. Another night they had the Django Reinhard style with those guitars with the oval soundhole.

Last time you said that you build guitars in the semi traditional way. Has that moved towards traditional now?

Yes. I am not quite sure what I meant by semi traditional. You must realize that I am still a very inexperienced luthier. Probably the most inexperienced luthier that you have interviewed in this whole thing, so I'm very humble. Not many luthiers will think that they are there yet. That is why we continue doing it.

Would you ever want to experiment with extreme designs?

I don't think so. I think I am going to be making traditional guitars.

What is THAT sound that you speak of in the previous interview that all luthiers aim for?

I don't think I can describe that sound. It is the sound that will make the player happy. I don't think anyone can describe THAT sound. I actually don't understand the descriptions that are applied to music. At the moment I don't have enough to talk about it. Of course I know what sustain is and the like, but there are certain terminologies that get used by you chaps that I really don't know. I must attend more concerts and get myself more up to date with classical music. Even describing a guitar for experienced classical musicians I think would be difficult. I think it is an intangible. It all goes to what makes that player really want to get into that guitar. Hopefully every guitar I make will satisfy my clients to a certain degree and I don't think it will satisfy everything.

Can you tell me a little bit more on your use of Mopanie?

I have used it only once and I probably never will again. It is very unstable. The guitar I made using *Mopanie* was made under all the correct humidity and other conditions and the doming on the back, if the humidity went very low, would almost flatten out. I think it is an unstable wood and I think the guy who cuts it didn't cure his woods long enough. I don't know if the guitar will ever be a problem, but the potential is there for it to crack. It is a lovely looking wood, but not a nice wood to work with. It is difficult

to bend and has a lot of back spring in it. My next steel-string is going to be made out of Madagascan Rosewood. It is a lovely wood.

You mentioned last time that you think that Kiaat will become the trademark S.A. wood.

Yes, I think so. I don't find it attractive, though. It is not a pretty wood. It has got a funny colour. Garth will probably disagree with me, though. It is probably already the South African trademark wood. To come back to your earlier question when you asked me why I in our last interview described myself as semi traditional. I think that largely went around the fact that I was using a two part lacquer system on the backs and sides and the neck. I was French polishing the top, but now Garth and I are so much into French polishing. We like doing it. We like the effect of it and the fact that we don't have to spray and pollute the environment. The guitar I'm busy with at the moment is probably going to be all French polished.

Is it difficult to French polish and if so, why?

Yes, it is very difficult. It is a process of learning how to lay down that French polish without removing it at the same time. It makes a very fine finish.

That is something that is unique to you and Garth, then.

Yes, none of the other S.A. luthiers I've spoken to do that. My last guitar was French polished on the back, top and sides, and lacquered on the neck and head stock.

The advantage of that is that there are less things that can interfere with the sound?

We think so, yes.

I think it is true, because Alistair Thomson told me yesterday that Greg Smallman once wrote to him and said that the easiest way to kill a guitar's sound is to cover it with thick layers of varnish. He suspects that French polishing is the best finishing you can have on a guitar. What does French polishing look like visually?

It is improving a lot. I've seen guitars at the conference in America that you won't believe are French polished, because they are so well done. It looks like they have been spray painted.

Is it just the skill of the guy who did it, or a specific technique?

It is simply his skill, because I got the recipe from him, but I have subsequently moved away from his recipe and gone back to the old shellac and alcohol mixture. Then I was in Amsterdam recently on holiday and I went and visited Otto Vowinkel and he was busy French polishing and finishing a guitar. As I stood there I watched him and he has also got an amazing finish.

Wow. You learn a lot from just observing other people at work.

Yes, and did I learn a lot! I spent a whole morning with him and had lunch with him and he built a guitar in front of my eyes basically, which was just fantastic. The guitars that he makes are beautiful. They don't get 5000 Euros for nothing. I think that is what he said he charged.

You say that you have only made one Cedar guitar. Why?

I would like to make more. I think I just understand Spruce a bit better. I am just starting to understand Spruce. I think using Cedar now would introduce me to a different side of the guitar that I would like to do. Definitely.

Do you agree that Cedar gives a warmer sound, but it is difficult to bring out the trebles?

Yes, I guess.

I think that is why Cedar works so well on Garth Pickard's guitars. They are smaller, so have a natural tendency to have less bass and more trebles.

Yes, I'm with you.

What kind of guitars would you want to carry on making when you retire from your profession and become a full-time luthier?

I'll make anything that sort of tickles my interest, whether it is a classical or steel-string. I don't think I'm going to deviate much from that. I intend using dulcimers as my bread and butter, because in a little town like Clarence, where I'm going to build guitars when I retire if everything works according to plan…..it is the most beautiful part of the country. We have got a house there. It's a beautiful little village surrounded by mountains, 20 km from the Golden Gate. It's just a beautiful place and we built a cottage there and are already planning our retirement house. I am even going to design my workshop into the drawings of this new house. I will be able to make dulcimers on a fairly quick turnover basis, which could just be good for bread and butter. Someone might come along there and see you building guitars and they might want something like a memento, because there are a lot of tourists. They might want to take a little dulcimer in stead of a guitar.

How much importance do you ascribe to the finish of the guitar? It sounds like you place more importance on that than most luthiers.

I think my guitars sound good and I think it is partly because I use French polish on my soundboards, but that is not something I can prove. One likes to wonder why this guitar is a nice one. Is it the doming of the soundboard or the strutting or whatever? There are so many factors that one has to try and use them all.

So you see the finish of a guitar more as a sound contributing factor than a visual factor?

Yes, with French polishing you have to sacrifice a bit of visual appeal, but is doesn't have to be that way, because if you are a good French polisher, you can get the guitar to eventually be as good as can be. To French polish around the bridge, you have to get into a little corner and you can never get into that corner properly. Otto Vowinkel will only put the bridge on last. He will do his whole French polish and then remove the tape which is protecting the soundboard and then put the bridge down. It is a finish that takes a lot more elbow grease. It doesn't necessarily take longer, because those lacquers and nitrocellulose take a while to settle and you've got to let them cure before you can start sanding them, but it takes away all this having to spray and sand and spray and sand.

Tell me about the last two guitars you finished.

I used a Hauser *plantilla* combined with a modified Torres bracing. It is slightly modified, because the width is slightly smaller. It is slightly narrower. I used a method that Garth Pickard and I spent hours on of doming the *solera*. It is not a new methd. Lots of guys use it. My dome is quite a deep dome, though. Three sixteenths of an inch, which is very deep. I learned all of this from Eugene Clarke. If you look at the profile of the guitar you will notice the dome. That is traditional. The top has been forced into this thing and using hide glue it doesn't creep at all, whereas all the other glues creep slightly. When you force it down and you have got it down with hide glue, the braces stay in this dome. That is what is important and what was so new to me in my latest guitars. You might not hear it well now. The tap tone will be gone at the moment, but Eugene says that your guitar top must be a drum. That is why it is under tension and that is what makes it so special. The biggest feature of my latest guitars is the dome in the top, which is quite prominent.