

An Interview

with Beau Hannam





Thanks for speaking to us, Beau. Maybe we can just ask how you got into building ukes?

I had been playing guitar since 1984 so I loved the instrument. Around 2001 I found Cumpiano's guitar-making book at a second hand book sale and read it cover to cover. I didn't really understand any of it but I knew I was soaking in some luthiery terminology and woodworking tips. After graduating university I started making my first guitars in 2003 under the gaze of Gerard Gilet in Sydney, Australia. At the Gilet Guitars school, I made 3 guitars, after which I volunteered weekends helping out where I could.

I started teaching students in exchange for wood sets or workshop time (it was \$110 a day at the time) then Gerard asked me to join full time which was a dream come true. The amazing thing about the Gilet School is that students started with rough milled pieces of raw wood and took those bits all the way

through to setting up the guitar, including spraying their own nitro. It was an all encompassing master class for every student so I feel very privileged to have been a part of that.

And now you're building ukes; how was the switch from guitars to ukes?

Easy- just halve the top thicknesses! But seriously, it took about 5 ukes to hone in on the top thicknesses to get a sound that I thought worthy of selling. Now, I find it easy to switch thinking in terms of both guitars and ukes re difference thickness, stiffness and tolerance of the wood.



Aren't the rules for guitars not really applicable to ukes?

Where I'm at now, the only rule is that I create an instrument that resonates deeply with a broad tonal spectrum and long response. In my mind, there is no 'guitar' or 'uke', it is simply a musical instrument that needs to vibrate to its full potential. The physical principles of the builds and problems therein are the same: scale lengths, compensation for correct intonation, fingerboard meeting the top radius, neck angle which speaks to bridge height and fingerboard thickness, action etc.

All that "simple" mechanical engineering is identical. The tops however do need to be thought of differently in accordance to string tension. There is much less top vibrational area and string tension to generate sound, so in many ways uke builders have a harder job than guitar builders as there is less to work with.

Uke builders are the MacGyver's of sound generation. In fact, my understanding of guitar tops is much deeper after having made ukes. To think about uke tops is to think about flamenco/classical guitar tops which is to understand steel string design and tolerances and vice versa. To look at lutes and renaissances style instruments is to further understand what a thin top is capable of under string tension.

It is a kind of reductive process: If a classical guitar has X string tension exerted on its top and a bridge of Z dimensions, what can I do to a uke top which is close to half the width and length, and half the string tension? What can I do to the bridge? There are many other factors of course re bracing, bridge plate and so on, but you get the idea of the benefits of looking at bigger/heavier and smaller/lighter instruments to the ones you happen to build in regard to possible tolerances.



Maybe you could let us in on your philosophy?

Everyone who taught me at Gilet guitars is an excellent and thoughtful woodworker so I try to be too. I saw a lot of badly made factory guitars and Gerard would point out the wheres, hows and whys of problems in such instruments so one quickly got a sense of how to employ good woodworking practices. We looked at simple things that immediately differentiate a well built guitar from a bad one. For example, if the back braces and transverse bar are tucked into the linings, if the headblock is slightly wider than the fingerboard to minimize the top cracking along that edge etc. My tops are what I would call safely thin.

And what are your favourite tonewoods?

I've probably used more Tasmanian blackwood than any other wood so it will forever have a place in my building, especially now I am located in Colorado as using it brings back so many memories. I was mostly a spruce guy but now I'm broadening into redwood, cedar, Port Orford cedar etc tops. I really don't have a favorite wood for any part of the build as each set is like meeting a new person.

Recently we've noticed more aesthetic details on your instruments.

Well, I went to a Rudolf Steiner ("Waldorf") primary school where I was immersed in artistic things from the very beginning. Later in life I went to art school for 3 years so I have always thought about aesthetics, form, lines, colours.

After art school, I got a degree in philosophy/theology. I mention all this as I feel the ability to think creatively coincides with, and is caused by, having a wide net of influences and interests which in turn allows the ability to fathom the intricacy and beauty of nature. Of course, I might just be a hippy with a big forehead.

The execution of the purfling- what's your favourite at the moment?

My signature headstock features fading purfling lines at the top. It is a difficult woodworking procedure and takes time to execute with any amount of precision. The overall image is influenced by old maps and their topographical rendering of hills and mountains.





Maybe you could talk us through that procedure?

For the headstock, I route the binding and purfling channel as one ledge. My headstock has 6 binding parts, 12 including the purfling. The top parts of my headstock have to be glued in two parts, each with an annoyingly difficult tight bend and rebend in the binding. Inside this top section, above my 'H' logo, are my fading purfling.

I 'fade' one end by holding my finger on the very end of the purfling and drawing it towards me over sand paper until it is feathered to a fine edge over about a ½". I hold the sanded purfling it up to a light to make sure there is a nice fading transition from full width to nothing.

I start with the more difficult left-hand side fading purfling line which creates the 'whip tail', (for lack of a better term) which bends, extends and fades into the right side of the headstock. For the whip tail, I use an exacto knife to cut, scribe, stab, scrape and in any way excavate a channel big enough to slide my fading purfling.

I usually have to cut the purfling to somewhat match this channel which is roughly a 45 degree slope due to the nature and awkwardness of removing such a small, thin amount of wood in a curve. I have experimented with a loose Japanese saw blade for this cut- it just works on guitar headstocks but not on ukes. I have also used this fading 'whip tail' on end grafts and rosettes as I just didn't think life was hard enough...

The right hand side of the headstock is easier. The binding itself butts up against the left side binding while the purfling fades out short of the centerline.



And now we're seeing a lot of "patchwork" aesthetics from yourself.

I think the best rosettes in modern guitar-making are Jason Kostal's Stained Glass rosettes. So I was influenced by this. I called Jason to ask permission to create a similarish look for a handful of future instruments.

It is important to acknowledge the influence of others, especially in the area of aesthetics where it is difficult to create anything new, especially in such a small area as a rosette. Jason's method involves staining woods of the same species.

I, however, tend to use 8 or 9 different woods- whatever is at hand and "speaks to" the rest of the instrument. I used a bit of figured local wood I found on a hike in Colorado which I was really happy with.

More recently I've moved into the wonderful world of burl- I've done a scoop cutaway and arm bevel laminated with burl. I've also come up with a quicker way to do my headstock with a faked fading purfling look and also a hand rubbed sunbursts on Tassy blackwood with no binding. Blackwood with a simple hand rubbed burst looks fantastic so these may be options for some future instruments.





I hear you've been shuttling between Australia and the US now; that must be disruptive to your building.

Indeed. Well, like all good stories, its starts with the words "I met a red headed Texan girl" hahah. So I decided to leave Gilet Guitars and move to Colorado to be with said red. I spent a year in Colorado in 2012 then had to go back to Oz for 7 months for visa reasons. I got married in Jan (31st, don't let me forget!) 2014 and now have a Green card so life is a lot more settled. I'm the Gerard Depardieu of luthiery! Now I have a full workshop here with a stock pile of very nice wood which I'm finally beginning to whittle into instruments.

And how do you find building in the US different from Australia?

I have found building in the US easier in almost every way. The best thing is simple accessibility to wood is greatly expanded. For instance, it is illegal to post common luthiery woods such as Honduran mahogany or Spanish cedar to Oz. All these woods are available in Oz but they are not items one can get from a decent lumber yard or call up and have an amazing Brazilian set in 2 days.

When I first got to the US, I was shocked to find beautifully figured maple in Home Depo! Also, postage is greatly reduced, tooling is cheaper, and machinery is up to half price so setting up my new workshop only cost a small fortune instead of an actual fortune.

The biggest change and most difficult part for me is no longer having the pleasure of sharing a bench with some cherished luthiery friends-being able to bounce ideas, problems and share wins with friends is definitely something I miss. However since moving to the Colorado I have made friends with talented local woodworkers, luthiers, new wood suppliers, customers and sellers. The world doesn't stay big and scary for long, which is nice.

And how does the different climate come into play now?

Well, Colorado is a dry state, especially during winter as snow sucks a lot of moisture from the air. In the Colorado winter, my two humidifiers pump into the air about 5 gallons every 3 days which keeps my workshop's relative humidity at 45% which is where I like it.

Just to be safe, I bought a 2nd hand de-humidifier for \$10 which should come in handy about 2 days a year. Along with a rich wife, controlled humidity is probably the most important building element for a professional luthier to have. It is also something that I've seen most often overlooked by new luthiers.

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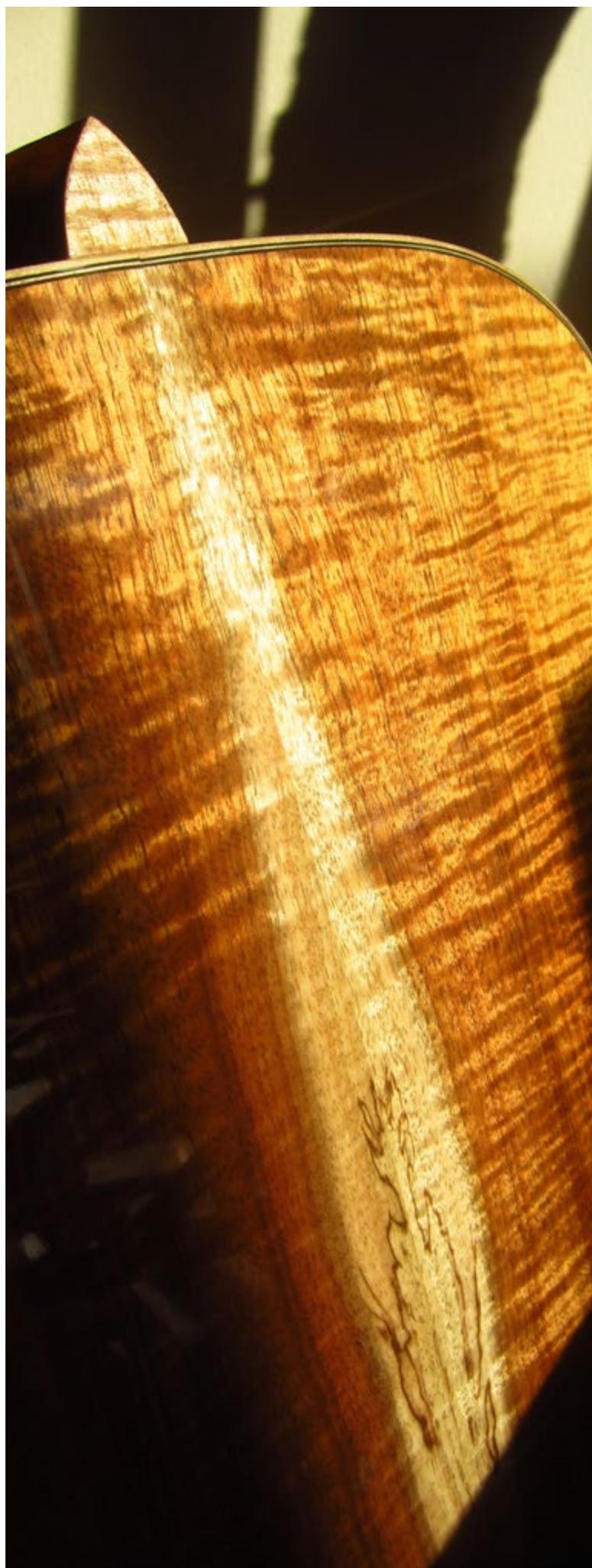
Maybe I can bring you back to tonewoods for a bit- would you say that tonewood choice for guitars and ukes can bring very different tonal responses?

Yes. A luthier should be able to...persuade the tonal spectrum of an instrument through wood choice according to what they or the customer is looking for. Rosewood and sitka will always be brighter sounding species than mahogany, cedar, Engelmann etc whether it be on guitar or uke. I will add however that wood choice is not some infallible menu for sound properties. eg, not all Brazilian rosewood/ German spruce instruments sound good.

Back and sides are important, but not as much as the top. I would rather an instrument with an amazingly light and stiff top, thoughtfully thinned and voiced with plywood back/sides over an Brazilian old growth back/sides and an over (or under) built top. There is some contention with how much back/sides play a part in it all as a vibrating (not reflecting) surface.

I don't bother with voicing backs for the very simply reason that the back is against the players chest 99% of the time completely nullifying any vibrational action. I therefore treat the back as a reflector and make it quite stiff. I spend a lot of time on the top- slowly thinning it while flexing, tapping and listening to it then the same while carving its braces.

To help bring out the monopole and make a generally more responsive top, I don't tuck any top braces into the linings in the lower bout but stop them short by 1/2" - 1" of the edge. I also thin the lower bout edges of the top. Now that I'm making ukes, which as mentioned before has made me look at classical/flamenco construction, I more fully understand what is possible in, and the limits of, top thicknesses. Greg Smallman guitars are a revelation to those that ponder top thickness possibilities.



I guess there are a few schools of thought-thick top, thin braces or thin top thick braces..... where do you fall?

My main concern is to achieve a responsive top, so my aim is always thin top, thin braces. I would rather use more thin braces (such as a very light lattice) to achieve stability then simply using thicker braces. Recently I used a double X brace on a uke with great success.

The main concern with a thin top and thin braces are the braces telegraphing through which can also cause the top to become wavy, especially when the braces run along the grain. I'm not certain, but I think builders use thicker braces primarily for the cosmetic reason of less brace telegraphing rather than any advantageous tonal response. Although a warping top can be a symptom of real structural problems, light brace telegraphing in the lower bout isn't really a structural problem.

It is, however, a turn off and ugly to most customers so this telegraphing becomes much more of a serious problem than structural,.. it becomes a marketing problem! Everyone needs to understand that the best sounding instruments will not have a perfect top.

Minor top deformation in the lower bout is a sign of a well built instrument (with the above caveat). A top that is still perfect after even a short time can only be an overbuilt top. More numerous thin braces, I feel, is always a better solution than thicker braces.

My guitar braces are 1/4" wide, uke braces about 3, 4, or 5mm wide. For top thickness, I quickly sand to a point where I know a good top should still have life in it (stiffness, good tap etc) and if it doesn't, it gets cut up as marriage strips, or sound hole reinforcement. For guitars this point is .100"-.120 depending on body size. For ukes tops .080". I further work down the entire top from here and, just

“ Minor top deformation in the lower bout is a sign of a well built instrument ”



prior to binding, concentrating on thinning the lower bout perimeter.











No Chladni patterns or tap tuning?

At the moment I'm tapping the top during the brace carving stage in an effort to get no dead spots and minimal dull thuds. Duller thuds exist in any top such as between braces but a more evenly dispersed bracing pattern reduces this, especially in the lower two tone braces of guitars, behind the X brace.

The standard 3 or 5 fan uke braces are pretty good as is. For steel string guitars, a light double X brace is becoming the alternative for high end luthiers, as this, being the beginnings of a wide lattice, very evenly disperses the load behind the bridge.

After binding, I tap my top listening for a long booooooing sound like a drum. If it is lacking, I will further remove wood from the perimeter to accentuate this sound, which is basically the pumping monopole.

We used Chladni patterns at Gilet Guitars in Sydney and those resonance numbers are great tools to have. However, when moving to Colorado from Sydney equipment priorities overtook equipment want so I'm yet to get a tone generator. I'm looking for one still.



There has been some criticism with the use of Chladni patterns, particularly aimed at the suggestion it homogenises the tone...

As for a homogenised sound, I agree that a perfect instrument can sound boring, as much as a perfect singer can sound boring when compared with a non-perfect singer like, say, Neil Young.

However, I used the patterns themselves as just visual representations of the top (monopole), back and air cavity resonances. My primary concern is to make sure these 3 resonances were not coupled/in sync, ie resonating on or close to the same note which causes a loss of energy. The other concern is to make sure the top isn't resonating on or near any scale note, a symptom of which is wolf notes.

Getting a top to resonate between two semitones being the ideal. There are some common remedies for wolf notes for an already made instrument: change the soundhole diameter, adding modelling putty to the top, carve braces etc.

However, the most sophisticated is by adding inert mass to the side as described in Gerard Gilet and Trevor Gore's excellent books *Contemporary Acoustic Guitar: Design and Build..* This adding of mass to the sides also has the benefit of (don't ask me how) enlarging the monopole vibrating perimeter! That is a wordy way of saying you get a louder and more vibrant instrument.

You've used the term monopole a few times, maybe you could explain that to us?

The monopole is the guitar/ukulele top's primary mode of vibrating action when excited (by strings). The monopole pumps the top lower bout as a whole (like a speaker cone) and is the main sound radiator. The monopole is where the majority of the radiating 'sound' and bass comes from, hence, the bigger the instrument, the bigger the vibrating surface, the bigger the monopole, or, should I say, possibility for a bigger monopole.

To visualise the monopole, sawdust is scattered over a top while its resonate frequency is found. The sawdust forms a ring of sorts which follows around the lower bout up to the waist ending at the soundhole. Where the sawdust forms, about 1 inch inside the perimeter of the lower bout, is the outer 'hinge' area of the top pumping.

With guitar building, I'm also thinking about the other major 'poles' which are the cross diapole (loudness near the instrument), and long diapole (projection farther in front). With ukes, I'm only really concerned with the monopole, as the other major pole, the cross diapole (where the top pumps in two halves is a sideways rocking motion on either side of the centre line) is there due to the nature of the fan bracing and a short 4" bridge.

With both guitar and ukes the monopole action can be increased by thinning the lower bout edges and stopping any braces short of the linings which allow the top to 'hinge'. The more braces follow the grain and the shorter the bridge and patch, the more cross diapole action you get.





To radically accentuate the long diapole, you would have a really long bridge, long thin bridge patch with braces running length ways with the tallest part directly under the bridge fading down- this would also be an outstanding way for your top to belly up behind, and sink in front of the bridge...but at least the people in the cheap seats could hear it.

So you can have too much of one pole of the other?

Well, i wouldn't want a dominate long or cross diapole at the expense of the mono. Flamenco guitars have a stronger cross diapole which gives that fast attack but the mono is always there as on all instruments.

I neglected to mention that all these poles are engaged simultaneously in a guitar/uke top like some kind of amazing wooden jumping castle.

Bridge design (length), bridge coupling with bracing, brace carving and top thickness tapering all play a part in how a luthier can favour one pole over another. It just depends on what is wanted- a brighter (more wood/ stiffness at the edges) or bassier sound (less wood/stiff) faster attack, sustain etc.





And do you think it is the luthier's role to maximise the potential in each piece of wood or to manipulate it to such an extent as to obtain the desired sound?

I always try to bring out the maximum potential in a guitar or ukulele top. This happens to coincide basically all customers desires, especially with fingerstyle players.

With ukuleles you can't afford to sacrifice any top resonance potential as there is so little to start with. However, "maximum potential" is not always the best choice for certain guitar styles. For instance a bluegrass picker probably wouldn't want an ultra high responsive/resonating guitar whose spectrum of overflowing harmonics and overtones muddle that dry punchy, quick attack.

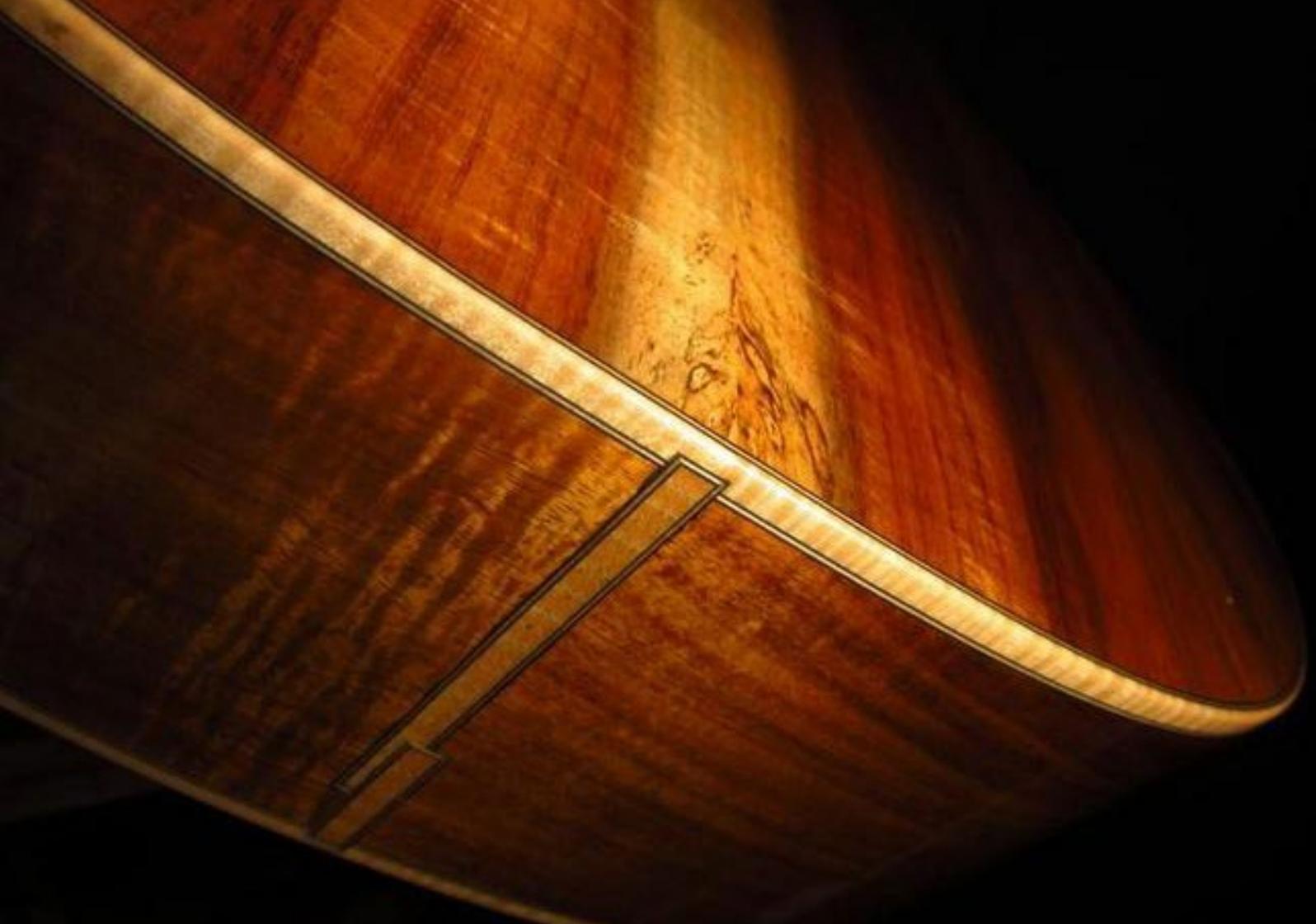
A great fingerstyle guitar isn't really a great bluegrass guitar although I've seen Tony Mcmanus play both styles on the same guitar better than anyone. Also, there are certain guitar shapes/styles where a customer's desired sound isn't consistent with a top's full potential;

e.g., Stella and Kalamazoo ladder braced tops, and Selmer/Maccaferri guitars which aren't really built for maximum potential from a resonating point of view, but they sound great for fast runs because of this limited potential.

So is there such a thing as a fingerstyle or jazz guitar?

Well.....my first answer is that Bert Jansch, a most celebrated fingerstyle guitar player and song writer, played his whole career on a Yamaha dreadnaught, so from that we can say that brand or body shape seems to not be a factor in producing the only thing that matters in the end, namely inspiring a talented musician to write good songs.

The second answer, in short, is that a fingerstyle guitar should be responsive, resonate, have a long sustain with many complex overtones. From what I understand of Jazz guitars (ie archtops), some of these elements could be somewhat of a hindrance. It's the same with lead bluegrass guitars, too many overtones muddies up those fast runs.



And what would you be talking to a potential customer about when they are thinking of ordering from you?

The first thing I ask is what the customer is thinking they want: body shape, top and back woods. Those details should correspond to what sound they are wanting and the music they play, or hope to play. If not, then I educate them on the specifics of tonewoods and the effect of pairing them with each other. Usually, it is a process of weeding out unnecessary elements or dispelling luthiery myths read on forums.

After the body shape and woods are set, I then focus on details such as rosette styles, binding material, purflings, decorative end grafts and back zippers. I also inquire about the customer as a person- what they do for a living, what interests they have in music, art movements, colours and life etc.

In doing so, I'm starting to think about design elements that could be incorporated into areas where I can make a personal artistic mark such as end graft, back zipper, rosette, heelcap, fingerboard end, and headstock.

Most of the time I'm told "I trust your aesthetics as a luthier and artist, do what you feel is best in these areas". This is really the only position to be in as a creative person.

If somebody wants something I don't believe in (eg, an inlay of Miley Cyrus at the 12th fret) I will simply direct them to another luthier as I'm just not interested in creating anything that isn't beautiful. Unfortunately, what beauty is remains a debatable subject.



So the shapes don't really affect the sound too much?

Sound differences occur and are effected by, firstly larger or smaller top vibration area. Other contributing elements are body depth, bracing efficiency, scale length etc.

A good example would be the Selmer/Maccaferri guitar whose 'sound' is found in the highly unique top geometry (a pyramid of 6 degrees, from memory), small soundhole and ladder bracing rather than its body shape per se. Selmers have a resonator-like reverb which is interesting to hear.

Body shapes do effect sound but, very strictly speaking, it is not really the body 'shape' itself which is the cause of the effect (the sound),

it is the size of the vibrational area. The size of the top's vibrational area is determined by bracing/top efficiency, i.e., dead spots due to weakness, or way too stiff spots which also kill sound. Such things are like heat sinks for sound.

To illustrate, with restrictive (i.e., bad) bracing you could build a dreadnaught guitar with a vibrating area of a small parlour guitar. I presume for it to sound more "parlourish" you could tweak body depth, sound hole size, string tension etc. It would be a great way to confuse people at the secret luthiers Christmas party!



But for the Maccaferri style uke you're not using any reflectors right?

Correct. Actually, the reflectors didn't last long in the original guitars either. I'm also not doing the authentic pyramid tops (too stiff for a uke) or ladder bracing (bad economy of resonance) as found in the original Maccaferri instruments. I've seen other maccy uke makers do lattice and 3-5 fan bracing but, at the moment, I'm using super-light double X brace.

I want to make 4 or 5 identical ukes but with different bracing, including what could only be described as a Greg Smallman mini copy: super stiff back/sides and ridiculously thin top (say, .045-.055") with carbon fiber strands reinforcing the lower bout extremities.

I'll probably have to keep that particular uke to see how it handles string pull over time. I'm sure it will sound great though.

Speaking of carbon fiber- do you use it in your necks?

I've always only used a double action truss rod but since moving to the US and looking at the luthiers' here, I'm now using CF on either side of the truss rod.



I understand you prefer Brazilian rosewood for bridges?

Yes, assuming it is light weight Brazilian. Rosewood is always a better choice over ebony which isn't really a stable wood, so I very rarely use it, anywhere except for bindings. I've also used figured Tasmanian blackwood bridges with some tassy blackwood instruments which is a nice pairing, although I tend to rub some dark brown stain into it as light coloured bridges look strange to me.

I also use Brazilian rosewood for fingerboards on guitars and ukes or African blackwood (which is a rosewood) if I'm after a black fingerboard look. I tend to use TUSQ saddles over bone. I have a video on *youtube* of me dropping both saddles onto a bench- the TUSQ sounds like glass while the bone just gives a dull thud.

But none of this fossilised ivory?

: I've not used fossilised ivory. It definitely sounds more romantic than a polymer product like TUSQ, but I doubt it sounds as good as TUSQ with the drop test. Having said that, a duller material (compared to TUSQ) like bone or real ivory can smooth out a too bright an instrument in the way a different string selection can.

I always reach for TUSQ as my standard saddle despite the dislike of it from numerous US and Canadian luthiers who seem to have known it years ago when it may have been a different recipe. All I know is that it is good now- Everyone should hear the drop test- it is a revelation.

Cool! Do you pay much heed to fretboard feel?

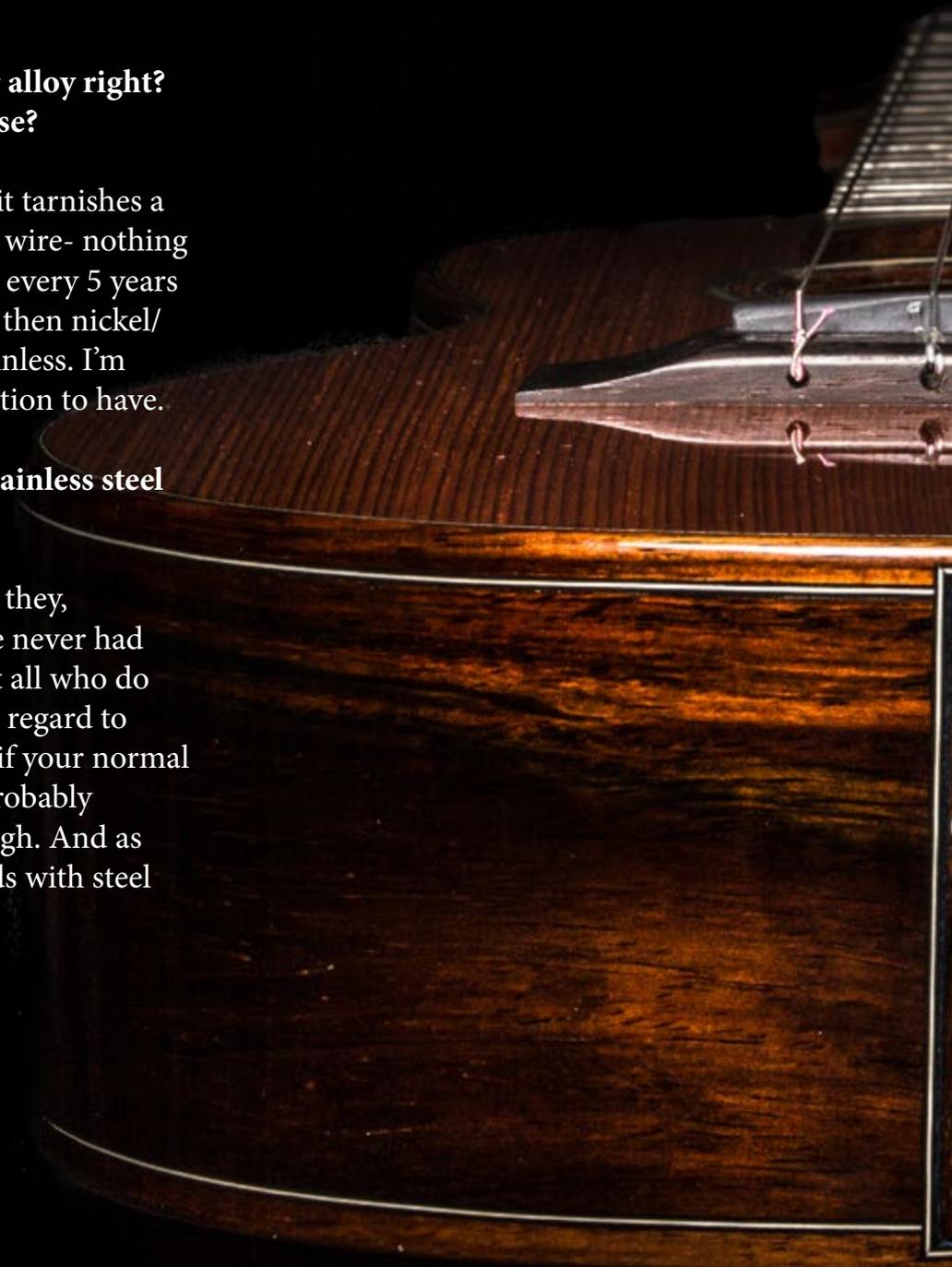
As long as it feels near perfect, I'm usually ok ;) Standard fingerboards are 16" radius on guitars and flat for ukes. All are bound and fret ends all receive a good hemisemiphericalling. I like 0.080" Evo gold fret wire at the moment and use it or 0.080" silver/nickel on everything depending on the look. evo gold looks great on warm coloured woods like Tassy blackwood, cocobolo, mahogany etc. I find silver tends to suit darker woods like Indian rosewood.

Evo gold- that's the new copper alloy right? How is it to work with and in use?

I like it- it looks nice. I've heard it tarnishes a bit over time, but so does all fret wire- nothing 30 seconds with some steel wool every 5 years won't remedy. It is a little harder then nickel/silver wire but not as hard as stainless. I'm finding that it is a really good option to have.

And what's the problem with stainless steel frets?

No real problem apart from that they, apparently, are hard to work. I've never had a reason to use stainless frets but all who do say it blunts files pretty quick. In regard to stainlessness of them, I feel that if your normal frets are actually rusting, your probably not playing the instrument enough. And as mentioned previously, 20 seconds with steel wool makes them shine.



Let's touch a bit on finishes- I know you've used a variety, which is your favourite?

Nitrocellulose lacquer, with gloss as standard. In 2012 those at Gilet Guitars were lucky enough to get a small class French Polishing tutorial by Teen Goh who has been teaching the art for 30+ years in Sydney. Since that class, I have been polishing all my tops, giving them a 3/4 French polish, then as thin as possible nitro over that. I find that this combo gives the wood a beautiful deep luster and a durable finish.

As of 2013, I wanted to offer a uke at a more affordable price point, as \$3000+ isn't an option for everyone. I did this by having no bindings, and a simplified version of my complicated fading headstock purfling. As standard on these ukes I do a hand rubbed burst (if wanted). I've done quite a few bursts since 2003 and I can do a hand rubbed burst as quick as spraying it but with a better looking result on figured woods like Tasmanian blackwood.

Tassy blackwood with a hand rubbed burst is just spectacular. A handrubbed burst accentuates the figure while a sprayed burst tends to cover it up alot more (especially if you use powdered dyes to make it look authentic 1930's burst). My bursts look more like deep stained glass and definitely NOT a procedure I do to cover up faults in cheap cuts of wood, which was the original practice of the factories.

Actually, all my guitar and uke builds with figured blackwood have a light golden brown stain rubbed into the grain and is then sanded off the surface. The stain remains in the lower troughs of the grain but the high lights are lighter making the whole thing POP with character. It is a time consuming and subtle thing to do but well worth it.





Maybe now is a good time to discuss the lineup of instruments you offer?

My core guitar shapes are OM/000, dreadnaught, L00, parlour, and a new tenor guitar. I can also do J45, 00, and medium jumbo as we made all these at Gilet guitars so I have a lot of experience with all the shapes. I've wanted to add a harp guitar to my list for years so perhaps 2017.

Ukulele shapes are tenor, Selmer/Maccaferri, concert, baritone. I took sopranos off my website as I just don't want to make them. I am developing a harp uke which should surface sometime late 2016 or 2017.

If a customer comes to me wanting a body shape I don't offer, I will explain to them that I can do it but make it clear that I've not made one before, this was the case of the tenor guitar and Selmer uke.

With the tenor guitar build (which will be paired with a matching tenor uke) I researched for weeks all things tenor guitars and through that developed my own body shape in connection with traditional body and scale measurements, and made the mold. It is no small thing to commit to a new shape but being a custom builder allows me to be fluid with any design element- I'm not locked into jigs or templates.



Thanks for your time Beau. Before letting you go would you have any advice for our readers who are contemplating ordering a custom uke?

It has been a pleasure. Thanks for speaking to me.

On ordering a custom instrument, I'd advise to do research on body shapes, woods, and decorative specifics to create a sense of aesthetic which appeals to you. I have found that having a sense of colour interaction in woods helps with things such as binding and purfling choice which can hold people up.

Also, knowing the difference between binding and purfling as I've heard of a few horror stories when the customer gets their prized instrument and the binding is red when they thought they were talking about a thin red purfling line.

On my website I have a downloadable 9 page document called "Glossary of Terms" which outlines and describes in detail everything anyone could possibly want. I added this to avoid such confusion, especially with non-speaking customers.

Knowledge of terms such as 'binding' and 'purfling' don't contribute to the sound of course but it helps the order process be less daunting for the customer who faces many major design choices straight up be they a simple yes or no answers to the cornerstone of any instrument- the top and back wood choices which require further insight into desired tone and playing styles.











