



orfeo

N°14

MAGAZINE

**Markneukirchen
Special**

**The history
Villa Merz
The museum**

**C. F. Martin
Richard Jacob "Weissgerber"
Armin & Mario Gropp
Angela Waltner
Joachim Schneider**

**N° 14 - Autumn 2019
English edition**

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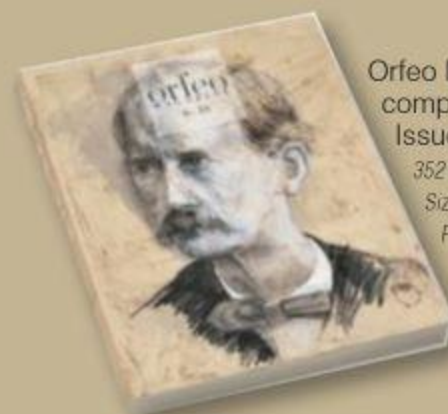
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From the Editor

Orfeo MAGAZINE N°14

Have you ever heard of Markneukirchen?

It's a small, almost forgotten, German town not far from the Czech border, where for the last three hundred and fifty years every imaginable orchestra instrument has been manufactured: string, wind and percussion! No other town anywhere in the world comes close to offering such diversity.

The manufacture of instruments here reached its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the wars and divisions of last century took their toll: the region was cut off from the West when Germany was divided in 1949, and its isolation was even further exacerbated by the Berlin Wall (1961-1989).

We journeyed to Markneukirchen to rediscover this hotspot of quality lutherie, which gave us C. F. Martin, founder of the famous American brand, and Richard Jacob Weissgerber, who, despite being a prolific luthier, was little-known across the rest of Europe.

These days, the tradition is embodied by – among others – luthiers such as Armin and Mario Gropp, Stefan Schneider and Angela Waltner.

Enjoy.

Alberto Martinez

Markneukirchen, the town of music

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) pushed Protestant luthiers out of Bohemia and into Saxony, where they could freely practice their religion. The twelve violin makers who settled in Markneukirchen (in the Vogtland region, Germany), founded their guild in 1677, and their descendants have perpetuated the profession ever since, generation after generation.



 *Musikstadt*
Markneukirchen



Monument commemorating the luthiers guild and its establishment in 1677.

The construction of Viennese guitars and, in particular, the workshops of Johann Georg and Johann Anton Stauffer had a profound influence on guitar making in Markneukirchen (known as Neukirchen prior to 1858).

Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century many guitar makers from Markneukirchen and Klingenthal had learned their craft in Vienna, which was a hive of innovation.

The Spanish models, developed in parallel by C. F. Martin in the United States, gave new impetus to Saxon lutherie. But it was not until 1925, after the visits of Miguel Llobet and Andrés Segovia to Markneukirchen, that Richard Jacob "Weissgerber" began to focus on Spanish construction and that guitars built in the manner of Antonio de Torres began to eclipse the Viennese ones.

Unsigned guitars

In the course of the nineteenth century, Markneukirchen developed into a major European guitar making hub. There were likely more than a hundred luthiers at that time in the town, handcrafting different guitar models and designs, from very simple instruments to richly decorated gems for a rich and noble clientele.

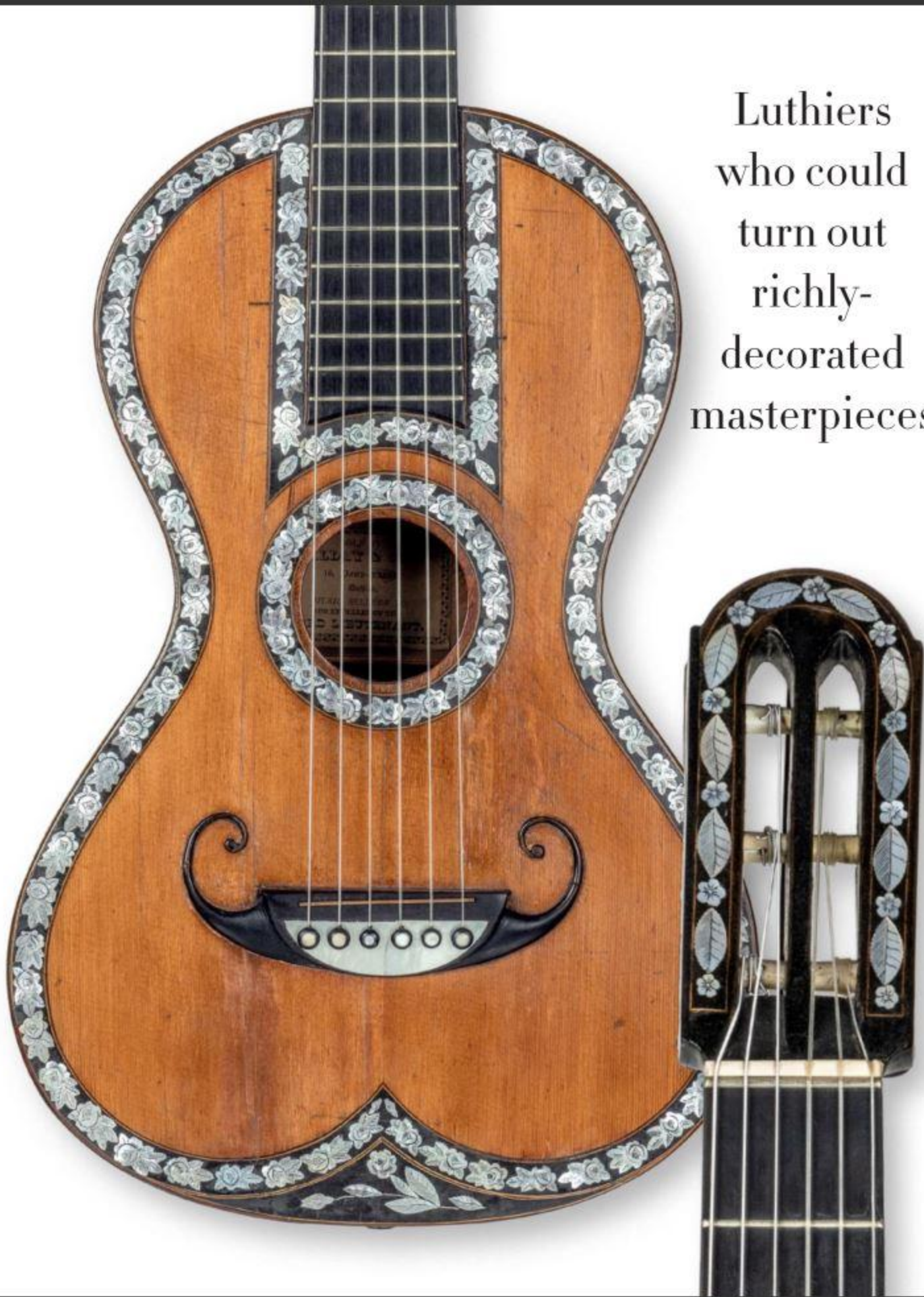
This musical instrument industry in the Vogtland, which boomed in the 19th century, was based on close cooperation between producers and wholesale dealers. Due to the region's geographical isolation, professional distributors played a vital role in transporting and selling instruments in Europe



Everywhere we look, there are reminders that this town is a "Musikstadt".



Luthiers
who could
turn out
richly-
decorated
masterpieces



Two guitars from the Vogtland region: on the left, guitar attributed to Johann Gottlob Vogel (ca. 1830); on the right, guitar attributed to Johann August Paulus (ca. 1870).

This practice of selling unsigned guitars led inexorably to an almost complete loss of identity and reputation of the manufacturing tradition.

and America. Practically all luthiers worked exclusively with such dealers and were therefore utterly dependent on them in economic terms.

For the dealers, it was important to impose absolute manufacturer anonymity so as to facilitate their trade. The instruments were therefore sold bearing the names of foreign traders, local brands or no label at all. Whatever the case, knowledge of the true origin quickly evaporated or became blurred with time. This practice of selling unsigned guitars led inexorably to an almost complete loss of identity and reputation of the Saxon-Vogtland manufacturing tradition.



Violin makers vs. carpenters

In the Vogtland, it was traditionally the violin makers who were responsible for the production of all stringed instruments, including six-stringed guitars. As early as 1807, the Markneukirchner violin makers guild laid their first official complaint against local carpenters, who were building guitars.

Price lists from the time reveal that this new instrument – the guitar – was much more expensive than a violin, which had a fixed price. Given the greater earning potential at stake, it is not surprising that the violin makers were trying to fight off any competition from outside their guild.

C.F. Martin, like his father Johann Georg before him, was one of the carpenters involved in the dispute. As for the guild, it was never able – though not for want of trying – to officially enforce its demands.

A characteristic feature of the Vogtland violin making tradition was its archaic assembly ("durchgesetzter Hals"), in which the neck and neck block are an integral part of the instrument's structure, as with the Spanish guitar construction technique. The local violin makers applied this traditional, familiar assembly to the construction of guitars. The carpenters, on the other hand, influenced by Viennese luthiers, were building their guitars in the so-called "German style", in which the neck and body are made separately and later put together by means of a dovetail joint.

Christof Hanusch

<http://www.christofhanusch.com>

My special thanks go to the Musikinstrumenten-Museum Markneukirchen, Enrico Weller, Petra & Ekkard Seidl, Rainer Krause, Stephan Weber, H.-Christian Koehn, Andreas Michel.



More than a hundred luthiers are believed to have been working here in the 19th century.



Villa Merz

The University School of Musical Instrument Making (Fachschule für Musikinstrumentenbau) is housed in a magnificent villa and offers courses of the highest calibre.



A marvel of the
Art Nouveau style,
built in 1903.



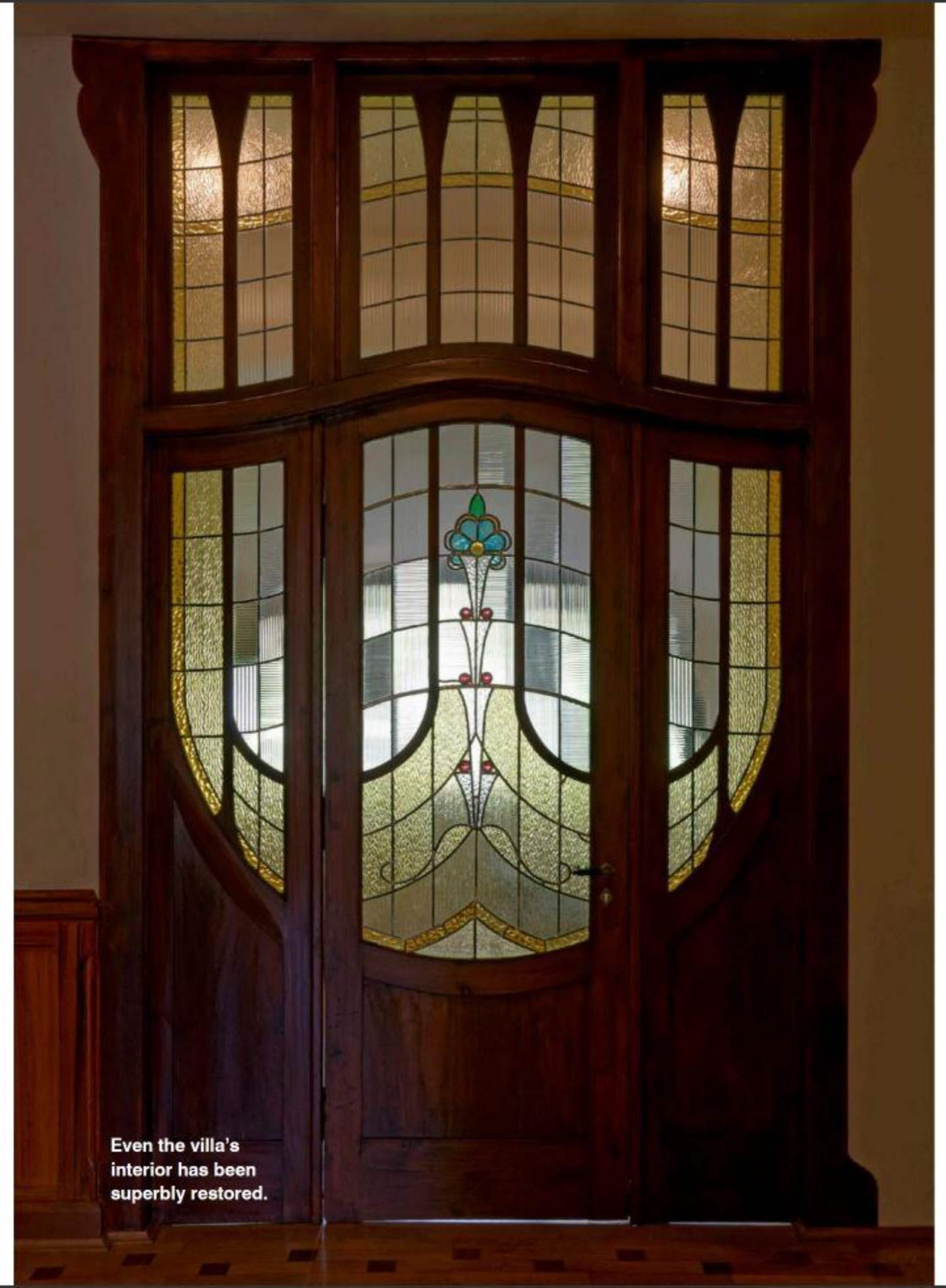
Prof. Dr. Andreas Michel, surrounded by some of his classical guitar lutherie students.

Students enrolled in lutherie can specialise in the construction of bowed string instruments, of the bows themselves, or of plucked stringed instruments.

The story of the Villa Merz mansion begins with the marriage of Curt Merz, son of a musical instrument dealer, to Olga Reinhold, daughter of an industrial magnate who had the villa built as a wedding gift. This gem of Art Nouveau, completed in 1903, was built upon a hill at the entrance to Markneukirchen and sports the initials "CM" proudly on the façade.

Some thirty years ago it became a school of instrument making, and has acquired international renown for the quality of the training that it offers. Students enrolled in lutherie can specialise in the construction of bowed string instruments; of the bows themselves, or of plucked stringed instruments. The courses, which are four years

in length, need to equip students with the skills required for designing and crafting both modern and historical instruments. Instruction at the school covers not only traditional artisanal expertise, but also scientific research. It also addresses new manufacturing techniques using carbon fibre structures and the challenges for lutherie when it comes to the use of renewable materials. The school boasts CAD software, an acoustic experimentation section, a laboratory, an impressive library and a photography studio. Upon completion of their studies, graduates leave with the necessary wherewithal for crafting and restoring instruments, teaching, or working in management in the music industry.



Even the villa's interior has been superbly restored.

The Musical Instrument Museum of Markneukirchen

The Musikinstrumenten-Museum

Markneukirchen, founded in 1883, is the oldest museum of its kind in Germany. It has more than 3,500 instruments in its collection, of which some



1,600 are on display. There is a special section devoted to the history of instruments made in the Vogtland region.



In the foreground, a display case dedicated to "Weissgerber" guitars.



Johann Knöβing,
Leipzig 1807.



Carl Loos,
Schönbach 1880.



Heinrich Koch,
Rudolstadt
ca. 1820.

© Frank Fickelscherer, MMM (3).

In 1883, a teacher at the vocational school of instrument making by the name of Paul Apian suggested opening a professional museum so as to help educate not only future generations of instrument makers, but also the general public. In this regard, the founding of the Musical Instrument Museum of Markneukirchen is quite different to that of other museums. It was not conceived by wealthy donors; nor were there any corporate sponsors attending its birth: the museum was designed and instituted by the corpus of local instrument manufacturers, artisans and dealers. Thanks to their worldwide contacts, Markneukirchen's musical instrument dealers also facilitated the purchase of instruments abroad.

MOTHER-OF-PEARL MUSEUM

If you ever find yourself in Markneukirchen, take a moment to visit the Perlmutter Museum (Mother-of-pearl Museum), in the neighbouring town of Adorf. You will learn how the local traditions of working with mother-of-pearl began, and enjoy displays of beautiful pieces made from these shells. The activity surrounding *Margaritifera margaritifera* (freshwater pearl mussel) was an important part of the region's economic development... and of guitar decoration!



Display cases showing instruments from the region, from Europe and from Asia.



Reconstructed sawmill in the adjacent building.



In one of the museum's rooms, there is a luthier's workshop to discover.





There are some astonishing guitars on display, like this Guitariano.

A gold mine of information, knowledge and inspiration for students and artisans alike

IT IS ALSO IN THIS REGION THAT THE BANDONEON WAS BORN

The bandoneon has become emblematic of tango music and the great Argentinian composer, Astor Piazzolla. It was invented around 1840 by Friedrich Zimmermann but named in honour of Heinrich Band, who promoted this new instrument by adapting sheet music and creating a method under the "Band-Union" brand.

The bandoneon found its way to Argentina around 1870, thanks to German sailors and emigrants. The most coveted are the "Double A" models, made by Alfred Arnold in Carlfeld, some thirty kilometres from Markneukirchen.



Originally, the museum – which was more of a pedagogical space than a museum in the true sense of the word – was chiefly designed for professionals and students in the region. It encouraged apprentices and students from the specialised school to come and discover the advances in instrument manufacture via observation and experience. There are still, even today, close ties between the museum and the region's instrument producing sector. The instrument collection that it houses is a veritable treasure-trove of information, knowledge and inspiration for people studying at the professional school, but also for artisans who craft instruments.

A sonic promenade

Since 1942 the collection has been housed in a remarkable building: a former mansion – classified as a historical monument – which was built in 1784 in a late Baroque style. Even before entering the museum per se, the grounds contain instruments that visitors are free to play. Once inside, all manner of instruments are on display: from giant-sized to miniature, representing different eras of orchestral composition, lutes, guitars, instruments from the region, from around Europe, from Asia... There is one display case dedicated to the guitars of C. F. Martin and another to those of "Weissgerber". In an adjoining building, visitors can admire a reconstructed traditional sawmill.

A display devoted to guitars by C. F. Martin.



C. F. Martin, from Markneukirchen to America

Christian Friedrich Martin (Markneukirchen 1796-Nazareth 1873) learned to build guitars under Stauffer in Vienna. He emigrated to the United States in 1833 and founded the internationally renowned company that became the gold standard for acoustic guitars.

Christian Friedrich (later Frederick) Martin's decision to emigrate to America, it is often said, was triggered by the dispute between the violin makers guild and the guitar making carpenters. But this is likely not the whole story. C.F. Martin was ambitious and strong-willed, as demonstrated by his later trajectory. From around 1812 or 1815 and until at least 1825, C.F. Martin lived in Vienna and got married there. After gaining a taste for life in the Austrian metropolis, he probably felt constricted when he returned to his small home town, Markneukirchen; we have no way of knowing whether his Viennese wife, Lucia Ottilia nee Kühle, enjoyed life in a small Saxon town. As a luthier, he was able to make a living in Markneukirchen, but there was no chance of significant betterment in this small merchant-dominated town. It is therefore quite plausible that he saw no future for himself there.

1833, the American adventure

The notion was not so very far-fetched:

there had long been good trade relations between America and the Vogtland; moreover, his colleague and companion from Vienna, Heinrich Anton Schatz (1806-1867), had already gone to New York in 1826. Martin's mother had died in 1828, and when he lost his father in 1832, there were few family ties to keep him in Markneukirchen.

He presumably took with him some of his most beautiful instruments so as to facilitate his introduction into the "New World". Upon arrival in America (1833), Martin opened a music store, ran later in cooperation of Heinrich Schatz, selling instruments and accessories.

On the label of the earliest known American Martin guitar is written: C. Frederick Martin, Guitar & Violin Manufacturer, Importer of Musical Instruments, 196 Hudson Street, New York.

**Guitar attributed to C. F. Martin,
made in Markneukirchen
circa 1830, prior to his
emigration to America.**



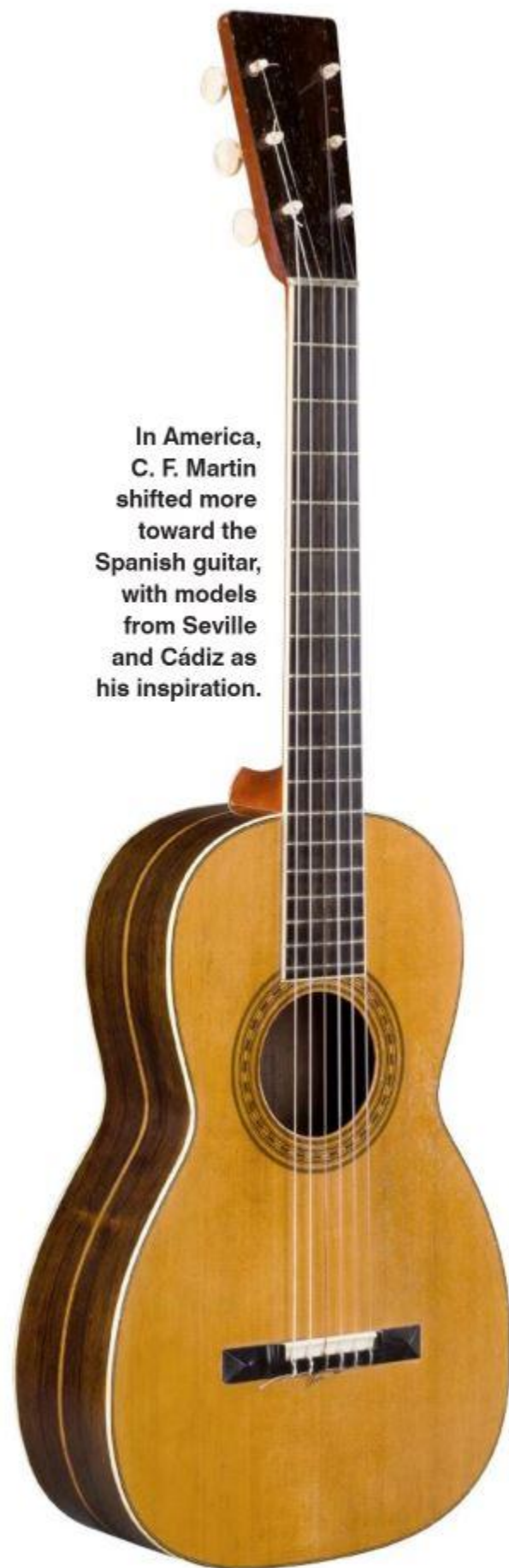


Noticeable influence of Stauffer's Viennese workshop on this Markneukirchen guitar attributed to C. F. Martin.



The Spanish models, developed by C. F. Martin in America, gave new impetus to the local lutherie. Here, Johann August Paulus 1850.





In America, C. F. Martin shifted more toward the Spanish guitar, with models from Seville and Cádiz as his inspiration.

The inventory of goods that he received from the Markneukirchen trader F. T. Merz in the years 1835 to 1839 includes guitars, wind and string instruments, bells, trombones, horns, various types of trumpets, bows made of pernambuco, cello and violin bridges, guitar machines, cymbals, hunting horns, guitar and violin pegs, flutes, strings, bridge pins, violin tailpieces, cases, capos...

In the year of 1836 alone, a total of thirty-three Markneukirchen guitars were delivered to Martin & Schatz. Among them were instruments made by: "Lederer" (presumably Carl Wilhelm Lederer), "Ficker" (presumably Friedrich Wilhelm Ficker), "G. Gütter" (presumably Carl Gottlob Gütter) and "Voigt" (without the indication of a first name it is impossible to identify the luthier, as there are at least six local violin and guitar makers of this name). What remains unknown is whether or not these guitars from Markneukirchen were sold under the C.F. Martin label.

After just six years in New York, Martin moved to the small town of Nazareth, in Pennsylvania, where there was a large, welcoming German community. He focussed on making Spanish-style guitars and sold them through distribution partnerships (Martin & Coupa, Martin & Bruno). This kind of American-Spanish model was later adopted by the Markneukirchen luthiers, who began crafting them alongside their customary Viennese models.

C. F. Martin & Richard Jacob

C. F. Martin and his cousin Johann August Paulus (1806-1870) both shared a woodworking lineage and had similar family and professional backgrounds. J. A. Paulus, ten years younger than Martin, also apprenticed under Johann Georg Stauffer in Vienna. It is presumed that the two cousins worked concurrently in Stauffer's workshop for a time.

Like his older cousin, J. A. Paulus also left Vienna to return to Markneukirchen, and from the 1830s he was deemed one of its best luthiers. The instruments attributed to him attest to his outstanding skill. He went on to mentor Karl August Jacob (1846-1918), father of Richard Jacob "Weissgerber".

Which leads us to yet another story...

Christof Hanusch

www.christofhanusch.com



In the early twentieth century, the standard for the modern acoustic guitar was established: a 14-fret neck, larger bodies and X-bracing that could withstand the stresses exerted by steel strings.

Left, the OM-28, Martin's bestseller from 1930 through to today. Right, a D-45, with its Dreadnought shape, the most beautiful and most coveted of its kind.

Richard Jacob “Weissgerber”, the unknown master



A most prodigious output, the result of working 16 hours a day, 6 days a week.

Little known in the West, Richard Jacob “Weissgerber” (Markneukirchen 1877-1960) made more than 3,000 guitars between 1905 and 1960 – with practically no two guitars the same – displaying breathtaking craftsmanship. But it is not only this incredible prolificacy and variety that keeps Weissgerber aficionados so captivated; his instruments are outstanding in terms of construction and sound. Like the guitars of all the great luthiers, they have a unique, inimitable voice.



The ceaseless search for perfection.



Guitar crafted by Karl August Jacob, Richard's father, circa 1900.

He was particularly influenced by his father, a guitar maker whose high-quality work forever inspired him

The ancestors of Richard Jacob were tanners by trade ("Weissgerber" in German) and Weissgerber was merely a family nickname until Richard Jacob chose to use it as his brand in 1921. Richard Jacob's early days were steeped in instrument making: Markneukirchen was one of the world's largest producers of musical instruments in the 1880s. He was particularly influenced by his father, Karl August Jacob, a guitar maker whose high-quality work forever inspired him. In his first apprenticeship, Richard made zithers and it was after his military service, in 1899, that he switched to guitars, working for six years in the workshop of Wilhelm Voigt.

From 1905 to 1911, he made guitars with his father in the family workshop, before setting out on his own. The young luthier worked sixteen-hour days, six days a week, producing instruments for wholesale dealers as well as making bespoke guitars to order. It is thought that more than 2,000 of his guitars would have been sold to dealers devoid of his label. With the creation of his brand name "Weissgerber" in 1921, Richard Jacob began to distance



The mother-of-pearl decorative elements at the bottom of the instrument are typical of Markneukirchen guitars.



Viennese model (1922), with its characteristic shape and ribs that broaden in the middle.

himself from the firmly established Markneukirchen trading structures and to supply his customers independently, risking a boycott by the Markneukirchen dealers. In 1930, he severed all ties with them.

“Weissgerber” and the Spanish guitar

After visits by Miguel Llobet (1921 and 1924) and Andrés Segovia (1924) to Markneukirchen, Richard Jacob's work took a whole new turn. The sound qualities of guitars by the Spanish masters opened up a different world for him and, like Hermann Hauser in Munich, he turned his focus to building Spanish guitar models.

His most important developments in the years that followed were the “Torres” model (1928), which he deemed “the ideal guitar for concert and soloist” and later the “Simplicio”, his most beautiful Spanish model.

Although his guitars were superb, Richard Jacob was never satisfied with them and continually strived to develop and improve his construction

methods, which is why there are so few identical instruments. Since his main focus was on the sound, the guitars of this period often display sober decoration.

Until the late 1930s, he continued developing his Spanish models and then, in 1943 after a period of experimentation, he introduced his most momentous innovation: he started fluting the soundboards and backs of his concert guitars near the purfling, hollowing them out as violin makers do. From that time, and right up until his death, he never stopped refining his construction methods and bracing.

In the 1950s, all of his developments and innovations culminated in a large, new model: the “Grand Concert Solo” is the quintessence of his sixty years of work and his legacy to the guitar world.

Behrend, the “Weissgerber” ambassador

In the 1950s and 1960s, the West Berlin guitarist Siegfried Behrend played “Weissgerber” guitars



The Rekord model is one of his creations (1925).



The visits
by Llobet and
Segovia were
a turning point
in his work



His Torres model:
“The ideal guitar
for concerts and
soloists.”



In the 1930s,
the “Simplicio” was
his most stunning
model.

As of 1943, he began hollowing out the edges of the tops and backs of his concert guitars, as violin makers do. This guitar is his 1951 Concert model.



Concert model, 1943, with the soundboard domed in the centre and fluted at the edges.





West Berlin guitarist Siegfried Behrend playing with the 1943 guitar of the previous page.

In the 50s and 60s, the guitarist Siegfried Behrend gave concerts with Weissgerber guitars

in his concerts and tours in Germany and beyond. His performances generated strong demand, especially in Japan and West Germany but, after the creation of the German Democratic Republic (1949) and the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961 - 1989), it was nearly impossible in the West to get hold of an instrument by Richard Jacob. When Siegfried Behrend died, interest in Richard Jacob's guitars waned and his name cropped up less frequently. We hope that his instruments will be rediscovered and honoured for their craftsmanship and unique musical qualities. Richard Jacob "Weissgerber" must be reconsidered by history: he deserves greater pride of place in the pantheon of lutherie.

Christof Hanusch
www.christofhanusch.com

His last
guitar: "Grand
Concert Solo"
model, 1960.



Armin & Mario Gropp, the successors

Armin Gropp, who founded the workshop, has more than sixty years' experience making stringed instruments. He taught lutherie at the Markneukirchen school from 1993 to 2013. He has been working with his son, Mario, luthier and guitarist, for 35 years.





Mario Gropp, photographed here with his father, took an early interest in lutherie.

Do you see yourselves as furthering Markneukirchen's tradition of lutherie?

Mario Gropp – No, our work is closer to that of Weissgerber than that of the local luthiers, whose inspirations lie more with Spanish guitars. Not only did Weissgerber have his own ideas about construction; he also, above all, had a particular sound in mind: a clear, bright, very balanced sound – reminiscent of Stauffer's Viennese school – a sound somewhat like the early Hausers, less powerful than Spanish guitars, and very refined. You can hear it quite clearly in the recordings of Siegfried Behrend, a great German guitarist who played on Weissgerber guitars.

It is worth remembering that my father used to build violins until the 1950s. So it is only natural that his influences were violin lutherie and Weissgerber.

Do you have any other influences?

M. G. – After the Second World War, this part of Germany was on the other side of the Wall. From 1972 onward, all of our guitars were sold by State cooperatives and we were not allowed to make any direct sales ourselves. We had hardly any information about what was being done elsewhere in Western Europe, or contact with clients or guitarists. We were cut off, and as a luthier, it is very difficult to make progress unless you have that



Armin Gropp carried the tradition forward with his "Weissgerber" model.



“Spezial V” with
it spruce top,
and wenge back
and ribs.

Split saddle,
offering
more tuning
accuracy
and (right)
Mario Gropp's
signature
head stock.



dialogue with guitarists. It was only in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that my father was able to open his workshop to the public once more. Our only chance to see and hear other guitars was at the International Guitar Festival in Budapest (Hungary), which attracted excellent guitarists from all around the world. It was fantastic! That was where we met José Luis Romanillos and, since my father was teaching lutherie at the time, he invited him to come and give a one-week course in Markneukirchen. From that time on, we started developing our guitars in earnest.

Do you build your guitars the Spanish way or the German way?

M. G. – I learned the Spanish way, starting with the soundboard and neck. My father knows both ways but he prefers the Spanish technique. We both feel that there is better interconnection between all of the instrument's components: the guitar's neck and body make up a whole. That big solid heel reaching right inside the body makes the whole thing sturdier and improves the sound. It is a different story for the heads, however: we generally prefer the German technique, with the V-joint, for our own models, but if we are making a replica of a Torres, then obviously we attach the head the Spanish way.



Tony Sheridan, a former Beatles singer from the group's early days in Germany, was paid for his concert in Markneukirchen with a guitar crafted by Armin Gropp.

Are replicas a big part of your output?

M. G. – Yes, we do at times receive orders for a copy of a Torres, a Stauffer or a romantic guitar. There is no way that we could make a living by sticking to just one model. We are in a slightly overlooked corner of Europe here, and our market is too small. We need to be able to produce guitars for different client requirements, which means that we have to offer a range of instruments, with different fingerboards, sizes and price tags. My father used to make student models and just one high-end model, "Artist", which we call the "Weissgerber" today, inspired by his concert guitars, with their soundboards that are domed in the centre and fluted at the edges, like violins.

What are your main models?

M. G. – In the late 1990s I took an interest in lattice construction and came up with my "Spezial" model. No carbon involved, mind you – it is all in wood – but since then, the bracing and construction have changed a great deal. I have also made some double-tops. Lately, I have come back to a more traditional sound, offering more colours, even if it means sacrificing some of the power. My latest creation is the "La Onda" model. It has a



Spruce top, Honduras rosewood for the back and sides of "La Onda", Mario Gropp's latest creation.



A workshop infused with the scent of wood and hot glue...

much thinner top, and very light bracing comprising forty-two very fine, parallel braces. As usual, we offer a choice between spruce and red cedar for the top, various different woods for the body and several lengths for the fingerboard.

Which woods do you prefer?

M. G. – My father really likes aged maple, but the trend in customer demand is more toward darker woods, rosewoods. We have many different wood varieties in stock, quite old, and even some exceptional European timbers, such as cherry and walnut. We also have some German oak, very dense, dating back to 1945 and which has given some fine results!

What details are unique to your guitars?

M. G. – The shape of the head is like our workshop's signature: my father has one, and so do I. We always use a two-part saddle, which improves tuning accuracy. The fretboard is slightly elevated, making it easier to reach the high notes and the heads of our guitars are attached with V-joints. As for the rest... each Markneukirchen workshop has its secrets!



Upon the death of Richard Jacob "Weissgerber", his son Martin Jacob asked Armin Gropp to help him finish the incomplete guitars left by his father. Between 1990 and 1994, Armin finished twenty-seven such guitars.

Angela Waltner, between Torres and Weissgerber

Angela is an indefatigable researcher.

She received her training in lutherie first in Mittenwald and subsequently in Markneukirchen. She is specialised in the restoration of French Romantic guitars and took part in an in-depth study on Weissgerber. Today she makes her own models in Berlin.

Angela in her
Berlin workshop.
Photo by
Stefan Maria Rother.



À la Weissgerber: neck/head V-joint and purfling of casein plastic.

You have an original way of working...

Angela Waltner – Yes, I like experimenting; that way, I keep on advancing. For example, I bought three fairly mediocre factory-made guitars and tried improving them without making major modifications; just adjusting little things. I sanded the bracing a bit, as well as parts of the bridge, and I changed the saddle and nut. The idea was to harmonise the instrument's sound spectrum. Those three guitars sound just fine now!

And how do you know which adjustments to make?

A. W. – It's thanks to a method invented by engineer Benno Streu: you play each note and pass the back of your hand gently over the lower bout of the soundboard; you can clearly hear the instrument's different vibratory modes. There are some zones where the vibration is intense, even brash, and other areas where the vibration is more subtle or even stifled, non-existent (nodes). It was Ernst Chladni, the physicist who founded modern acoustics, who discovered that in 1802. After that, it's a question of equalising the two sides of the soundboard: left and right. It's incredible, but the ear is actually more precise than microphones! Sometimes I also make changes to the back, sides or the upper bout, the higher part of the soundboard which is partly responsible for the trebles.

What can you tell us about your bracing?

A. W. – I have experimented with various types of



The "Concert" model: arched back, raised fretboard and bracing inspired by the 1921 Hauser I patent.

The "Essence" model
with its carved head stock,
elevated fingerboard and
rosette of concentric circles,
much like the nineteenth-
century French guitars.





Bridge of the "Anima" model with its three movable saddle pieces.

bracing. My latest one is a blend of a conventional five-strut fan bracing and three thin perpendicular bars. The little brace set halfway between the rosette and the bridge stems from one of Hauser I's ideas, from his 1921 patent, in which he sought to combine the Spanish sound and the German sound; that sound inherited from the Viennese school.

With my bracing, I, too, am hoping to bring two the schools together: the German sound (Stauffer, Weissgerber), bright and balanced; and the Spanish sound (Torres, Santos), so very expressive, with its deep basses. For me, it was hard to strike this balance. Remember that I have a background in the French Romantic guitar and Weissgerber. It was Benno Streu who greatly helped me understand the Spanish sound, getting me to listen to recordings of Stefano Grondona playing on guitars by Antonio de Torres. In some ways, that fast-tracked me through the years that Hauser I spent working towards the Spanish guitar and satisfying Segovia.

German or Spanish method for your guitars?

A. W. – The Spanish way. Although I do sometimes, at the behest of a customer, use a V-joint to attach the head to the neck.



"Concert" model bracing: three-strut vertical fan with two horizontal bars.

Tell us about your bridges...

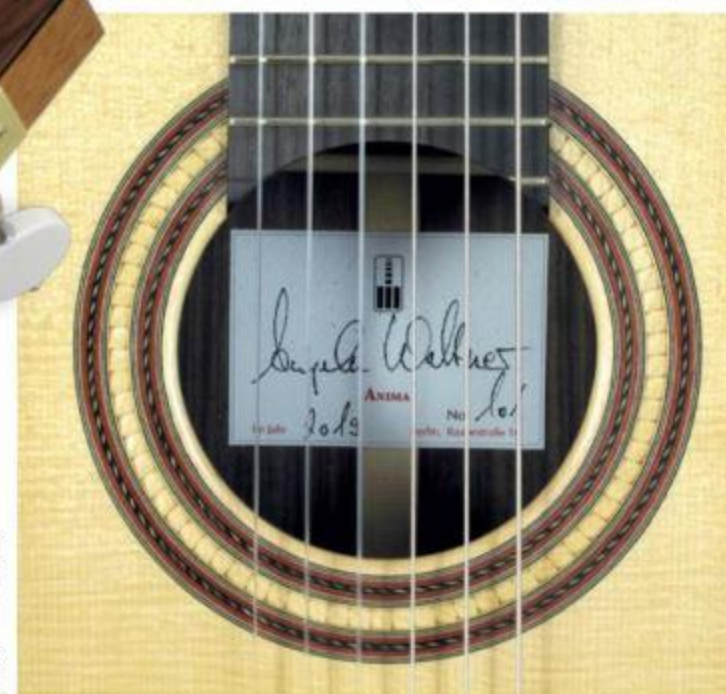
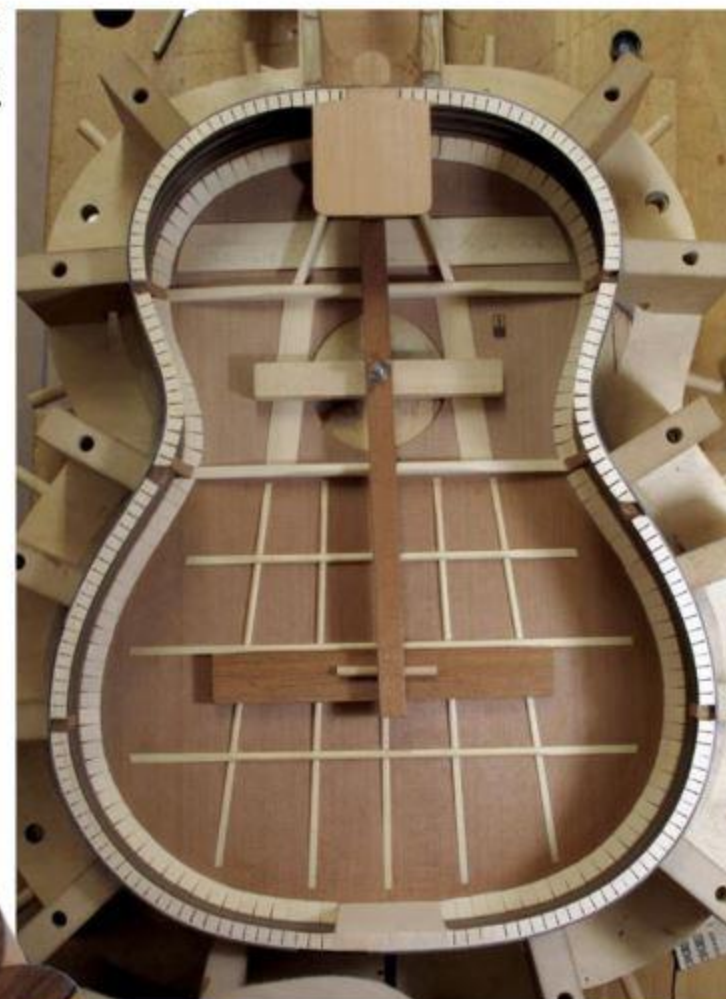
A. W. – I make the saddles in three separate parts, enabling accurate fine-tuning of each string. The bone strips are not set into a groove and you can very easily adjust them. This is not something that I invented: the idea goes back to the 1970s, from the ISIGL (Institute of Stringed Instruments Guitar and Lute) in Düsseldorf. My latest saddle is very light and is no longer rectangular; it has a freer shape, which allows me to alter its profile to enhance the sound if necessary, without the change being visible.



The concentric circles in some rosettes are adorned with a hint of mother-of-pearl.

The "Anima" model
is the product of
her latest research.

Recent
bracing
developments.



The bridge
is inspired
by lutes, and
the head stock
very simple.



The maple ribs of a future guitar.



Beautiful spruce soundboards, with their unassuming rosettes already in place.

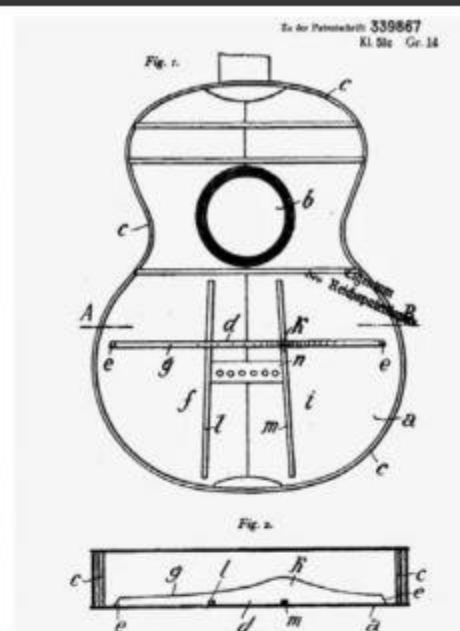
Angela uses the Spanish technique to build her guitars.





A freshly-finished Panormo replica.

Bracing patent filed in 1921 by Hermann Hauser I.



How many models do you make?

A. W. – Three models: “Concert”, “Essence” and “Anima”. I started making the “Concert” model when I came to Berlin. It has a domed back, elevated fretboard and bracing inspired by the Hauser I guitar and its 1921 patent: three vertical bars arranged in a fan shape and two horizontal ones; one under the bridge and the other further forward. The head stock is quite plain and the pattern in the rosette is simple. The “Essence” model has more complex bracing, building upon the previous one: it has a five-strut fan and three transverse braces. The head is sculpted, the fretboard raised and rosette features concentric circles, like the nineteenth-century French guitars by Lambert. The “Anima” model is the fruit of my latest research and an expansion on the “Essence” bracing. The fingerboard is not elevated; the rosette and bridge take their inspiration from lutes; and the head stock is unadorned. I also receive numerous special orders; actually, I have just finished making a copy of a Panormo.

What traces of Weissgerber are still to be found in your work?

A. W. – You can still see certain elements of construction from the Viennese tradition and from Weissgerber in particular: the shape of my guitars viewed in profile, as they are wider in the centre; the use of casein plastic for the binding around the body; and the neck/head V-joint... but above all, the sound of his guitars still inspires me.

© Stefan Maria Rother.



“It’s incredible, but the ear is actually more precise than microphones!”

Joachim Schneider's workshop



Steffen Schneider keeps the family workshop going, with his son, Alexander.



Joachim Schneider and his children in the workshop (early 1980s).

The name Schneider in the world of lutherie stretches back to 1894, and was initially associated with the manufacture of violins and cellos. Joachim Schneider (1939-2019), was trained by his grandfather and graduated from Chemnitz with a "Meisterprüfung". At the family workshop's helm since 1962, he passed away the week before our visit and we were welcomed by his son, Steffen, and grandson, Alexander, who are both luthiers.

“The guitars that we build today are more refined and involve much more work.”

What influence has Markneukirchen had on your work?

Steffen Schneider – In terms of the construction itself, the Markneukirchen influence was probably more noticeable in the early days of our family's work, but the guitar is not like the violin; it has evolved over time and we have to keep up with guitarists' requirements. The guitars that we build today are better than the earlier ones; they are more refined and involve much more work. Student guitars entail about a hundred hours of work; the other models call for much more than that.

How many models do you offer?

S. S. – I am the first luthier in the family to make guitars exclusively. We make guitars with three different categories of construction and wood quality: one is a student model, which is quite simple and is finished with nitrocellulose lacquer; another is our concert model, with superior construction, a carved head, and a body which is finished with nitro except for the top, which undergoes French polishing; and then there is our select model, crafted from the best woods avail-

Concert model:
spruce top, maple back and sides, and carved head stock. Spanish method of construction and French-polished soundboard.





They offer two types of neck/head joint: German-style V-joint, or Spanish-style scarf.



The head stock that has spelled Schneider since 1969.

They adjust
the model,
technique and
woods to the
customer's order



They have a soft spot for German spruce.

able, French polished all over, and which sports a German-style head/neck V-joint.

The dimensions of the guitars may vary somewhat, depending on the order. Our top-end instruments, which we make for elite guitarists, tend to be a little larger, thus offering more power. The guitar body can also vary in accordance with the desired fretboard length, as per the customer's order: 65, 64 or 63 cm.

In reality, the orders that we receive do not necessarily fit tidily into these classifications: we make myriad variations. I would say that roughly half of our clients order bespoke instruments (fin-

gerboard length, choice of woods, etc.). Very often, when we receive a special order, we actually make two guitars to the same specifications and then let the client choose.

What are the distinguishing features of your guitars?

S. S. – The head stock is immediately recognisable, so typically Schneider. It was my father, Joachim, who designed it in 1969. It isn't a copy of Weissgerber, but he did sometimes add mother-of-pearl, as Weissgerber did.

Another detail: we perform two types of head/



A superb rosewood back with three horizontal bars.



Depending on the choice of wood for the neck (mahogany or Spanish cedar), they add a central brace for added strength.

neck joint: using a German-style V-joint, and a Spanish-style scarf joint. We prefer building guitars the Spanish way, starting by joining the top and neck. The notable exception is the way in which we attach the head stock in our high-end guitars.

Which woods do you use?

S. S. – We generally use German spruce for the tops, and occasionally Canadian red cedar.

For the back and ribs, we offer maple, Indian, Honduras or Madagascar rosewoods, cocobolo wood, wenge, and so on. We receive more requests for rosewood from our customers than for any other wood. Personally, I think that the best rosewood comes from Brazil.

Wenge is a most handsome wood and I do like it a lot, but its hardness makes it extremely difficult to work, and it doesn't varnish easily, either, because of its open pores.

And which bracings?

S. S. – We use different types of bracing. We have experimented with double-top guitars, with carbon and lattice bracing, but we came back to using solely wood and opted for a more conventional construction. We also build Torres models with a five-strut or seven-strut fan, which is our most-used bracing style.

For the back supports, we use either three or four bars, depending on the guitar size and the characteristics of our chosen wood.

Sometimes, depending on the choice of wood for the neck (mahogany or Spanish cedar), we add a central brace for extra reinforcement. We always tailor our construction to the type of wood that we have in our hands.



“Wenge is a most handsome wood but it is difficult to work.”



The Schneiders offer various different rosette patterns.



To achieve the ideal degree of flexibility, the bridge can be either concave or convex, depending on the density of the rosewood.

We can see that you have two different kinds of bridge...

S. S. – We make our bridges either concave or convex, depending on the density of the rosewood, thus rendering them more flexible or less so, as required. For example, for bridges made of Honduras rosewood, we make them concave.

The groove for the saddle is also made at a slight angle, offsetting the diameter of the strings and thus improving tuning accuracy. We prefer the saddle to be made of one single piece, which ensures maximum contact with the soundboard, although we make a two-part saddle for ten-string guitars.

As a general rule, our premium guitars have a twelve-hole bridge. We find it more elegant and the pressure from the strings on the saddle will be more uniform.

How would you sum up your work?

S. S. – We can never make two identical guitars: it is never the same wood, the same bracing, the same finish, nor the same scale. With each and every creation we adapt the technique and the model to accommodate not only the specific order, but also the woods that we are using.

As luthiers, we all take Torres as a starting point, but from there, each of us will arrive at our own interpretation. We could never make a living if we were to keep building guitars strictly like Torres or Weissgerber.



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