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MAGAZINE

**The Viennese
Guitar**

**Tobias Braun
Lukas Giefing
Matthias Tilzer
Daniel Zucali**

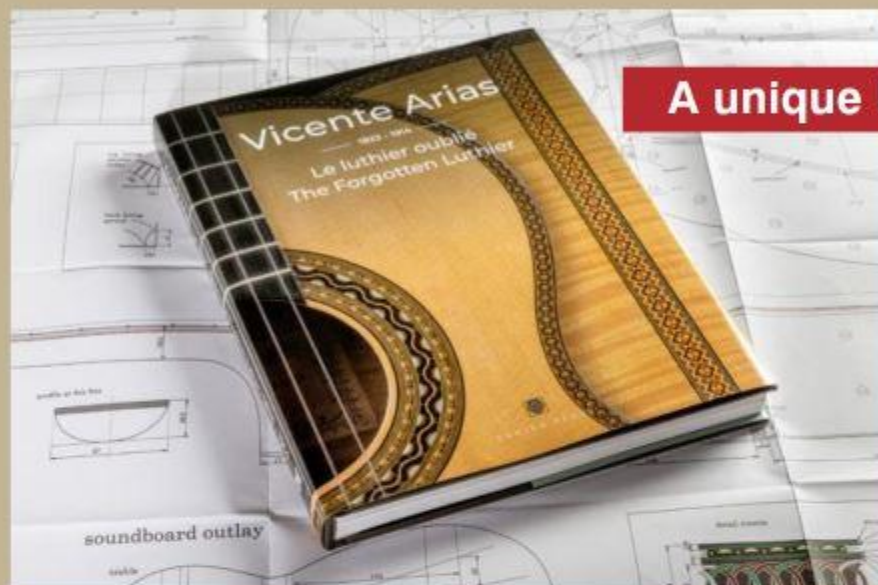
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From the Editor

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From the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, Vienna was the music capital of the world. Numerous composers, whether Viennese by birth or by adoption, settled there, including Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms; the publication of music was flourishing and disseminating their works throughout Europe. During this period, the guitars of Johann Georg Stauffer embodied the zenith of Austrian lutherie. But toward the end of the nineteenth century, they were supplanted by those of Antonio de Torres, Vicente Arias, Manuel Ramírez and other great Spanish luthiers. Viennese lutherie slipped off the radar...

Today, a new generation of luthiers, displaying high quality work, is taking centre stage. We set off to meet three luthiers in the classical mould: Tobias Braun, Lukas Giefling and Matthias Tilzer; and one iconoclastic luthier: Daniel Zucali.

We recommend reading this edition with Viennese waltzes playing in the background and a Gustav Klimt masterpiece on the wall!

Alberto Martinez

The Viennese Guitar

Johann Georg Stauffer is the greatest name in Viennese guitar-making. His achievements and innovations were profoundly influential during the nineteenth century. His son Johann Anton, as well as other excellent luthiers, perpetuated his work and their guitars became indispensable references well beyond Austria's borders.

It was precisely in the year 1800 that Johann Georg Stauffer, one of the driving forces behind the Romantic era's guitar mania, set up shop in Vienna.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the guitar had been virtually non-existent in Austria, Germany, or anywhere else east of the Rhine. And yet, although Vienna had played no role in the development of the guitar with single strings, it became the nerve-centre for all things guitar – and

as such it even temporarily dethroned Paris. Guitars designed for single strings instead of courses had first appeared in Naples. Very quickly, the idea spread along a north-south axis stretching from the south of Italy to London, via Marseilles and Paris. It was in Paris that it was greeted with the most enthusiasm, and the initial model with five single strings evolved into one with six. All of this happened during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and Vienna had no part in it.

Guitar gifted by Johann Georg Stauffer to Marie Louise of Austria on the occasion of her wedding to Napoleon in 1810. © Art and History Museum Neuchâtel, Switzerland - Photo S. Iori.





Engraving by
A. Laborde from
the book *Voyage
pittoresque
en Autriche*
(*Picturesque
Journey in Austria*).
Paris, 1821.

Georg Stauffer managed to come up with a surprisingly accomplished six-string guitar.

But even so, when young Georg Stauffer took over the workshop of his master, Ignaz Bartl, he managed to come up with a surprisingly accomplished six-string guitar model right away. It has long been customary to refer to these early Stauffer guitars as "Italian-style". But the actual facts are far more complicated than that – and worthy of consideration, because they reveal much about art history, and... the early days of European construction.

Around 1800, only a few of the leading figures in what was to become a love affair between the world capital of music and the guitar had arrived in Vienna. Leonhard von Call, who hailed from Tyrol, or Louis Wolf (from Bohemia), would have had little chance to become acquainted with the modernised guitar before arriving in Vienna. Simon Molitor, who was of German origin, had been an orchestra director in Venice in 1796/97 – but reported that he had only seen guitars strung with courses there. Still, the first virtuosos likely to have brought guitars with single strings to Vienna were indeed Italians: Matteo Bevilacqua, Bartolomeo Bortolazzi, Andrea Spina, Francesco Zucconi... but none of the instruments that they introduced around 1800 could explain the maturity of Georg Stauffer's construction methods right from the start.

One needs to look beyond the floral soundboard decoration and instead peer inside the instru-

ment to get a sense of what really happened. Italian – and more specifically Neapolitan – guitars at that time were not made with solid inner linings. Also, the fragile neck-to-body joint was often secured by a nail driven through the upper block into the neck. But even Stauffer's earliest guitars lack the nail: the heel is properly inserted into the upper block, and are built with solid linings on both sides.

Furthermore, his earliest guitars already have pins to secure the strings onto the bridge. We have become so used to this feature in modern (steel-string) guitars, and so familiar with the idea that it originates from the Romantic era, that it is easily taken for granted. But bridge pins in a guitar made in 1800, in a place with no recent tradition of the instrument nor its manufacture – that is certainly food for thought.

So, what could possibly explain this phenomenon? The answer, from a Viennese perspective, lies to the west. The only guitars which Stauffer could have possibly examined around 1800, and which would display both solid linings and bridge pins, would have been French. It would have taken no more than one guitar-playing visitor from France stepping into the Bartl/Stauffer workshop to show the young maker a highly accomplished French instrument – made, for example, by François Ory in Paris, or Charles-Joseph Marchal in Mirecourt. Both are of particular interest in this



Early guitar by
Johann Georg Stauffer.
Vienna, circa 1815.

Georg Stauffer was not only a gifted maker, but also a daring entrepreneur and keen on novelty.

context, because they were among the first to introduce the bridge pin feature.

Georg Stauffer was not only a gifted maker, but also a daring entrepreneur and keen on novelty. He must have sensed the guitar's potential and although he failed in some of his later enterprises (see below), his instinct definitely served him well on this issue. It was not long before the instrument was adopted by a larger public, and for demand to explode. Soon, he would employ several journeymen and apprentices – and see serious competition arise. The first makers in town to pick up the new instrument still came from a violin-making background, such as Martin Stoss. But after the arrival of Mauro Giuliani in Vienna in 1807, ever more specialised craftsmen would settle in the town. Among them were Johann Ertl and Franz Feilnreiter. While the former would later associate with Stauffer, the latter was a fierce and talented competitor.

There is one important question, which to this day remains unresolved, about Feilnreiter's contribution to what would become a hallmark of the Viennese School of guitar-making: the adjustable neck. In June 1822 Stauffer and Ertl were granted a patent ("K.K. Privilegium") for this invention. It consists of a neck which can be adjusted by tightening or loosening the one screw by which it is attached to the guitar's body, while the upper part of the fingerboard floats freely above the soundboard.

But this wasn't quite the original idea. In an ear-

Terz guitar with adjustable neck.
Johann Anton Stauffer.
Vienne, circa 1845.



Seven-string guitar,
Johann Anton
Stauffer & Co., made
in Vienna, 1827.



The old Burgtheater,
Vienna, founded
in 1741, was one
of Europe's most
important theatres.

lier version of the adjustable neck, the fretboard was cut between the 11th and 12th fret, and the upper part of it inserted into the soundboard; only the part glued to the neck was able to move. In retrospect, this system may appear archaic, but it was nonetheless a spectacular piece of innovation.

Now here's the rub: not only do surviving guitars fitted with this first version predate 1822; they were also crafted by various makers: Georg Stauffer and Johann Ertl, but also Bernard Enzensperger, Andreas Zettler and Franz Feilnreiter. Viennese archives contain a note from 1817 regarding a dispute within the craft between him and Georg Stauffer: – could this dispute have been about the early version of the adjustable neck? A positive answer appears likely, especially as it would explain Stauffer's motivation to protect the later version. But as to which maker initially came up with the adjustable neck idea, we may never know.

In any case, it was Stauffer who secured the invention – all in all for a period of eight years. Concomitantly, he came up with an ingenious business idea. After the rather cloak-and-dagger departure of Mauro Giuliani in 1819, the latter's fellow countryman Luigi Legnani became the hottest guitar

virtuoso in town. Legnani's first concerts in 1820 made a big impression on a now very large public.

In the years around the Congress of Vienna (1814/15), composers, arrangers and publishers had been very busy meeting public demand for new repertoire pieces. They even established what may be an unbroken record, with some 2,000 new pieces of music for guitar published during the 1810s alone. Stauffer must have sensed that Giuliani's departure risked leaving a void and would ultimately be bad for business. Much hope therefore rested on Legnani's shoulders. But unlike Giuliani, who was very prolific and willing to sideline difficult concert pieces like his Grande Ouverture op. 61 in favour of more accessible material, Legnani's output was lower and the technical requirements of his compositions usually very high.

Much more than his music, therefore, it was the virtuoso's aura that would help sell guitars. Georg Stauffer introduced the so-called "Legnani model".

To this day, there is a great lack of clarity regarding the actual definition of this model. Although the slo-



Typically Viennese model,
inspired by the viola da
gamba. Johann Anton
Stauffer. Vienna, 1830.



A Stauffer label bearing the mention "after the model of Luigi Legnani".

Stauffer is also associated with the iconic head design later copied by Leo Fender.

gan "after the model of Luigi Legnani" and the above-mentioned patent appeared at the same time, they exist independently. For neither the opulent waist which is often associated with the model, nor the adjustable neck are features of the Legnani model. To sum up an intricate matter in a few words: A Legnani model is a guitar that allows the player to perform the music of Luigi Legnani. Period.

A document by Anton Diabelli from 1825 presents the Legnani model and highlights one feature alone: its tessitura. The depicted guitar displays no special features, except for the presence of 22 frets – which appears to be the only requirement Legnani actually had. The first Stauffer guitars bearing the famous slogan comply with that. What happened later on can only be explained as a commercial drift. Viennese makers had been stymied for a period of eight years, during which demand for the instrument peaked, because they were not allowed to implement the adjustable neck. Some, like Nikolaus Georg Ries, just wouldn't let another one slide: And so, the Legnani model – whatever that actually was! – became the hallmark of the Viennese School. Vienna also hosted other guitar-related innovations. One of the earliest, from around 1813, was the *terz* guitar (Giuliani's *Rondo per due chitarre* op. 66, featuring the *terz* guitar, was published in 1816). Though no-one knows who hit upon

the idea first, some of the oldest surviving specimens of the instrument are again Stauffer products. To judge by the considerable number of Viennese-School *terz* guitars that have survived to the present day, the instrument was quite a success; the smaller guitar in G sounds nicely and projects exceptionally well. It was adopted in the south of Germany and, to a lesser extent, in Italy, but failed to establish elsewhere (although recent findings suggest that a variant of the instrument enjoyed some success in northern France around 1830).

While Stauffer is also associated with the iconic head design later copied by Leo Fender, tuning-machines were certainly not his invention. The Berlin maker Johann Gottlob Thieleman filed a patent for those as early as in 1808, while the oldest Stauffer guitar to display tuning machines dates from 1814. The *arpeggione* (originally named "Bogen-Gitarre") and the "Hohlflügel" (a piano with a semi-circular keyboard) on the other hand, were indeed inventions by Georg Stauffer – but also commercial failures.

By the time Stauffer senior allowed his son Anton to jointly run the business (hence the creation of "Johann Anton Stauffer & Co." in 1827), it was clear that Vienna's guitar mania had already peaked. The epicentre of the phenomenon had moved back to Paris and would soon reach London. But even so, during the only full calen-



Guitars with additional bass strings outside the fretboard became quite popular.

dar year of business as "Johann Anton Stauffer & Co.", which was 1828, the workshop's output was close to a thousand instruments. From today's perspective it may come as a surprise, but during the Romantic era, it was not unusual for the best manufacturers to also be amongst the most productive. Quality in numbers was a viable business model, and craftsmen achieving it were well-respected. This was true for Stauffer in Vienna, just as it was for Lacote in Paris or Panormo in London.

Despite the impressive numbers, Stauffer Sr. struggled with the costs of his large payroll, sizeable workshops in the heart of Vienna and patent fees associated with his many innovations. After a short exodus to Košice (Bohemia), he and his wife finished their days in a home for destitute craftsmen in Vienna (it was there that Georg Stauffer built his final, highly innovative instruments). Anton, who remained childless, closed the Stauffer workshop in 1849, right after the revolution which put an end to the Romantic era. After a spell in Prague, he came back to the Austrian capital and earned a modest crust as a piano teacher.

Thereafter, the most important Viennese makers to perpetuate the craft were Friedrich Schenk and Johann Gottfried Scherzer. Both specialised in guitars with additional bass strings outside the fretboard, another typical feature of the Viennese School. Most early guitars of the type sported a simple extension to the head, designed to accommodate up to four additional strings outside the fretboard. They became quite popular,

Ten-string guitar, richly decorated with motifs in ebony and ivory, crafted by Henryk Rudert, son of Viennese maker Johann Rudert. Warsaw, 1861.



Typical contraguitar with
13 strings, by Johann Gottfried
Scherzer. Vienna, 1867.
A metal rod inside helps the
body withstand the strain
caused by the strings.

even though they appealed to fairly advanced players. Here again, Luigi Legnani may have weighed in: – J. K. Mertz, Johann Padovetz and the Russian guitar enthusiast Nicolai Petrovich Makaroff most certainly did. Scherzer enjoyed some success with variants of what was initially called the "Helikan-Gitarre" (meaning: huge guitar), another of Georg Stauffer's inventions. It was a very large Legnani model with two necks merging into one heel, the unfretted one supporting a number of additional bass strings. The instrument with seven (or more) additional strings later became known as "Schrammelgitarre" – named after the brothers Johann and Josef Schrammel (although it was Anton Strohmayr, a member of their four-piece ensemble, who actually played the instrument). They became famous for their urban Folk music, based on popular songs and dances. Many other ensembles followed in their footsteps and made the iconic Schrammelgitarre immensely popular all over Austria, large parts of Germany and Bohemia.

In the German language "Schrammeln" today means something like "play the guitar in an amateurish way" – which gravely underestimates the abilities it takes to master the original Schrammelgitarre! Elsewhere, in an entirely different musical context, Viennese guitars with additional bass strings as per Stauffer and Scherzer became very popular among Russian guitar players.

Despite a new wave of guitar mania around 1900, only a few makers – such as Ludwig Re-



Ludwig Reisinger was to continue building contraguitars in the 20th century. This 16-string model was made in Vienna in 1935.

isinger and Georg Haid – kept the trade alive in Vienna. For one thing, they had to face growing competition from German makers like Hermann Hauser or Hans Raab (not to mention major manufacturers like Julius Heinrich Zimmermann). But in addition, their instruments turned out to be a mismatch for the most interesting new repertoire of the time – which was Spanish. For the music of Tárrega and Llobet, the best sounding instruments were the local ones: either the prestigious guitars of Antonio de Torres, or excellent contemporary instruments by Vicente Arias, Enrique García or Manuel Ramírez, to name but a few. While the Viennese School guitars had had an immense influence on guitar-making all over Europe and North-America – not least thanks to Christian Friedrich Martin – no Viennese model was ever established as the archetype of the modern guitar. That was Torres' achievement.

Today, guitars of the Viennese School are mostly used to play Folk music in the Schrammel tradition or Romantic era repertoire. For the latter, Stauffer and his peers provided some of the best-sounding instruments, as proved by the rapidly growing number of recordings on original instruments, as well as a booming market for guitars modelled after historical Viennese models.

Erik Pierre Hofmann

Thanks to Simon Palmer and Stefan Hackl for their contribution.

Ed. – To all those who are interested in the Viennese guitar, I recommend reading the book "Stauffer & Co" by Erik Pierre Hofmann, Pascal Mougin and Stefan Hackl.



Today, Richard Witzmann perpetuates the manufacture of contraguitars in Vienna. He was trained by Josef Wesely, Ludwig Reisinger's successor.

At the end of the 18th century,
leaving his position in Salzburg,
Mozart settled in Vienna, drawn
to its thriving musical scene.



A photograph of Tobias Braun, a luthier, working on a guitar body in his workshop. He is wearing a blue shirt and a blue apron with the text "Gitarrenbau Ottenschlag" on it. He is using a long, thin tool to work on the interior of the guitar body, which is mounted on a workbench. The workshop is filled with various wooden materials and tools, and several finished guitars are hanging on the wall in the background.

Tobias Braun

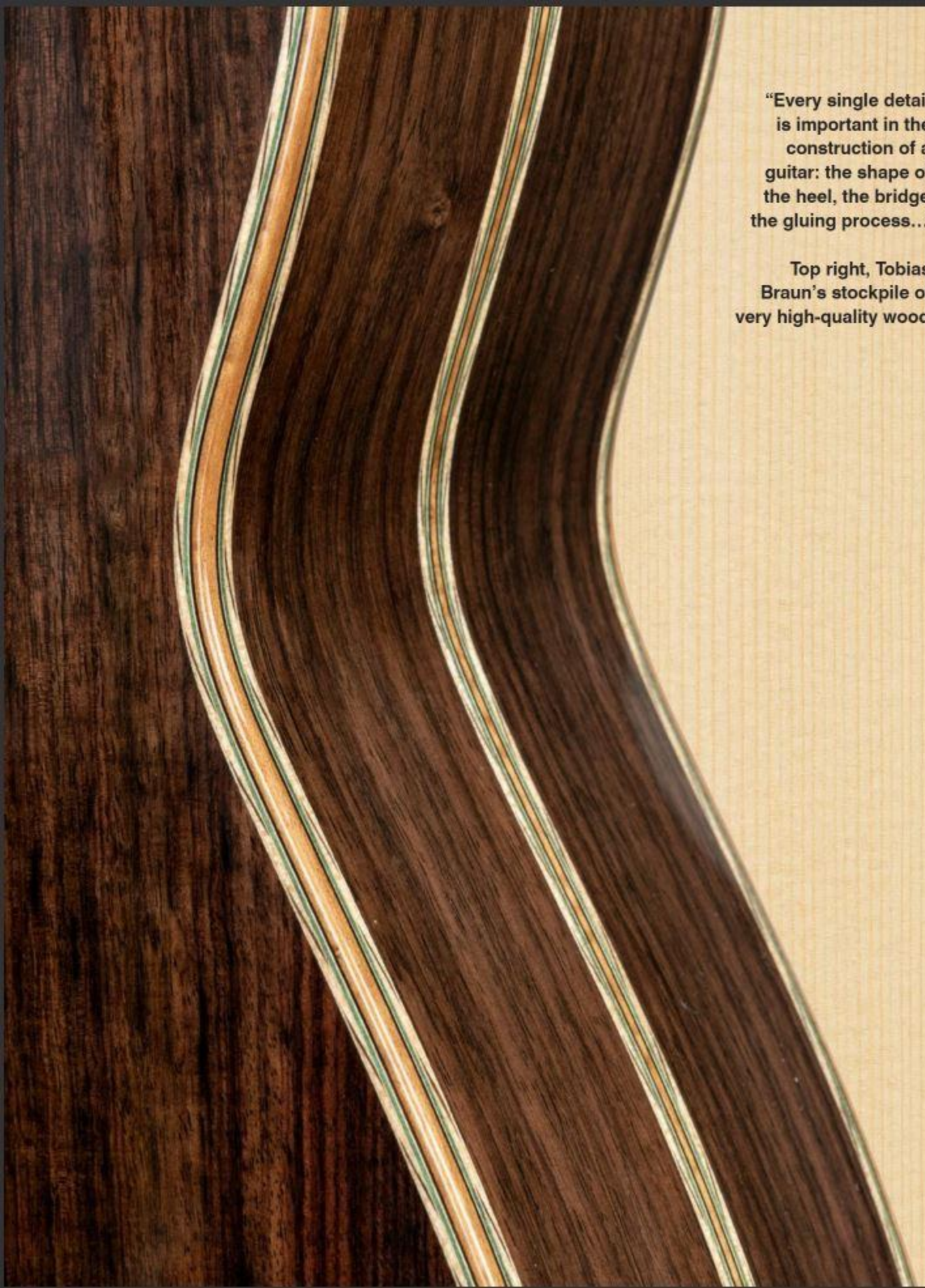
His workshop is in Gaaden, near Vienna. Initially self-taught, he furthered his training under José Luis Romanillos.

His guitars take their inspiration from the great Spanish masters and are consistently built of superb quality woods. Following in the footsteps of his maestro, he in turn runs lutherie courses each summer.

When I walked into your workshop, I could see that you were working on a guitar; what were you doing?

Tobias Braun – I am making a replica of a Vicente Arias guitar from 1889. I was just making the final adjustments on the back before gluing and closing the guitar body.

It's an instrument that I'm preparing as a model to show the participants in my upcoming guitar-making class. This summer, I'll be giving a two-week course in which I will teach them a few typically Spanish construction techniques. The participants will build copies of this Arias, following my instructions.



“Every single detail is important in the construction of a guitar: the shape of the heel, the bridge, the gluing process...”

Top right, Tobias Braun's stockpile of very high-quality wood.



This is wonderful for a beginner: the Arias is a relatively easy guitar to build and it sounds nice. A five-strut fan, two harmonic bars and that's all there is to it... It is simple, straightforward, which encourages you to focus on perfecting your techniques of assembly, of gluing, so that everything fits naturally into place. That is the big takeaway from Arias.

I bring a recipe book along to my courses and I show the participants the recipe for goulash... It seems so simple and the ingredients are easy to come by and yet... the way in which you prepare the ingredients, select the right pot, the cooking time, the temperature... every aspect contributes to the final result. It's the same for guitar construction: you can't reduce it to a mathematical equation; there are so many subtleties and ways of working.

Professionally speaking, I came of age thanks to the José Romanillos courses and I loved the friendly atmosphere in which we all worked for those two weeks. The participants came from all corners of the earth and we would spend two weeks completely immersed in lutherie. I took part in his courses in 1984 in Zurich, in 1988 in Aalst, in 1989 and 1992 in Córdoba; it was such a thrill. As of 1993, José asked if I would be his assistant during his lutherie courses, which was a huge honour for me. Today, I'm continuing on with what my dear *maestro* started.

Let's talk a little about your guitars: how many models do you make?

T. B. – My guitars are all based on instruments from renowned Spanish masters, guitars that I



have personally analysed and measured, with the exception of Segovia's Manuel Ramírez guitar, which is in the MET in New York.

On the other hand, I do make a distinction between models and copies: when I make a model, I take some liberties with my guitars and there are always personal touches in their construction.

My smallest model is the 1889 Arias (plan by Karel Dedain). Next, there is the 1912 Manuel Ramírez (Richard Bruné's plan) and the 1937 Hermann Hauser. The largest model is the Santos Hernández from 1924 which belonged to Luise Walker, the great Austrian guitarist. Her teacher, Miguel Llobet, had personally picked it out for her in Santos' workshop and taken it back to Vienna. I also make a flamenco model, based on a 1989 Manuel Reyes.

The fact that I offer a range of different models means that guitarists can always find something to their liking. When they come into my studio, I observe their playing, especially their right hand, and I can thus quite quickly point them toward the most suitable model for their particular playing style.

Don't you make a Tobias Braun model?

T. B. – Yes, my model is a blend of Manuel Ramírez and Santos Hernández. I aim for guitars that make it easy to achieve beautiful sounds, which assist the guitarist, which can offer *pianissimos* that are still wholly musical notes. I'm seeking an easy response, rich in harmonics. I also plan to make a Romanillos model.

After all these years working with Romanillos, you are finally going to pay homage to him!

T. B. – Out of respect for José, I really struggled with the idea of crafting a Romanillos model. He will be 90 years old next year. For me, this will be a way of paying tribute to him, for everything that he taught me.

I have been listening for the longest time to recordings by Julian Bream from the 1980s. What Bream does with his Romanillos guitar, and what the Romanillos guitar gives to Bream... it's absolutely magnificent. This guitar took everything that

2017 guitar, spruce soundboard, back and sides of yew (*Taxus*). 1924 Santos model.





"La Cordulesa" guitar, made in 2010. Spruce soundboard, back and sides of cypress. Tobias Braun model.



"I enjoy the challenge of building different models, each offering a different sound and character."

Bream was doing with his right hand and translated it into incredible music.

The work done by Romanillos may appear simple, but his manner of assembling everything is extremely refined. It is blend of Torres and Hauser. The fan, for example, with its short lower bars that close the fan, is very Hauser. The thin soundboard, however, and its domed profile come from Torres. I enjoy the challenge of building different models, each offering a different sound and character.

Which woods do you like working with?

T. B. – For my soundboards, it's not that I have anything against red cedar, but I'm happier with spruce.

For the back and sides, I have always worked with Indian rosewood, because of its stability and reliability. But my preferred wood is cypress; I'm addicted to the smell of it. Whenever I'm planing cypress, I find its fragrance intoxicating! I also like maple, but it is more difficult to work with: achieving the right thickness and curvature. Sat-

inwood is a superb wood, somewhat forgotten since Simplicio's time, but truly marvellous. I find that it gives guitars a sound similar to that of Brazilian rosewood. I also have a stock of ziricote, ebony, padauk, bubinga, etc. I really enjoy working with solid woods, not veneers or laminates.

To which details do you pay particular attention?

T. B. – All of them. When assembling the guitar, as a matter of principle I always try to reduce the tension, to cause a minimum of stress among the parts. I never force anything into place; the clamps barely exert any pressure.

I am currently experimenting with the binding around the body; I'm strengthening the binding while thinning the soundboard around the edges, down to 1.2 mm or 1.4 mm. One advantage of having several models is that I can try out an idea on one model without taking risks on any others. In any case, it isn't a good idea to make too many changes at once: tweaking just one aspect is enough, and then upon listening to the instrument you can tell in which direction that change is taking you.

Sometimes, I strengthen the neck with a small carbon rod, hidden under the fingerboard. It doesn't alter the sound; neither does it affect the weight – only three or four grammes less. This is upon the request of guitarists living in very humid climates.

The bridge is another very complex issue in lutherie. In a flamenco guitar you need a swift attack and a shorter sound, whereas in a classical guitar it is better to have a gentler attack but a sound that is longer, richer and less immediate. So, it is up to us to come up with the sound that we are seeking by making the most appropriate bridge. We can vary the rigidity or the mass, but the results are different.

I recently altered the curvature of the heel on my guitars... and the sound changed. The problem with the guitar is that every single part of it plays a mechanical role, has an aesthetic value, and that both of these aspects furthermore depend on the wood that you are using. Just as with goulash!

"La sexagésima", guitar built in 2020, in celebration of Tobias Braun's sixtieth birthday.

Soundboard of well-matured spruce, rosewood back and sides.

1924 Santos model.





Vienna's new Burgtheater, inaugurated in 1888, is still deemed among the greatest stages in Europe.

Lukas Giefing



Left, his device for measuring soundboard flex. Above, Lukas arranging the marquetry and strips for a rosette.

His workshop is in the suburbs of Vienna. He learned his craft by examining guitars made by good contemporary luthiers and by following the advice of guitarist Alvaro Pierri. He has more than a hundred guitars under his belt.

What was your training in lutherie?

Lukas Giefing – I am self-taught. I started playing the guitar as a teenager and it wasn't long before I felt the urge to build one. I have always enjoyed woodwork but I didn't know of any lutherie schools, and so I learned from books, from luthiers and through a lot of trial and error.

Which luthiers taught you the most?

L. G. – One of the first was Matthias Dammann, but most of all I studied the guitars that I came across around me. I was thus able to observe and study the guitars of Paulino Bernabé, Antonio Marín and, more recently, of Daniel Friederich. I was lucky enough to know Alvaro Pierri, who lives here in Vienna and who encouraged me to study his guitars, especially his two Friederich models: his N° 751 from 1994 in spruce, and N° 794 from 2004 in red cedar.

What did the guitars teach you?

L. G. – The idea was not to copy these guitars, but to understand how Daniel Friederich worked. Today, I measure everything and I try to analyse how the instrument functions. I measure, for example, the soundboard flexibility (in hundredths of millimetres) at multiple points and then I map the soundboard with the computer, showing all of these values. This shows me if there are any particularly rigid or overly floppy zones and so I know where to add or remove mass. It's invaluable for understanding how the bracing comes into play.

I don't perform the usual manual check of my soundboards' transversal flexibility like other luthiers do; I'm chiefly interested in the longitudinal flexibility. I get the feeling that it is more important; it's the wood's elasticity running in the same direction as the strings' traction and I look for strongly veined spruce.

Rigidity is important, too, but I can easily check that thanks to the thickness.

What sound are you after?

L. G. – As a general rule, I don't like concerts; we are too far away. I prefer to be close to the guitarist or to play the guitar that I'm studying

For his guitar N° 100, built in 2012, Lukas chose a spruce with bear claws for the soundboard and purpleheart (*Peltogyne spp*) for the back and ribs.



He spent years
examining the
bracing styles of
contemporary master
luthiers, especially
Paulino Bernabé,
Antonio Marín and
Daniel Friederich.





myself. Above all, I am looking to make an instrument with good trebles but not with very deep bass notes. Currently, the sound of my guitars is evolving toward a new balance, with highs that are even stronger, more present.

What are your favourite woods?

L. G. – For the soundboard, I am more comfort-

able with spruce. I do also like cedar, but I find that it doesn't result in the same clear trebles; they don't have the same richness that spruce offers. It's a difficult issue: we don't listen objectively. It's the same problem with the woods used on the back and sides, because guitarists all too often listen with their eyes!

The spruce on my guitars comes from Austrian



Computer analysis of the soundboard flex test measurements.

forests and I buy from the same supplier who works with Bösendorfer pianos. For the body I like working with Indian rosewood, maple, robinia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), walnut (*Juglans regia*) and purpleheart (*Peltogyne spp*). I find the purple colouring of this last wood stunning; I chose it for my guitar N° 100!

What are the special features of your guitars?

L. G. – I make just one model. The price variations reflect the woods used. My bridges, with their two-hole tie-blocks, are of rosewood, never ebony, which I find too heavy for bridges. The necks are of Spanish cedar, mahogany or maple. The rosettes are all made with natural, undyed woods.

For the fingerboards, I use ebony, robinia and "blackwood tek" (hardened *Pinus radiata*). For the bracing, I used the Bouchet-Marín model for the longest time and these days I'm using Friedrich's style. Finishing is always French polish. My headstock design is my own, but is quite similar to other Spanish guitars; I am considering lengthening it a little, but I do worry that it might alter the sound balance of my guitars.

Any final thoughts?

L. G. – Yes, I always tell my clients that they are welcome to come into the studio to try, hear and compare my guitars with the ones that they already know. I always have several guitars ready. Obviously, each one is unique!

Detail of the rosette on the maple guitar opposite. The spruce soundboard features very prominent bear claws.



At the end of the 19th century, an art movement appeared in Vienna: the Viennese Secession (Sezessionsstil), closely related to France's Art Nouveau and Germany's Jugendstil. It included architects and plastic artists. The *Pavillon am Karlsplatz*, by architect Otto Wagner, typifies this style.



A man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a grey and black plaid shirt, is in a workshop. He is holding a light-colored wooden guitar body with both hands, looking at it intently. In the foreground, a dark wood guitar body is mounted on a wooden stand. The background is a wooden wall with various tools hanging on it, including a level and a square. The lighting is warm and focused on the man and his work.

Matthias Tilzer

He has set up his workshop in Innsbruck, in the Austrian Tyrol. He was trained in Mittenwald, but switched to Spanish construction upon attending courses by José Luis Romanillos. His guitars stand out for the quality of their sound and their understated ornamentation.

Photos by Max Kirchbauer and Alberto Martinez



The headstock motif with two birds comes from a Baroque violin.



Wood shaving from one of his rosettes.



Preparing the tiny pieces that will be set into the mosaic.

How did you learn to build guitars?

Matthias Tilzer – As a youngster I was learning the guitar and all the while playing in a rock band, but we played so loudly that I was worried that I would have hearing problems in the future. One day, I asked my guitar teacher if he knew of any lutherie schools and he immediately recommended Mittenwald, in Germany.

I studied there from 1989 to 1992, and for a few years after qualifying, since I was worried that I might not be able to earn a living as a guitar-maker, I split my time between a steady job and building guitars at home.

Now I'm a full-time luthier: I make five or six classical guitars per year and do repairs on classical, acoustic and electric guitars, and on mandolins. I enjoy the repair work. On the one hand, I learn a lot by examining the guitars of other luthiers and on the other hand, I enjoy having people come into my workshop, livening up my otherwise all-too-solitary life as a luthier.

Have you had input from other luthiers?

M. T. – In 1991, I took part in a Romanillos course in Wasserburg am Inn (Bavaria, Germany), organised by luthier Curt Claus Voigt. It was fantastic: the discovery of Spanish lutherie opened up a whole new world for me, quite different to the one of traditional German construction that I had learned in Mittenwald.

From that moment on, I started making guitars the "Spanish" way and I was fortunate enough to meet guitar teachers at the Innsbruck conservatory who liked these guitars and started placing orders with me.

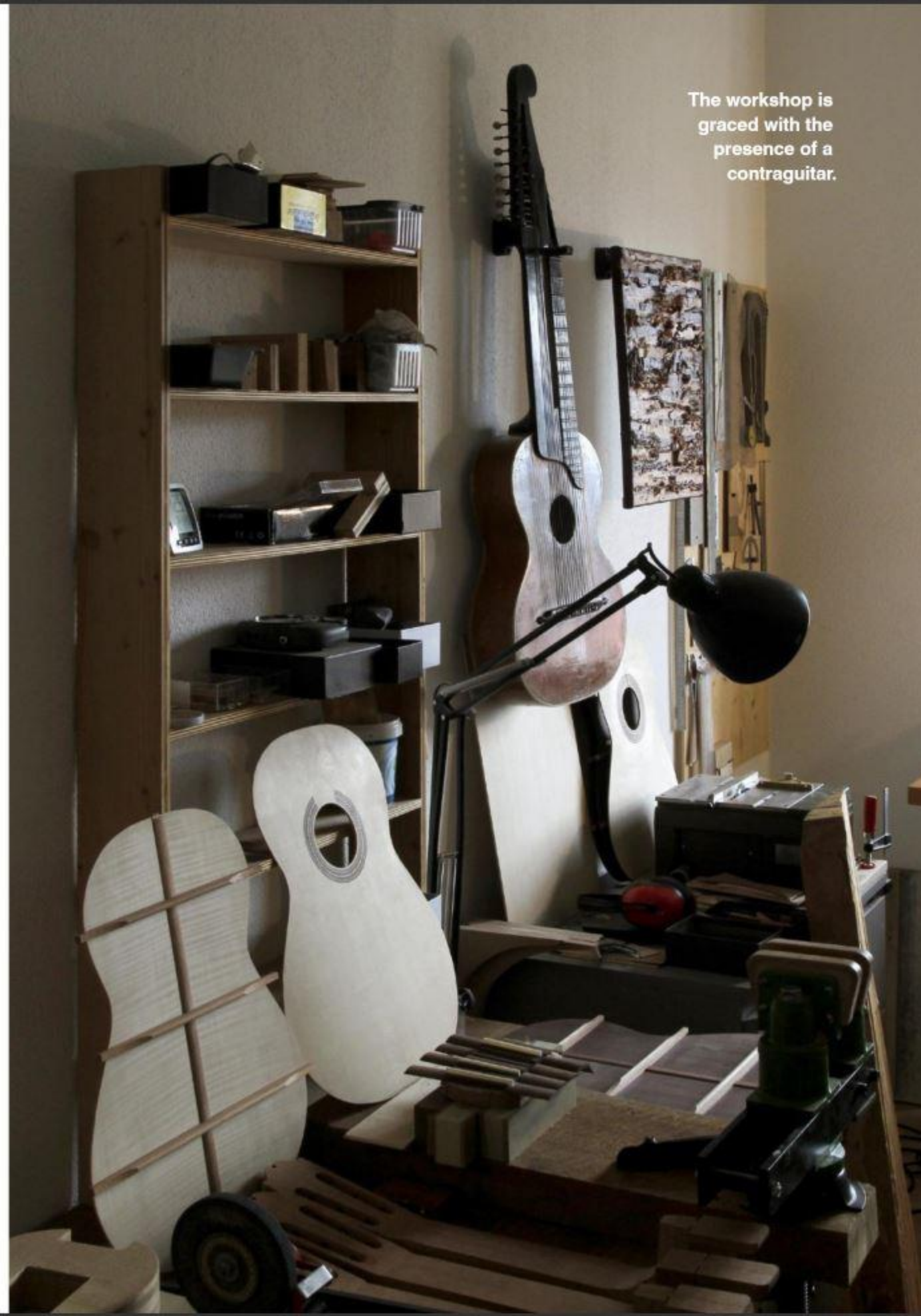
Another influence came thanks to a local guitar dealer, here in Innsbruck, who was importing

After attending Romanillos' workshops, he uses Spanish construction techniques.

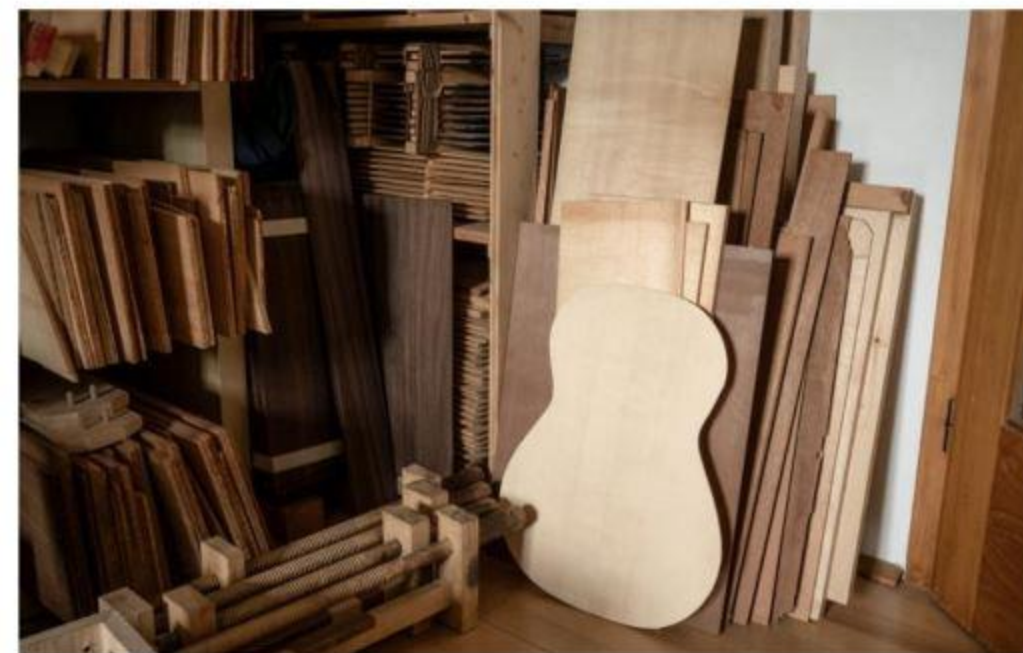


The heel comprises two pieces of Spanish cedar, glued length-wise.





The workshop is
graced with the
presence of a
contraguitar.



Enough wood in stock for a few years' worth of work.

guitars from Granada. It afforded me the chance to see the work of Antonio and Paco Marín, of Manuel Bellido, of Rafael Moreno... I really like the guitars by Antonio Marín, the way he crafts the neck... Tobias Braun has also given me advice and I have often visited his workshop.

Which proportions and bracings have you adopted?

M. T. – My guitars' design and bracing are a fusion of my own ideas, those from an Antonio de Torres guitar the plans for which we studied in Mittenwald and those of Rolf Eichinger, whom I met at his workshop in Karlsruhe, Germany. I was struck by Eichinger's guitars for their perfection and the sobriety of their ornamentation, for their simplicity. These days I use a symmetrical seven-strut bracing system with a thin reinforcement plate under the bridge. I feel that this plate, which extends right across the width of the body, helps harmonise all of the movements in the soundboard. I don't go so much by measurement; I work mostly by following my intuition.

Which kind of sound are you looking for?

M. T. – I'm searching more for quality than for

volume. I like having a lot of harmonics and being able to modulate the sound. Quality guitars are not easy to play; it's up to the guitarist to seek out the instrument's possibilities. A good guitar responds to your request, to your manner of playing. It's a bit like a racing car: the guitarist needs to learn how to bring out the best from it.

I test all my guitars, but to work out what they are capable of takes me hours. Since my level of playing isn't the highest, I often go to the conservatory and ask one of the teachers to let me hear my new guitar.

Which are your preferred woods?

M. T. – That's a conundrum, actually: guitarists prefer rosewood and the darker woods. Personally, I also like the sound of maple guitars and I would happily make more of them, but they are harder to sell. Maybe with today's awareness of environmental issues, things might change...

For soundboards, I like spruce and I can easily get my hands on top-quality pieces in Austria and in Germany. I look for well-sawn soundboards; I really appreciate the perfection of the cut and the direction of the grain.

I am particularly fond of soundboards with bear

“I don’t add a central strip; I’m aiming for simplicity and timeless elegance.”

claws, even though the indented rings make it harder to work and more quickly blunt the tools.

Tell us about the personal touches on your guitars.

M. T. – The rosette patterns are my own creation. My bridges are quick thick, because I like them to be robust. The purfling on the back continues uninterrupted all around the body, with no visible joint. I don’t add a central strip; I’m aiming for simplicity and timeless elegance. I use quarter-sawn maple for my purfling so its highlights and colour make a pleasing contrast with the rosewood.

Another personal touch is the heel block: I make it out of two pieces of Spanish cedar, bonded together length-wise. Upon request, I can also affix the head to the neck with a V-joint, as I was taught in Mittenwald, but I don’t see differences in the sound; it’s mainly an aesthetic choice. The headstock design with the two birds comes from a Baroque violin that I saw when sharing a workshop with a colleague. I make the fingerboards thick so as to stiffen the neck, avoiding the need for carbon reinforcements and suchlike.

But what I love best of all is working with wood. I live and work in the same place; all the livelong day I’m constantly thinking about how I’ll tackle the next step, about which woods to use...

The problem is that no two pieces of wood are alike...

M. T. – Yes, and that is precisely why luthiers exist; if it weren’t for the skill of adapting our techniques to the wood, factories would have already replaced us!



Elegance, sobriety,
simplicity: Matthias Tilzer's
guitars in a nutshell.





Gustav Klimt was a leading artist of the Viennese Secession.
The Kiss, oil on canvas with added gold leaf (1909).



Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I*, oil on canvas
with added gold and silver leaves (1907).

Daniel Zucali

He has the mind of a researcher and a strong personality. He isn't following the same paths as other luthiers; he crafts guitars with alternative pitches or multi-stringed instruments, thus offering guitarists a vast palette of potential sounds.





"Elia": his modern classical guitar model.

Orfeo – Your catalogue displays impressive diversity. Could you explain to us how you approach your craft?

Daniel Zucali – I enjoy making guitars of different types. Not only of different sizes, but also guitars with different pitches (terz or baritone guitars) and multi-stringed guitars (up to eighteen strings). I also make a crossover model and a jazz guitar with nylon strings.

Where do these ideas come from?

D. Z. – The ideas are neither mine, nor are they new. A hundred years ago in Vienna, Johann Georg Stauffer was producing different types of guitars and Luigi Legnani was composing for terz guitars.

I find it disappointing that guitarists and composers today aren't going in this direction. What makes a choir beautiful is the combination of voices in its composition: soprano, mezzo, tenor, bass and so on... I don't understand why the classical guitar world doesn't experiment with this, too. For me, a quartet comprising four identical guitars is inconceivable; it is a missed opportunity to embrace a broader musical richness. Yet it does exist in popular music. In a traditional

Mariachi ensemble in Mexico, for example, there is a guitar, bass guitar and requinto.

Do you have all of these guitars in stock?

D. Z. – No, I have the occasional specimen on hand to show to any guitarists visiting my workshop, but I work chiefly to order. I try to understand their tastes, their repertoire, their playing style and from there I can suggest such-and-such a type of guitar and such-and-such a type of wood. Moreover, since all of my guitars are hand-made, I can work to even special orders... if they don't alter my way of working or my conceptualisation of the instrument.

Which woods do you offer?

D. Z. – I have a huge range of different woods. Everything depends on your preferences and the music that you are going to play.

Tell us about your classical guitar models.

D. Z. – I make two classical models: "Elia" and "Aline" (I named my guitars after my children). I started by developing the "Elia". It is quite a traditional guitar, but not a copy of any particular luthier. I prefer not to take ideas from others. The



"Aline" is a classical guitar that has undergone further development, with lattice bracing, raised fingerboard and a monitor soundhole in the ribs. The decoration is reminiscent of Gustav Klimt's paintings.



Asymmetrical
bracing in the
"Elia" model.

"Elia" has a normal fingerboard, glued to the soundboard.

"Aline" has a raised fingerboard, which changes the sound somewhat, increases the sustain and facilitates access to the high notes. It's a guitar that is better suited to a high-level guitarist. More hours of work go into producing the "Aline" and its price is higher accordingly.

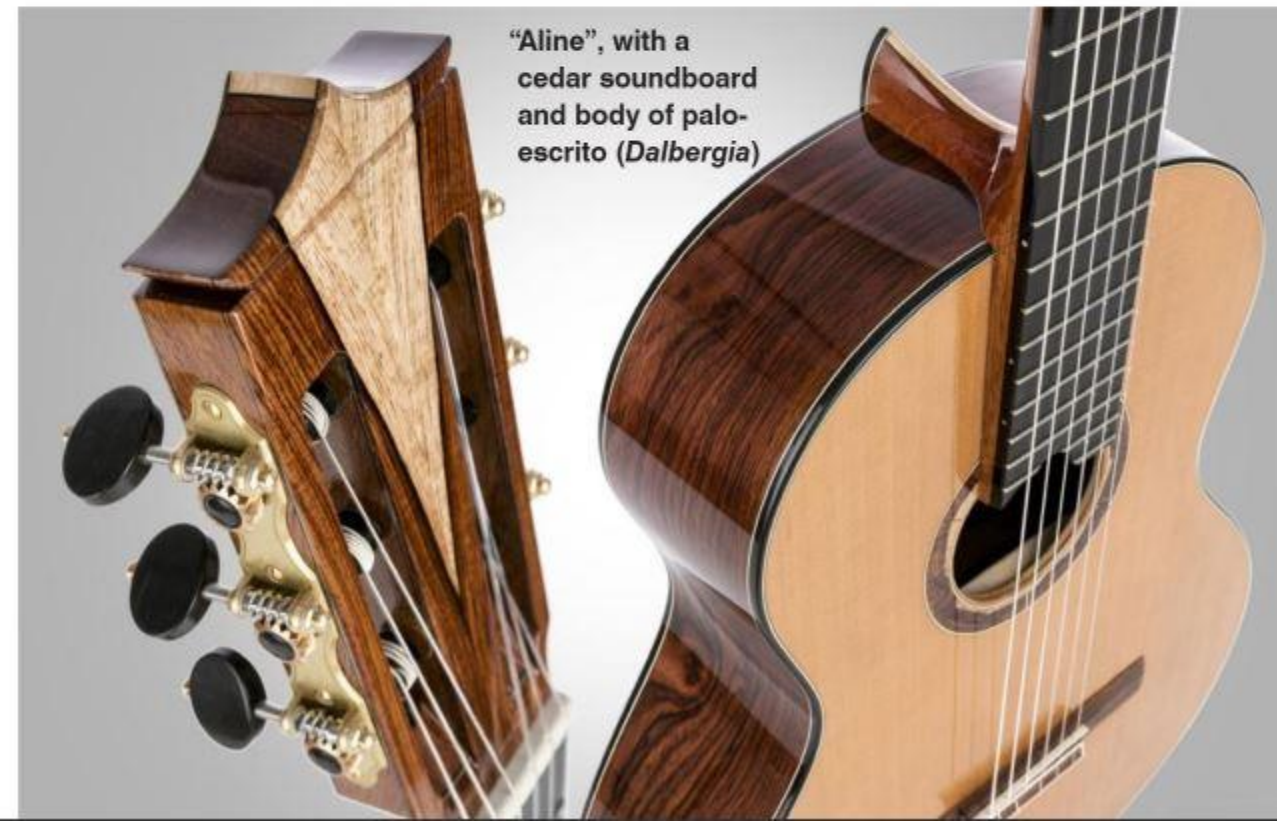
I have two models, with different sizes and fretboards.

Do both models feature the same bracing?

D. Z. – No. For the "Elia", I use asymmetrical bracing, a six-strut open fan. It is very stiff at the top so as to lend firm support to fingerboard and

leave the soundboard a lot of free movement in the lower bout. I don't add reinforcement under the bridge; I prefer to leave it as free as possible. For the "Aline", I use a kind of lattice bracing. Young guitarists are used to this type of instrument, which has an extremely thin soundboard and which is less tiring for the right hand. Anyone trained in the 1970s or 80s might have trouble playing these guitars, tending to press down too firmly and the guitar would not sound right. In my case, I developed this bracing style by extending my conventional bracing, retaining the same underlying six-strut structure.

In the bracing, I don't make too many changes. To me, this is part of the initial design of a guitar;



"Aline", with a
cedar soundboard
and body of palo-
escrito (*Dalbergia*)



Lattice-style
bracing in the
"Aline" model.

The "Crossover" model is for guitarists who are used to steel-stringed guitars and amplification. Bottom left, view of the pickup inside.





The "Jazzabella"
model, an archtop
jazz guitar, with
nylon strings and
pickup system.



The "Santone" model is a modern interpretation of a contraguitar. Fifteen strings, body of ash (*Fraxinus*), fanned frets and pickup system.



Trio of "Santino" guitar models: baritone, normal and terz guitar. Bridge with three-part adjustable nut for heightened tuning accuracy.



once I've got the bracing right and all the notes sound good, then I prefer to make any adjustments on other parameters. In my experience, asymmetrical bracing gives fewer problems.

Where does the "Crossover" come from?

D. Z. – "Elia" has always been my starting point. I retained the same shape but from there it developed in different ways: toward "Aline", with a raised fingerboard and lattice bracing; or more toward the Crossover model with a cutaway, soundport, pickup system and slightly thicker soundboard. The fingerboard can be radiused or flat. It's a guitar designed for guitarists who are accustomed to acoustic steel-string guitars and who may play solo or in a heavily amped band.

It is currently my most frequently ordered model.

And the jazz guitar?

D. Z. – The jazz guitar is completely different to the others. The first request for one came from a guitarist friend and I had to start completely from scratch. For two years, I studied all manner of guitars from this genre before actually daring to start building one. I thin out the soundboards with my CNC (Computer Numerical Control) milling machine and then I finish them by hand. They sound fine when played without amplification, but they really come into their own when plugged in. They are very comfortable with their radiused frets but of course, the sound is unusual because it doesn't come from steel strings.



"I make special guitars for special guitarists."

What are the other models?

D. Z. – I refrain from modifying the classical model too much. I do take liberties, however, with the other models. For example, I find that the guitar's soundhole is very poorly positioned. From a technical perspective, it is a mistake to place the soundhole right in middle of the sound box. But I cannot go changing too many things, or it would become an entirely new instrument, no longer a guitar.

There are two other slants to my work: building guitars with different registers that can be played in ensembles, in trios or quartets; and building guitars that are tuned differently, with more strings, that can be used to play the lute repertoire, for example.

When forming a guitar quartet, I think that it would be worthwhile combining a baritone guitar, a terz or quint, and two normal guitars. Musically, that would offer greater richness. That's the case with my trio of "Santino" guitars: there is one terz, one classical and one baritone. Surprising through it may seem, the baritone guitar actually works very well when built in the normal body size. The bridge nut on all three is a three-part adjustable system. I also make guitars with seven, eight, fourteen and even up to eighteen strings. The number of strings, the tuning, the size and the shape are often determined after lengthy conversations with the guitarist placing the order.

That was how I came to take an order for a fourteen-string guitar, destined for playing Baroque music written for the lute. I have also received orders for modern contraguitars.

I think we could safely say that I make special guitars for special guitarists!

"Barocco", a fourteen-string guitar for those wishing to play Baroque music on a modern instrument.



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