



Orfeo

N°13

MAGAZINE

**Italia
Special**

**Gabriele Lodi
Enrico Bottelli
Paolo Coriani
Mimmo Peruffo**

Val di Fiemme forest

**N° 13 - Spring 2019
English edition**

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From the Editor

Orfeo

N°13

MAGAZINE

In our sixth edition of Orfeo, we promised to return to Italy one day and introduce you to more incredible guitar makers. A promise is a promise, and we are pleased to showcase three more Italian luthiers in this edition: Gabriele Lodi, Enrico Bottelli and Paolo Coriani.

Still in Italy, in the Veneto region with its Palladian villas, we meet one of the few manufacturers of gut strings; the kind that once gave voice to instruments in the days before nylon, strings so fragile and yet which offer a sound of pure magic.

And further north, near the Dolomites mountain range and the Austrian border, we discover a majestic forest, recently devastated by a powerful storm. It is called Val di Fiemme, an exceptional spruce forest which is home to the trees that Italian luthiers have prized ever since the heyday of Stradivari and his fellow craftsmen from Cremona.

Enjoy.

Alberto Martinez

Gabriele Lodi, in search of balance

A photograph of two men in a guitar workshop. On the left, an older man with white hair and a beard, wearing a light blue shirt and a blue apron, stands with his arms crossed and his hand near his chin. On the right, a younger man with short brown hair, wearing a light purple shirt and a dark blue apron, stands with his hands on his hips. They are in a workshop filled with wooden cabinets, shelves, and various guitars. Two acoustic guitars are mounted on the wall behind them. To the right, there are shelves with books, a music stand with sheet music, and a stack of books on the floor.

Gabriele Lodi has a two-pronged international reputation: as a luthier and as a restorer of antique guitars. He works with his father, Maurizio, who founded “Liuteria Lodi” in the seventies with his brother, Leandro.

“The guitar,
as I see it, is a
structure in which
all of its components
are in harmony.”

What kind of sound are you looking for?

Gabriele Lodi – I have always sought to reproduce that elegant sound of a Torres guitar, with deep resonance and a vast range of polyphonic fullness.

But I have also been aiming, for a long time now, for something that goes above and beyond sound alone: harmony of string/structure tension. I examine the role played by each of the guitar's different components: how the body reflects the sound, the role of the neck, the top's responsiveness, but the thing that I always pay particular attention to is the harmony of tension. When you hit upon that harmony, the sound is magnificent, truly magical! I love it when a guitar produces a beautiful sound without revealing the mechanism behind it. This is what you find in vintage guitars, with their lightweight construction, where every single part of the instrument helps produce its voice, that movement of air, just as with the human voice.

Some modern guitars, built to be very stiff, generate the sound all by themselves instead of giving the player any say in the matter. The net result is a lack of nuances; each and every note has the same sound matrix. I don't like guitars with a domineering timbre of their own; they leave no room for a musician's own choice of expression, his or her own interpretation of the music.

The guitar, as I see it, is a structure in which all

His personal
model is
inspired by
the guitars
of Robert
Bouchet.





In his view, every component in the guitar forms part of a harmonious whole.

“The guitar is an instrument designed for performing a repertoire that has been around for four hundred years.”

of its components are in harmony: each and every part needs to contribute; not only the soundboard. Every element, each with its own characteristics, has a role: the neck needs to be stable, the back needs to properly reflect the sound produced by the strings and the top, and all of these parts need to be in harmony with each other to make up the whole. I understood this by studying the guitars made by Torres: cohesion.

How important are the woods in your search for cohesion?

G. L. – It's important to know how to use each variety of wood. There are myriad excellent woods, but you have to know how to choose the best ones for the guitar that you are planning to build. Working with Italian spruce from the Val de Fiemme, which is quite light, for example, is very different



Gabriele likes old, lightly built guitars, in which the instrument as a whole produces its voice.

to working with Bavarian spruce, which is heavy. You always need to strike a balance between elasticity and lightness. The soundboard is a membrane, and so elasticity is crucial, and yet if the construction isn't rigid enough, you might find that the soundboard warps before long.

Are “lattice” or “double top” guitars a step in the right direction?

G. L. – Yes, from a theoretical perspective, Smallman and Dammann are perfectly correct; it's the application of their ideas that I have trouble with.

A corner of the workshop infused with the scent of hot glue.

I believe that each guitar should have its own identity, its own voice, its own character. The guitar found an identity with Torres; an identity intertwined with a repertoire. Guitars by Smallman and Dammann are powerful and offer plenty of sustain but they lack any connection with a repertoire; they are designed with the guitarist in mind. The aim isn't so much to make music as to win competitions. As I see it, the guitar is an instrument designed for performing a repertoire that has been around for four hundred years.

Do you think that the guitars change a lot as they age?

G. L. – Yes, very much, especially spruce, if directly under the strings'



“For the top,
I prefer spruce and,
naturally, it’s Italian
spruce from Val di
Fiemme that I know
best.”

tension. Initially it produces a sound that is a bit tight, but after a few months it adjusts to the stress, opens up, and this new-found elasticity will then last a very long time.

The woods and glues on our guitars are always changing and the manner in which they “age” will depend on how the instrument is used. The woods of a guitar that is played daily will noticeably change and the whole structure needs to adapt to this level of activity.

Which woods do you prefer?

G. L. – For the top, I prefer spruce and, naturally, it’s Italian spruce from Val di Fiemme that I know best. For the body, I like all of the traditional woods: rosewood, maple and cypress. They each lead to a different sound, but they’ll always be beautiful. I’m very fond of cypress; maple from the Balkans with its noble sound is reminiscent of the violin-making tradition; while rosewood – especially Brazilian rosewood – with its dense, deep, serious sound, is the very quintessence of the classical guitar. Indian rosewood might be the one with the least personality, but it is still a lovely wood to work with, offering superb results.

My guitars are all slightly different, always tailored to the kind of wood that I have chosen for each. The adjustments are always very subtle, but the idea is to optimise the material at hand, and I am



“Historical”
model, inspired
by Torres.



Templates of Hauser and Torres guitars restored by Gabriele.

guided as much by feel as by sight. All of the guitars are French polished.

I get the impression that you always come back to Torres...

G. L. – Yes, I try to understand the great luthiers for my work. I try to do as Hauser did, taking Torres as a starting point, trying to further his ideas and update them so as to ultimately arrive at the creation of "my" guitar. These days, guitarists need an instrument that can handle air travel, changing climates; a Torres was never built for such stresses. And yet it is difficult to get away from Torres... Over these last few years I have restored a great deal of Torres guitars and I came to the conclusion that he was the greatest luthier of all time!

What are the characteristics of your guitars?

G. L. – The construction of my guitars is light and the bracing resembles that of a Torres,



The bracing is glued in a home-made chamber.

albeit tweaked to accommodate nylon strings. Since nylon pulls more strongly than gut, certain parts of the soundboard need to be reinforced, but I didn't want to add extra bridge reinforcement like Hauser did: I prefer the sound of Spanish guitars, built without that added plate. I also made the soundboard thicker in some places.

How many models do you make?

G. L. – I make the "historical" one and my own model. The "historical" model is inspired by Torres, García or Santos Hernández. These guitars take their inspiration from the ones that have come through the workshop, but they are not precise replicas; the sound is tremendously difficult to copy.

I work with my father: he does the cutting and gluing, and I make the soundboard, neck and rosette and do the fitting. Then it's my father who finishes them off with French polishing.

My own personal model is inspired more by



French polishing is always used to finish the guitars.



“Historical” models, inspired by García (top) and Torres (right).

Bouchet. My starting point is the Paris school, from Lacote to Bouchet. I find the French sound very appealing; it has so much personality. To strengthen the top, Bouchet picked up on Lacote's idea of adding a brace under the bridge, unlike Hauser, who added a thin plate covering the entire bridge area. I think that Bouchet's is the better solution: adding strength under the saddle, but only where it is strictly needed. But the more I worked, the more I realised that if I thinned out this strut I could achieve greater soundboard elasticity and thus conserve this vital feature of the Spanish guitar.

For me, the Spanish sound stems from the fan bracing, without any added bridge support. With the advent of nylon, however, the bridge came under much more stress and so the Spanish sound was changed forever. After Torres, luthiers have to choose between following Hauser or going down Bouchet's road. There really is no other way.

Photos (2) : © Galerie des Luthiers, Lyon (France).



The Lodi workshop
is in the town
of Carpi, a few
kilometres north of
Modena.



Enrico Bottelli, rosette lover

He started out as a guitarist playing a steel-string acoustic guitar, but quickly developed a passion for lutherie and took classes with Carlo Raspagni in Milan and later with Ervin Somogyi and Richard Schneider in the United States. As his tastes changed, he found himself increasingly drawn to the classical guitar. Two courses under José Luis Romanillos in Córdoba galvanised his decision to be a luthier.

Bottelli in his
Voghera workshop,
in Lombardy.

Thanks to the contagious passion of José Romanillos, he switched from building acoustic guitars to building classical guitars.

How did you get started as a luthier?

Enrico Bottelli – I have always loved the sound of the guitar. I learned to play acoustic as a teenager and I even considered playing professionally, but since I'm not really cut out to be a rock star, I enrolled in Carlo Raspagni's school of lutherie near Milan, where I learned the basics of the craft.

In 1982 I was in Berkeley (California) for three months learning the construction of the steel string guitar with Ervin Somogyi and, in 1988, I was apprentice of Richard Schneider, who was building nylon string guitars on the basis of the Michael Kasha design.

That's when my interest in the classical guitar really started growing, and then I heard from some Italian colleagues about José Romanillos and his classes. I took courses with him in 1994 and 1995 in Córdoba. Romanillos' passion for the classical guitar was contagious and from that point on, I dropped acoustic guitar construction to focus exclusively on the Spanish classical guitar.

In 1999, I was lucky enough to restore a 1952 Hauser; I thought

that it was exquisite and took the opportunity to make two replicas of it. My rosettes were different but the construction was otherwise identical and I was very pleased with the result.

Did you keep making Hauser replicas?

E. B. – Afterwards I moved on and, while remaining faithful to the musical features of Hauser, I began building guitars with a bit more light, flexible and responsive soundboard.

This was not only to satisfy a customer's demand but was the direction of my research for an ideal instrument, modern, deep, open and sensible.

It would be true to say that my real starting point in lutherie was with the Spanish guitar, thanks to, in particular, Romanillos: those lively guitars, with their light construction. In my early years as a luthier, I built guitars the way that Romanillos had taught me, like the 1973 Julian Bream guitar, with its typical fan bracing and

Internal construction of his Hauser model.





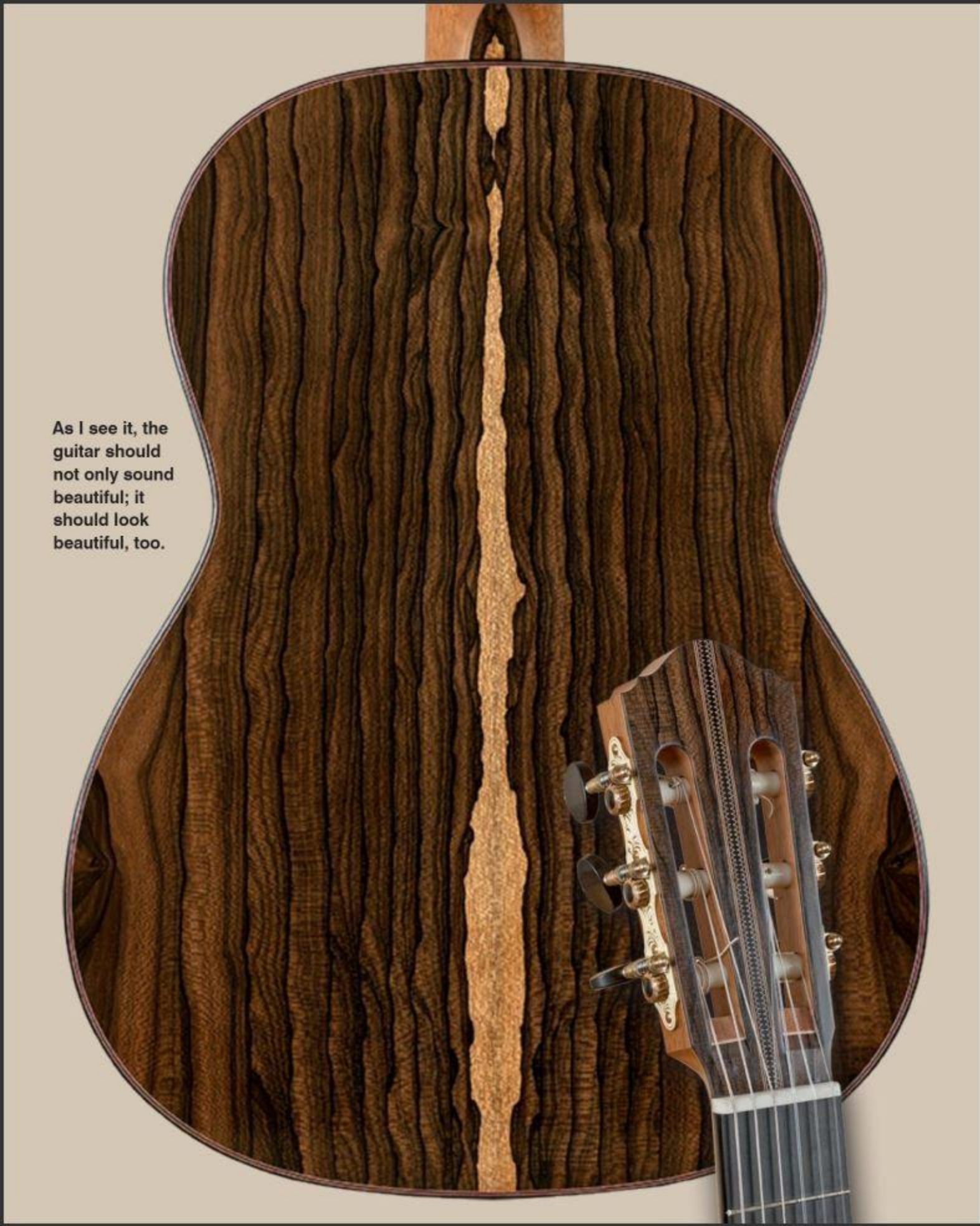
Purfling being prepared on a mould.



Device for bending the ribs on a Hauser template.



Enrico Bottelli uses, almost exclusively, spruce for his guitar tops.



As I see it, the guitar should not only sound beautiful; it should look beautiful, too.



Stock of Spanish cedar for necks and heads.

“With Hauser as a base, I did find my own path, but always by shifting toward lighter construction.”

the two struts on either side of the sound hole. The exhibition “La Chitarra di Liuteria” in Vicenza (1997) was also a major influence, as was my encounter with Stefano Grondona and the historical Spanish guitars, especially the Torres’ instruments. These guitars left an indelible mark on me.

These days the biggest influences on my work are Hauser and Torres. The Hauser sound is perfectly balanced, elegant, clear; for me, that’s the sound of the twentieth-century classical guitar. But the Torres sound is the one that I like best; there’s something magical about it that speaks straight to the heart. Although the instrument may be less perfect than a Hauser, less balanced... it is so very moving! It is very difficult to build instruments that capture the essence of Torres guitars, to reproduce “that sound”.

The other issue, for us luthiers, is that very few guitarists actually really understand and love those instruments and know how to play them. There is little demand from concert players for that kind of guitar. With Hauser as a base, I did find my own path, but always by shifting toward lighter construction, in the direction of the Spanish guitar and Torres, using thinner wood and a lighter spruce. The

German spruce used on Hausers tends to be quite resinous, rather heavy and the tops are often quite thick. Such guitars take a few years to “open up”. I was looking for a way to reduce that time-frame and produce guitars that could “mature” faster, offering a beautiful, classic timbre – rounded, sweet and deep – without the wait.

What matters to today’s young guitarists, like those who perform in the competitions, is to have a guitar with an explosive sound, that is easy to play and less tiring for the right hand. This is a pity, because these young players are no longer looking for nuances. Luckily, as they progress in their careers they tend to mature and start showing an interest in the quality of the sound; that’s when they move on to guitars with greater variation in timbre, more colours.

What are your favourite woods?

E. B. – For the soundboards, I have experimented with German spruces from Bavaria, Italian ones, as well as Swiss and French spruces from the Jura Mountains. I don’t place so much importance on the spacing in between the veins. I concentrate more on flexibility and weight;

“My construction style is typically Spanish, using a “solera” and with the ribs that slot into the heel block.”

the spruce that I prefer is strong and stiff and weighs 400-430 kg per m³. I use only spruce for my tops; I haven't found the sound qualities that I like in red cedar. For the back and sides, my favourite wood is Brazilian rosewood, for both its aesthetic and acoustic qualities.

The CITES rules have certainly made things harder for us. Now there is a complex system of certification. Considering that I turn out between ten and twelve guitars per year, the amount of wood that I would use in my entire lifetime is negligible. There should be an exemption for these small quantities of wood. I also like Madagascar rosewood, ziricote, maple and satinwood. I do not have much experience with cypress. I like aesthetically-pleasing woods. For me, it's not only the sound of the guitar that needs to be beautiful; it should also be beautiful visually.

What are the features of your guitar construction?

E. B. – I focus especially on the weight of the wood I use, I aim for a light soundboard, strong but with supple bracing: less wood and more flexibility.

I have also played around with the profile of the soundboard: soundboards that are totally flat, or others that are domed. The flat ones are more flexible and it is easier to achieve deep basses. I mainly build custom instruments, I like to satisfy the customer needs and wishes when possible, building the guitar of his dreams. I enjoy meeting the musician, discussing things together, hearing the person play. I can change the sound, make it darker or brighter by varying several parameters, depending on whether the guitarist plays with a lot of fingernail or more flesh. I also appreciate

discussing their preferences regarding aesthetics, ornamentation and woods.

Other than that, my construction style is typically Spanish, using a “solera” and with the ribs that slot into the heel block.

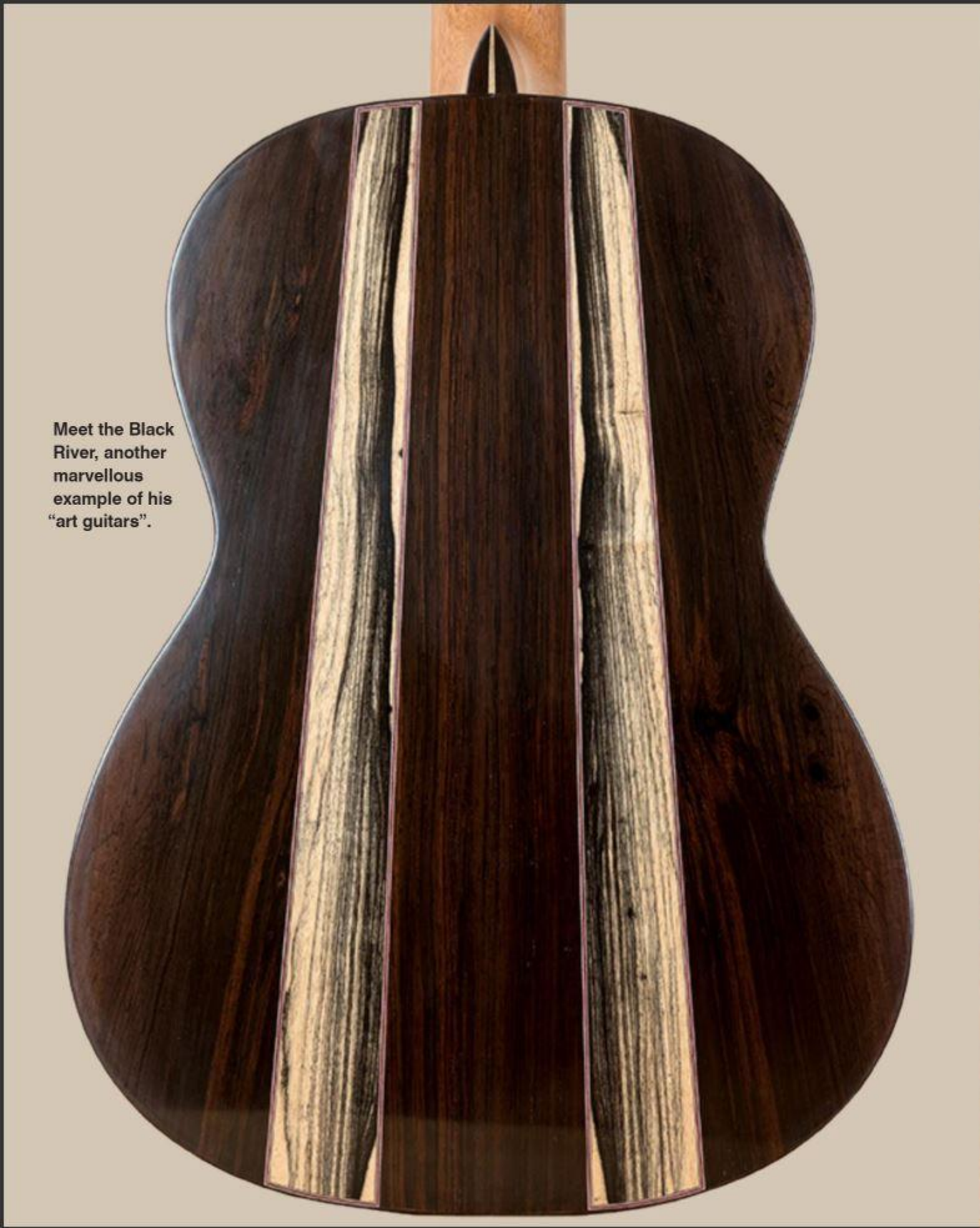
Sometimes I attach the head with V-joints like a Hauser, which results in a smaller head angle: around 8 or 9°. Aesthetically, I find it more pleasing this way, and I also have the feeling that it alters the sound slightly, making it sweeter.

Do you have more than one model?



A Torres “art guitar” model in satinwood, with exquisitely refined ornamentation.





Meet the Black River, another marvellous example of his "art guitars".



The Black River, frontal view, with its magnificent rosette.



Brazilian rosewood and black & white ebony from Laos.

« Crafting rosettes is my absolute passion: if I had my way, I would make more guitars like the Black River. »



E. B. – Yes. I offer a “concert” model, a “special” model (same as concert but with fancier rosette and mosaic decorations, rare beautiful woods and exclusive tuning machines), a Hauser 1952 replica, and a Torres model based on a second epoch big plantilla and bracing.

I also make one-off pieces; ideally one per year, which I call “art guitars”.

I love making the mosaics, mixing the woods, achieving colour gradations by combining pearwood, mahogany, African padauk, purpleheart, Indian rosewood, wenge and ebony, all in their natural colours.

Crafting rosettes is my absolute passion: if I had my way, I would make more guitars like the Black River. I love creating one-of-a-kind guitars!





Val di Fiemme, “Il Bosco che suona”

There are forests in the north-east of Italy, near the city of Trento and the Dolomites mountain range, that have long provided the prized tonewood for the soundboards of stringed instruments.

Legend has it that Stradivari and other great luthiers from Cremona would come here to choose the spruce for their future violins. But the history of these forests stretches much further back...



The sign at the entrance to the forests shows the named trees.

“If a spruce is to yield tonewood, it needs to grow straight and tall for at least two hundred years.”

The city of Venice is built on a lagoon: a shallow body of salt water adjoining the sea. Its houses are constructed on 117 islands thanks to the use of sturdy timber pilings, three to four metres long, driven into the mud so as to create solid foundations. The millions of piles upon which the city rests came mainly from nearby forests, chiefly those of the Dolomites. It was also the forests of the Dolomites that supplied the lumber from which Venice constructed its mighty armada, which dominated the Mediterranean for centuries, and famously defeated the Ottoman navy in the Battle of Lepanto (1571).

Tonewood

Among the woodland areas of the Dolomites, some parts are of particular interest to us: the great spruce forests, nurtured since

the dawn of lutherie so as to harvest tonewood for the construction of stringed instruments. Not all trees will yield soundboards for string quartet instruments, guitars or pianos: perhaps only one or two out of every thousand! If a spruce is to yield tonewood, it needs to grow straight and tall for at least two hundred years, at certain altitudes and in calm, undisturbed conditions, which is why forest rangers quite poetically say that “music is born of silence”.

The woods from Val di Fiemme

One forest in particular, located in the Val di Fiemme valley, is home to some exceptional spruce trees.

Legend would have it that Strad-

Wooden sculptures are peppered throughout the valley.



Val di Fiemme is one of the forests near the Dolomites mountain range.





Spruce from
Val di Fiemme
has outstanding
qualities in terms
of resonance,
lightness and
elasticity, perfect
for crafting
soundboards.



Some old trunks have been sculpted into violins or heraldic symbols.

ivari and other great luthiers from Cremona would come to select the spruce trees that they planned to use for their violins and cellos. Spruce from Val di Fiemme has outstanding qualities in terms of resonance, lightness and elasticity, perfect for crafting soundboards. The forest runs from east to west at an altitude of almost 1,400 metres. The winters are harsh and the summers short (the growing season), resulting in light soundboards with uniform, closely-spaced veins, and very little resin. The trees are selected in late autumn (October to November), as the moon is waning, when the trunks have the least sap. The felled trees spend

the winter months on a nearby stockpile until they are transported to the sawmill where they are quarter-sawn (cut in radial sections). The resultant quarters are then left to dry for four or five years before they are brought to market. During the drying phase they are examined, sorted and categorised in accordance with their qualities (aspect, vein regularity, sound).

Trees bearing names

A unique event known as the "Sound of the Dolomites" is held in Val di Fiemme, where internationally renowned musicians come to perform among the trees. Upon the concert's conclu-

Philharmonic: © visitfiemme.it foto F. Modica



The cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic playing under the spruce trees.



« Sound of the Dolomites »
is held in Val di Fiemme,
where internationally
renowned musicians
come to perform among
the trees.



The selected tree trunks are labelled "R" for resonance!



The traditional radial section required for lutherie.



Most of the wood is earmarked for the construction industry.



The nearby Ciresa showroom, illustrating various uses for spruce.

Last year a violent storm felled hundreds of trees in Val di Fiemme and in neighbouring forests.

sion, when a musician has chosen a tree, the *Magnifica Comunità di Fiemme*, which has been managing the forest for hundreds of years, places that musician's name on the selected tree. Several trees in the wood thus already bear famous names: Uto Ughi, Daniel Hope, Uri Caine, Ivry Gitlis, as well as the prestigious Berlin Philharmonic (2017). The ceremony ends when the artist plays a piece dedicated to their chosen tree.

The storm, October 2018

Last year a violent storm felled hundreds of trees in Val di Fiemme and in neighbouring forests. Winds howling at 180 km/h uprooted many of these magnificent tonewood trees that had been standing for 150 to 200 years.

According to estimates the severe weather (which also caused flooding in Venice) destroyed nearly 14,000 trees in north-western Italy. There is much needs doing in the aftermath, but the most urgent issue for the forest is to salvage the downed trunks before summer. If the trees stay on the forest floor, their wood will be ruined, with the arrival of June's warm weather, by insects, fungi and rot, and will thus never be suitable for instrument-making. It's a race against time...



Soundboards in storage at Ciresa, a local firm specialised in tonewood supplies.

Paolo Coriani, from hurdy-gurdy to guitar

He started out as a maker of hurdy-gurdies and steel string acoustics before falling in love with the sound of guitars by Torres and Manuel Ramírez.

Paolo Coriani in
his workshop in
Modena.



Hurdy-gurdies were quite popular in France and Italy.

“I played in a band specialising in traditional Italian music.”

With whom did you learn lutherie?

Paolo Coriani – I learned lutherie under Masetti, in Modena, initially as an apprentice from 1975 to 1980, and later as an employee in his workshop, from 1981 to 1984. With Masetti, we were making instruments belonging to a typically Italian tradition, in the style of Mozzani and Guadagnini, faithful to the age-old canons of construction that paid no heed to the instruments of other contemporary European luthiers. We would build hurdy-gurdies, guitars and other plucked stringed instruments. The guitars were mostly in maple; we made very few in rosewood. In 1985 I opened my own studio and produced chiefly hurdy-gurdies and acoustic steel string guitars, in the style American guitars from the 30s and 40s, the Golden Age of steel strings. Occasionally I would turn out guitars in the style of Kohno and Ramírez III.

In parallel, I played in a band specialising in traditional Italian music. Hudy-gurdies were quite popular in France and since I was able to make them and play them, I travelled to France a fair bit. During one of my trips to Paris, a friend introduced me to Christian Aubin, a French guitarist and luthier who had a guitar made by Antonio de Torres... What an epiphany: my initiation to an unknown sound of indescribable beauty! From

that moment on, I started focusing on Spanish guitars by the great masters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1993, I took a course under José Romanillos in order to further my understanding of Spanish guitar construction. That was where I met Tobias Braun, Gerhard Oldiges, Mark Peirelinck and many other fellow luthiers. I was awestruck by Romanillos' knowledge of the guitar; he always had the answer to our every question.

Later, I kept on studying, in particular the guitars from the Manuel Ramírez workshop, which, to me, epitomise Torres' work. I refer to the Manuel Ramírez workshop as a whole because we ought not to forget all of the other extraordinary luthiers who worked with him. My goal is to “re-create” the acoustic features of the guitars crafted by those master luthiers; those guitars that so profoundly influenced twentieth-century musical creation.

Has Manuel Ramírez always been your source of inspiration?

P. C. – Yes, I love that sound, even though I feel that his guitars have their limits, and that they still resemble instruments built for the popular tradition rather than truly modern instruments. I like the idea of following in Hauser's footsteps



Spanish-style
bracing, with
no added
underbridge
plate.



Blended
pieces of
maple on
this nearly-
finished guitar.





Final strokes
with a small
plane to
finish off the
bracing.



Back of
Brazilian
rosewood and
satinwood.



New templates
stand alongside
old ones in
Coriani's studio.

“I like the idea of following in Hauser’s footsteps and taking the guitars of Manuel Ramírez as a starting point.”

and taking the guitars of Manuel Ramírez as a starting point.

I have also had the good fortune of repairing and studying guitars by Hauser, Santos and Esteso, and with each one, I have been charmed by their sound. But I don't try to make replicas of these antique guitars, copying their shape or decoration; rather, what I am aiming for is approximate their voice. I was once lucky enough to see and hear Torres' "Leona" – one of the most beautiful guitars in the world – and the sound was incredibly beautiful and modern. For me, that is how a guitar should sound.

In the twentieth century, there were two things that radically changed the way in which Spanish luthiers worked: the Spanish Civil War and, later, the advent of nylon.

Later I took an interest in the work of Daniel Friederich and his scientific approach. It guided me

toward a more considered lutherie, more controlled. It is important to have a firm grasp on what we are doing if we are to keep perfecting our craft. The habit of gauging elasticity, weight and other factors has helped me to better understand my own work.

How many models do you make?

P. C. – I make a concert model inspired by García and by Simplicio, but it is a perpetually changing work-in-progress. I also have two other models: one inspired by a 1952 Hauser; and the other by Torres.

I only ever make copies of guitars that have come through my workshop and that I have personally been able to study and measure, which includes measuring the speed of the sound transmission in the wood. I have restored several Torres guitars, for example: the FE 19 dated 1864, "La Su-



Paolo Coriani also restores antique instruments.

prema" and the SE 43 from 1883, which is now housed in the Museum of Music in Paris. I have noticed something surprising in these guitars and I have often discussed it with Andrea Tacchi: when you tap your fingers on the soundboard of a guitar whose construction is absolutely symmetrical, with the same thicknesses throughout and the same bracing, it sounds different on the bass side, as opposed to the treble side. We have noticed this phenomenon in all guitars with a beautiful sound; it's hard to understand. All luthiers have their own way of working: García, for example, achieves a degree of asymmetry more by adjusting mass than via flexibility; Simplicio, on the other hand, works more by adjusting the bracing angles, as his bass struts and treble struts are set at different angles. I think that the wider the angle, the more harmonics come through; the more parallel the braces, the more we hear the fundamental note, and the sound is more spontaneous, with less sustain. Luthiers in my generation have had some theoretical training, through books, unlike the Spanish

“For the tops I like spruce, especially the spruce that we find in the Val di Fiemme.”

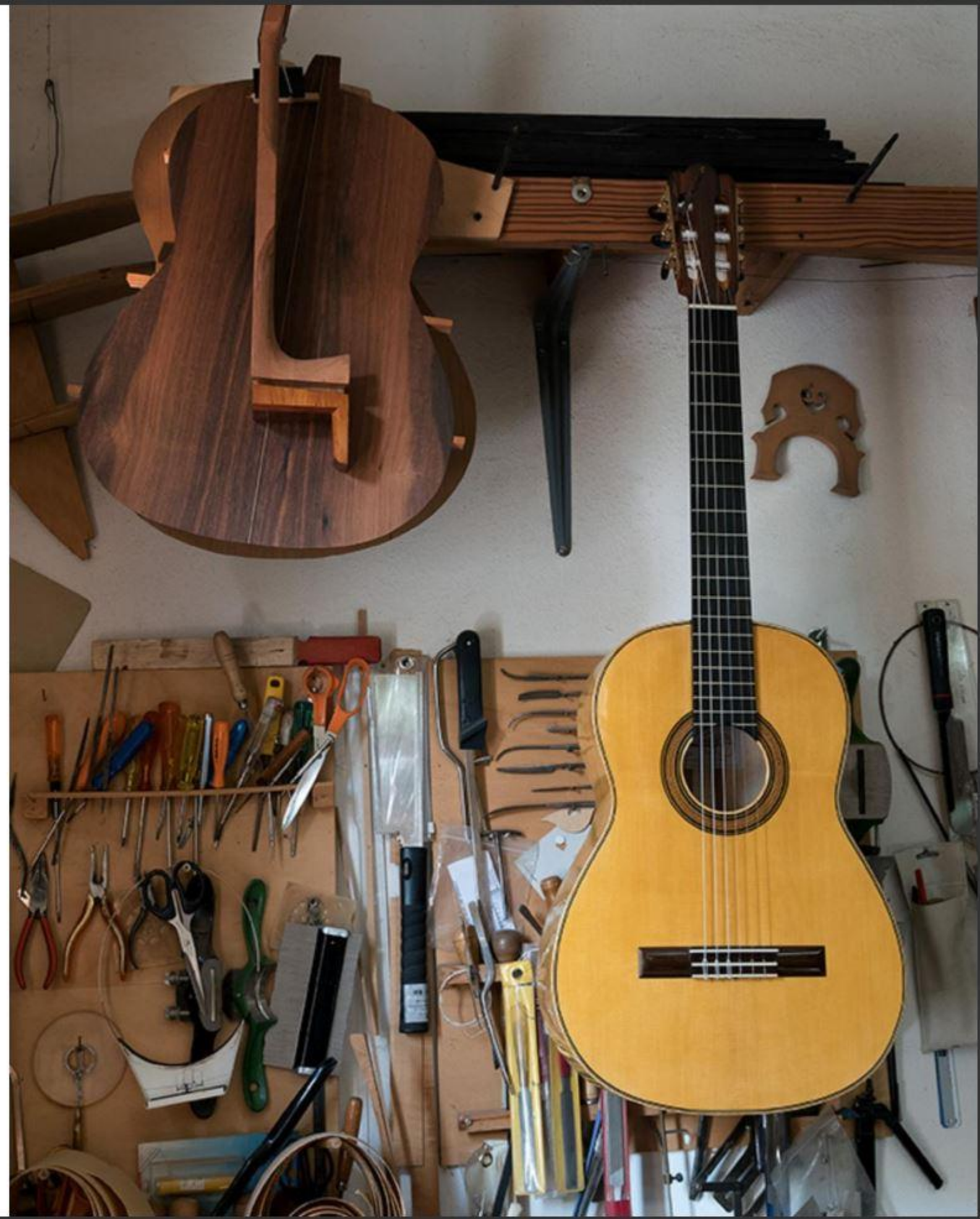
guitar makers who apprenticed in workshops with hands-on learning. Moreover, they were only ten or twelve years of age when they first started to smell the wood and feel the sawdust under their feet!

Which woods appeal to you the most?

P. C. – For the tops I like spruce, especially the spruce that we find in the Val di Fiemme and in the Tyrol region, a little further to the north on the Austrian border. I have experimented with red cedar, but I wasn't happy with the results. I have heard some extraordinary guitars by Fleta and Friederich, but I personally have never been satisfied when I have worked with that wood. The “Leona” didn't get her amazing sound from red cedar! For the back and sides I prefer Brazilian rosewood. For me, this rosewood, with its colours and its deep timbre, is the wood that gives the Spanish guitar its very best sound. Cypress, maple and satinwood also produce excellent results and I am lucky to have a large enough stock of these handsome woods to last me the rest of my life. Cocobolo, ziricote, Makassar ebony or Madagascar rosewood are also beautiful, but too heavy for my way of working.

Are you keen on building double top or lattice guitars?

P. C. – No, I don't think that I'll change tack now. I know that my guitars aren't everybody's cup of tea but, when all is said and done, I make about ten instruments a year and all of them find buyers.



Mimmo Peruffo, Stringmaster

He is the founder of Aquila Corde and one of the rare manufacturers of gut strings.



The use of gut strings stretches back into the mists of time but since the advent of nylon, the number of gut string manufacturers has been in constant decline. Interview with Mimmo Peruffo, the passionate man at the helm of Aquila Corde who has long been working on solutions for antique string instruments, especially lutes and guitars.



The bass strings are wound by hand.

“When the music teacher spied my grandfather’s home-made guitar, he advised me to go out and buy another one.”

How did you come to be a gut stringmaker?

Mimmo Peruffo – I had a grandfather who played the mandolin and guitar in a band, and one day, when I was about 18 or 20 years old, I asked him to teach me to play the guitar. He gave me his home-made guitar and taught me the basics, using the Carulli method.

A year later I enrolled at a music school in Vicenza. When the teacher saw me turn up with a guitar built by my grandfather, he advised me to go out and buy another one. So I went to a shop but the sales staff just didn’t take me seriously when they saw that I didn’t have enough money to buy anything in the store. I was very upset, and resolved to make one myself.

My grandfather explained how to build a guitar, but using the Italian method, whereas I wanted a Spanish style guitar. So just like Penelope unravelling her weaving, at night I would undo everything that I had done with him during the day, and then rebuild it the way that I wanted!

Once I had finally completed my guitar, my music teacher found it acceptable. Upon seeing that, a friend asked me to build him one, too. And since that second guitar turned out better than mine, I decided to make another one, and then another

one for yet another friend... And those were my beginnings with the guitar. My beginnings with gut strings go back to the day that my teacher came to class with a lute. I fell instantly in love with the sound of the lute and I started taking night classes in Verona. I then began building my own lute and once it was finished, history repeated itself: a friend asked me to build a lute for him as well, as so on...

Those are your beginnings in lutherie, but what about strings?

M. P. – I’m getting to that... Meanwhile, during a meeting with lute-makers, I was asked, since I had studied chemistry, to try to make strings from lamb intestine and they entrusted me with the research undertaken by Ricardo Brané, a deceased Argentinian architect and amateur luthier. I started experimenting, with the aim of producing gut strings with greater weight and a smaller diameter. The subject became an absolute passion for me and over the next ten years I read extensively and performed hundreds of experiments. I was so engrossed in what I was doing that I would hear the sounds of gut strings even in my sleep.



« It’s miraculous how this material is reborn with its inimitable sound. »



It takes just a few minutes to produce thousands of nylon strings.

“From 1997, I began seeking a synthetic material that would sound the same as gut, but which would be cheaper to produce and longer lasting.”

There was another key encounter: my meeting with lutenist Jakob Lindberg, with whom I developed a long-lasting working relationship. From 1997, I began seeking a synthetic material that would sound the same as gut, but which would be cheaper to produce and longer lasting. While visiting a plastics factory, an interesting piece of plastic especially caught my eye and it turned out to be the synthetic bristle used for the “Pippo” broom, a common household broom in Italy. I later finetuned that material, tweaking its elasticity, weight, and other factors, and that was how “Nylgut” was born.

Does Nylgut sound the same as gut?

M. P. – No, but it is close, it costs less and the strings last a lot longer. Whereas gut strings have a two-week manufacturing process, nylon strings can be made in their thousands in just a few minutes. Nylon helped make the classical guitar more affordable, but the sound of gut is, for me, unparalleled, unique.

The subject of gut fascinates me. Remember that the raw material comes from a dead animal. The sacrificial lamb is a powerful symbol in our culture: its death constitutes the perfect and ultimate

Guitarists need to find the right strings for their playing style.



“I invent musical dyes and make them available to guitarists-painters.”

sacrifice that offsets our sins. After the animal's death we work with the ugly, broken down part and, miraculously, this material is reborn with its inimitable sound.

Can you talk us through the different types of Nylgut strings?

M. P. – My main aim throughout these twenty years of research has been to offer guitarists as many colours as possible, to broaden their musical palette. It's as if I were the inventor of musical dyes and I were making them available to guitarists-painters.

My solutions were initially designed for any musician playing an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guitar or lute, and later, with Nylgut, the clientele was extended to include guitarists playing instruments from the early twentieth century.

To help them choose from among the range of Aquila's Nylgut strings, I would say that they basically fall into three categories: Perla for the musician looking for a warm, sensitive sound, with a lot of vibrato; Rubino, Alchemia or Zaffiro for lovers of carbon strings, very bright with rapid attack; Alabastro, Ambra or Cristallo for those seeking something in between.

Which ones for a Torres or a Santos Hernández?

M. P. – It's not up to me to tell you which strings would be best for you. It would be easier for me to tell you which ones I think you should avoid: on a guitar born with gut strings, it would be wrong to use carbon strings or a set of Aquila Rubino. It would be like putting an LED headlight on a vintage motorcycle. Using nylon strings would be a step in the right direction but, given the relatively low resonance of these guitars, you might run into trouble with the G string. I would go for Alabastro...

And what tension?

M. P. – That'd be like guessing how much sugar you like in your cappuccino! I recommend that you opt for a medium tension set, then string the guitar and, once they have stabilised, tune them a semitone higher and see how that feels; next, tune them a semitone lower and feel the difference. Only you can know what you prefer: more tension or less tension? By doing this, you can identify the perfect set of strings for you and your instrument. More sugar or less?



For me, the sound of gut is incomparable, unique.



It takes two weeks to produce gut strings.



In Vicenza, near the Aquila Corde factory, there are some magnificent villas designed by the architect Andrea Palladio to visit. Here, La Rotonda, built between 1566 and 1571.

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