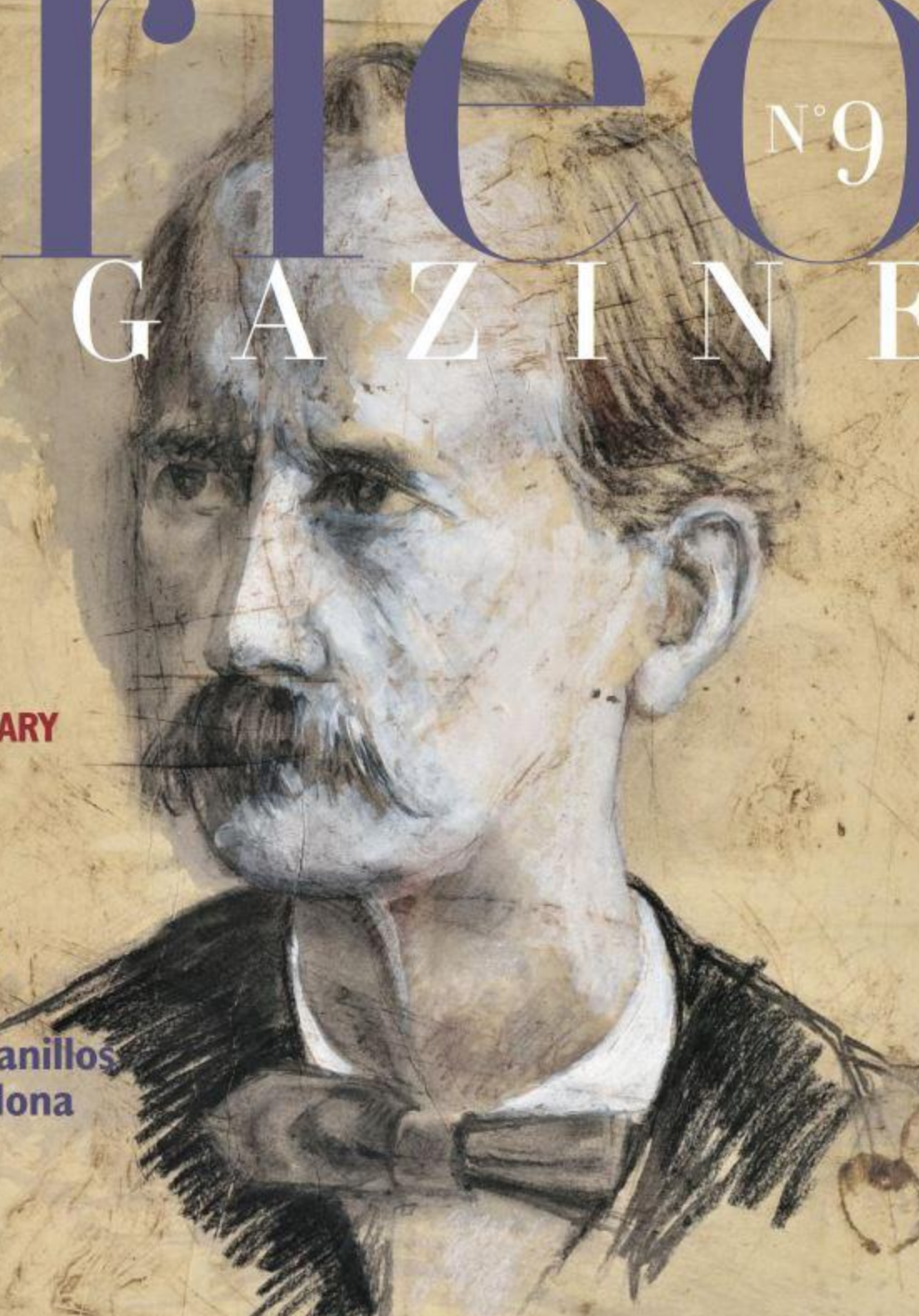


Orfeo

N°9

MAGAZINE



200TH ANNIVERSARY

**Antonio
de Torres**

**Five famous
Torres guitars**

Interviews

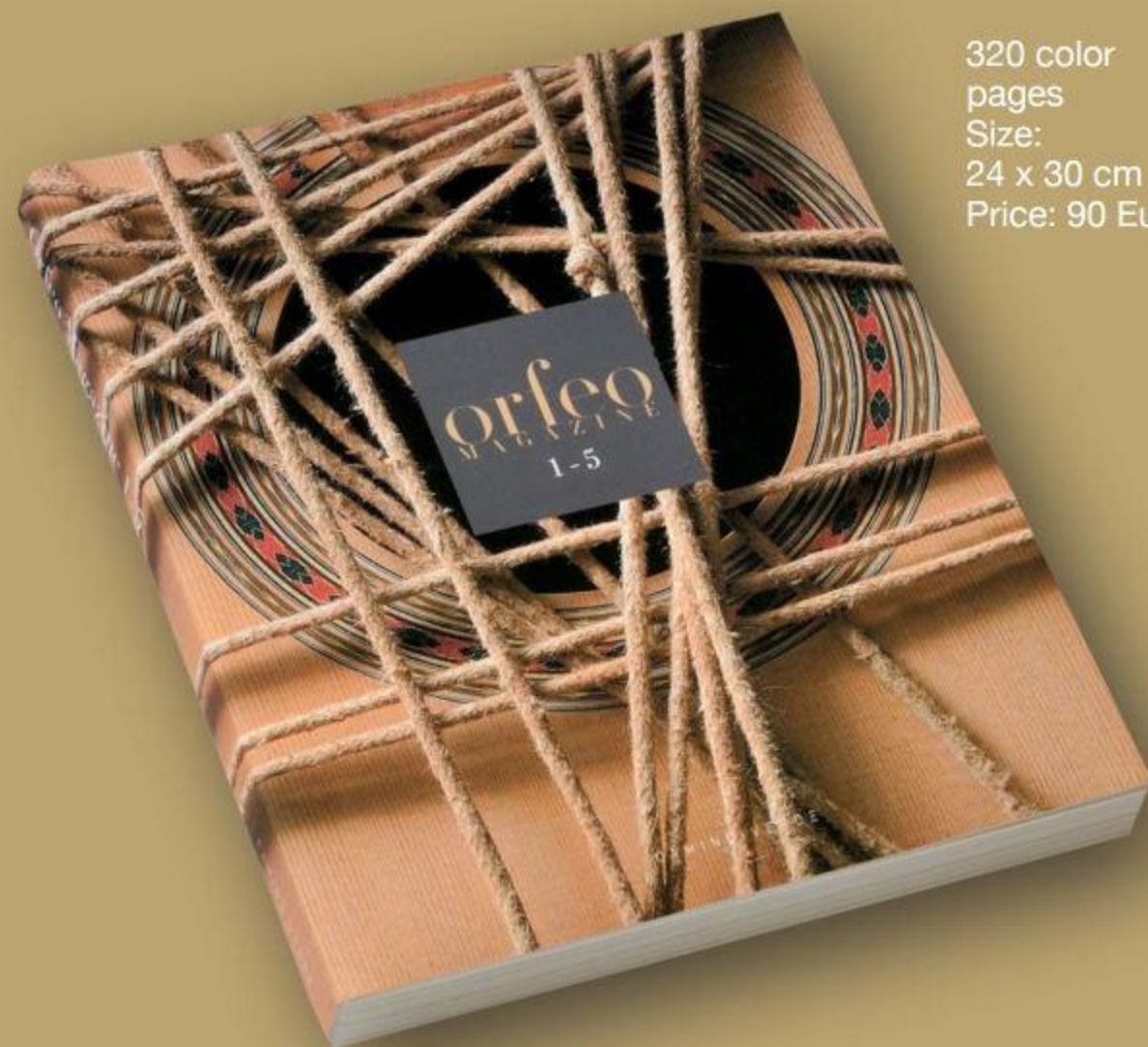
José Luis Romanillos

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From the Editor

Orfeo

M A G A Z I N E

N°9

Once upon a time in mid-19th century Spain, there lived a lowly carpenter. He was born in Almería, far from the country's great cities, and he built the guitars that were to become the universal standard for the classical guitar.

By bringing together empirically, but with tremendous sensitivity, the best ideas from his predecessors and peers, Antonio de Torres created a prototypical model of an instrument whose shape and sound surpassed any that had come before.

The best guitarists from that era – Julián Arcas and Francisco Tárrega initially, followed by Miguel Llobet – introduced the European public to this novel instrument and broadened the repertoire.

Spanish luthiers, spearheaded by Manuel Ramírez, quickly adopted this model and even to this day, as we celebrate the bicentenary of his birth, the guitars of Antonio de Torres are still an inspiration for the vast majority of the world's guitar makers.

A chance for us to pay tribute to Torres and try to better apprehend his work.

I would like to extend my thanks to Stefano Grondona for his helpful advice and thorough re-reading of this edition.

Alberto Martinez



Chisel and
Archimedean hand
drill attributed
to Torres.

Antonio de Torres Jurado

"The concert guitar was born
in his hands."

He was born in La Cañada de San Ubano, not far from Almería (Spain) on 13 June 1817 and died in Almería on 19 November 1892.

Torres is considered the father of the modern classical guitar. His innovative guitars kindled enthusiasm among the European public and changed the way that people viewed the guitar.

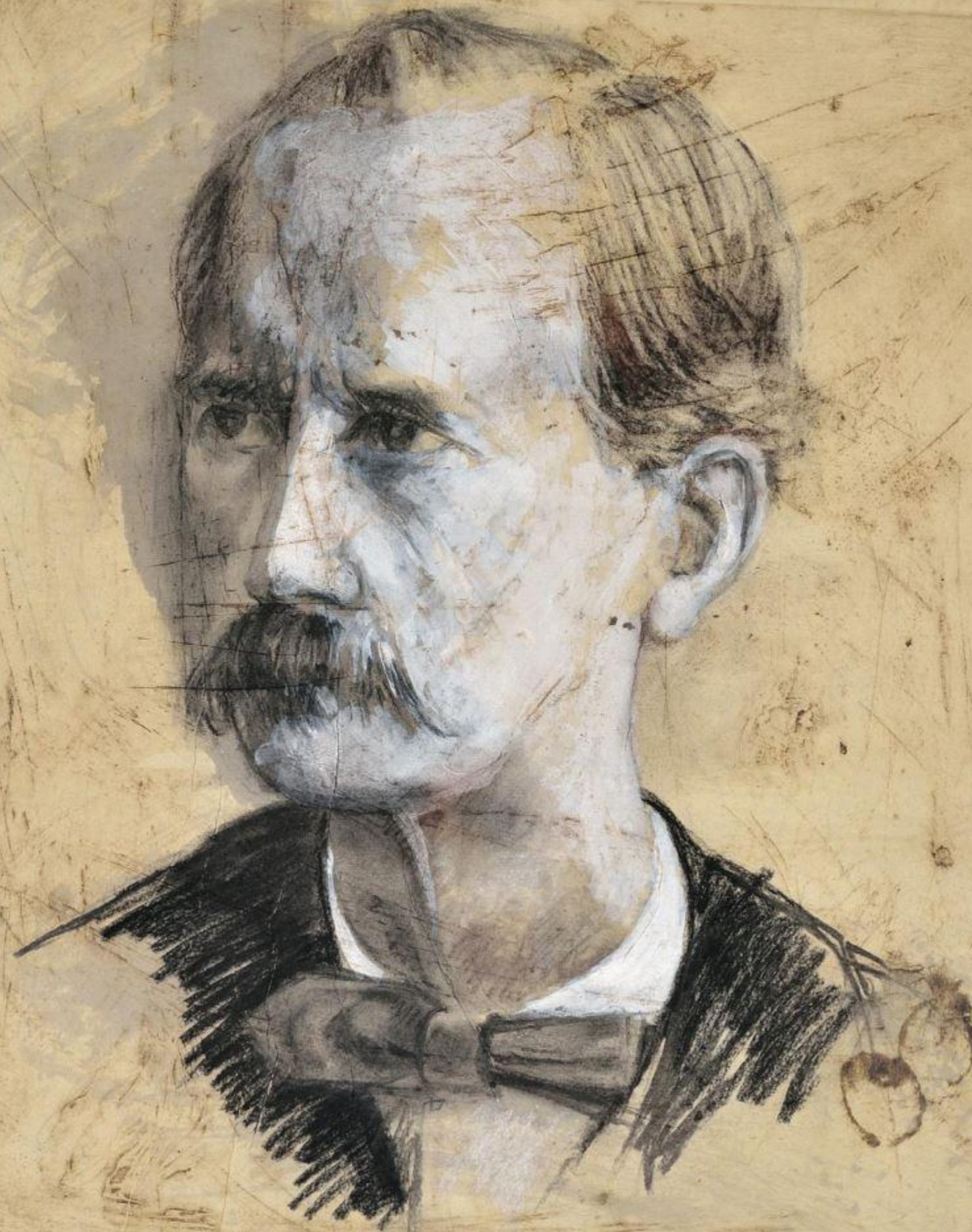
Domingo Prat, in his *Diccionario de guitarristas*, 1934, writes:

Famous luthier, great among the top artists in his field.

In his youth he moved to Vera where he ap-

prenticed in carpentry, a trade he practised for some time. Later, aged twenty-three, he married, and the couple had a daughter. For personal reasons he moved to Granada where, given his knowledge of woodwork, he easily learned lutherie under master guitar maker Don José Pernas. It was in this city, then, that the young man who would become a grand master of his art built his first ever guitar. Once established in his new profes-

The famous three-arch headstock. Shown here with wooden pegs and catgut strings.



Portrait of Antonio de Torres by French artist Catherine Keun.



Almería, 1852



Seville, 1856



Seville, 1865



Seville, 1884



Almería, 1888

Torres' guitar-making career is divided into two periods: 1852-1869 (FE) and 1875-1892 (SE)

sion, he decided to leave Granada and settle in Seville, where he remarried; the great guitarist Don Julián Arcas was a witness at the wedding ceremony... The wood that he used came from old furniture. Most of his guitars had cypress backs and ribs, necks made of cedar, fretboards in ebony, machine heads – although many had wooden pegs–, spruce tops, simple purfling, broad rosettes and some models were fitted with a tornavoz. He named one guitar built with these materials "La Leona" and Arcas said that it was his dream guitar for concerts.

On 1 January 1929, writer and critic Paulino Masip published an article on Torres in the Spanish magazine *Estampa* in which he maintained – as do we – that the new concert guitar was born in his hands and that, in a break from tradition, he revolutionised the guitar's design, endowing the instrument with hitherto unheard-of tones and nuances.

The house where Torres lived, at 80 calle Real, in La Cañada de San Urbano.



Almería, the city of Torres

To help us better envisage the life and times of Antonio de Torres, here are some key dates from the history of Almería.

711 to 1492 – Moorish occupation of Spain.

955 – Founding of the city. The Caliph of Cordova, Abd-ar-Rahman III, decides to refashion the port of Almería (*Al-Mariyya*) as a capital city (*medina*), complete with surrounding walls for defence (*Alcazaba*). As the home port of the Caliphate's fleet, it rises to become the leading port in all of *Al-Andalus*.

XIIIth century – The Caliphate of Cordova is subsumed into the Kingdom of Granada.

1492 – Reconquest of Spain by the Catholic Monarchs and expulsion of the Moors. Almería remains part of the Kingdom of Granada.

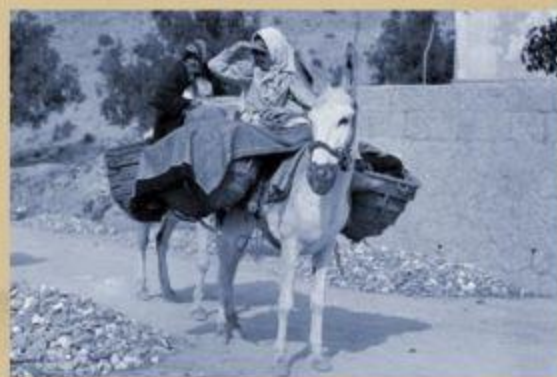
XVIth century – A time of decline and desertion for both the city and the province. In contrast to Seville, the city of Almería is far from the trade routes to the Americas and as such enjoys neither the vast wealth brought from the New World, nor the corollary boom in activity.

Moreover, the expulsion of the Moors deals a heavy blow to the province: it means the departure of those who had taught the Christians the techniques of mulberry cultivation, silk-weaving, irrigation and woodwork. Its isolation and poor communication channels serve to exacerbate the situation.

XVIIIth century – Mining development gives the Almería port a new lease of life: iron from Filabres, lead from Gador and marble from Macael all start to be exported. Growing and exporting grapes from Berja and Ohanes is another sector that flourishes at this time.



The monument commemorating Torres, unveiled in 1992 in La Cañada de San Urbano.



Photograph by Gustavo Gillman. Archivo General Región de Murcia.



Silver mines, El Jaroso, late 19th century.



Spanish inn, late 19th century. Archivos Rafael Garzón.

Spain reorganises its
provinces, creating
the province of
Almería, and
separating it from
the former Kingdom
of Granada

XIXth century – Spain reorganises its provinces, creating the province of Almería (1834), and separating it from the former Kingdom of Granada. To give you a first-hand account of what an adventure it was to travel to the area around Almería and what was the city of Vera, where Antonio de Torres learned woodcraft, here is an excerpt from *Sketches in Spain*, a book by English Hispanist writer Samuel Edward Cook, published in 1834: "After passing these defiles, we entered the great delta of the Almanzora, and crossing its wide bed reached Vera. In this day's route, or the preceding, there was not a *venta* and scarcely a house. I had been assured that Vera was a city, and that every thing was to be had there; I found it a straggling, poor, inhospitable place, with a wretched and dear *posada*, belonging to the *Ayuntamiento*, which is known all over the country for its miserable accommodation. The water is bad, being impregnated with nitre, and the country around dreary and unproductive."



"Café cantante" ca. 1885, photograph by Emilio Beauchy.



Torres kept
La Leona all
his life; it was
one of twelve
guitars in his
possession
when he died
in 1892.



Five famous Torres guitars

1856, "La Leona"

1858, The "Cumbre" guitar

1859, Llobet's guitar

1862, The papier mache guitar

1864, Tárrega's guitar

1856 - La Leona

This is the first known guitar to display all of Torres' innovations, with the exception of the rosewood bridge, as yet without a saddle, where the strings are attached like those of a lute.

It is a letter by Juan Martínez Sirvent, a vicar friend of Torres, published in *La Independencia* newspaper in 1931, that offers us some of the most direct information about the luthier's life and work: "He took up guitar-making on the advice of se-

A close-up photograph of the back and ribs of a guitar, showing the wood grain and the curved structure of the body.

Back and ribs of cypress, spruce soundboard, simple inlay...

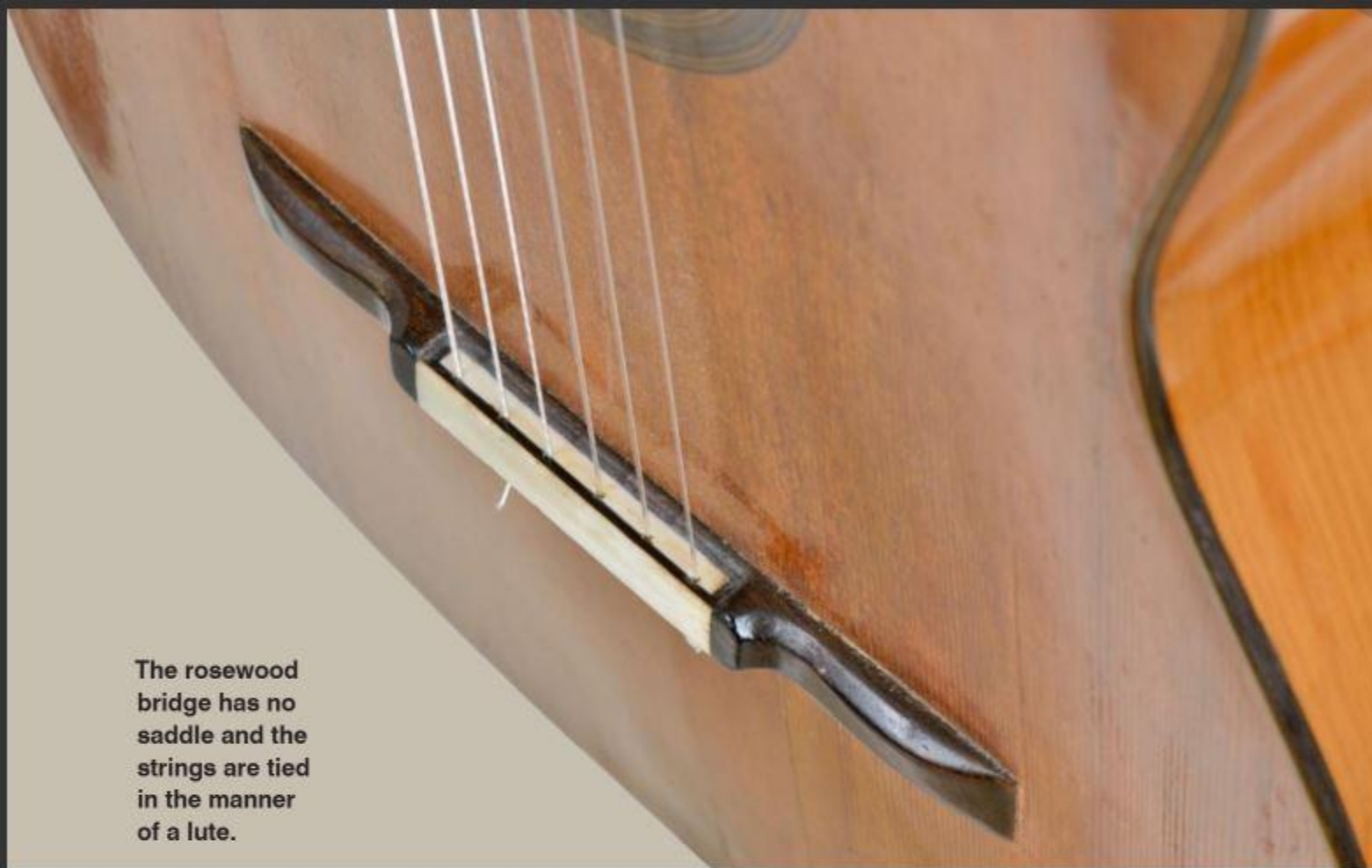
for Arcas and although he made guitars to sell, he set about making, with great care, a superior instrument, with the back and ribs of cypress, cedarwood neck, ebony fingerboard, machine heads and spruce soundboard; simple inlay, wide rosette and tornavoz. He named in "La Leona" and Arcas said this guitar was the one he dreamt of for his concerts. Afterwards, he made the papier mache guitar, of great sonority, and he never wished to sell either of them."



Julián Arcas,
the guitarist
who did so
much to
encourage
and advise
Torres in
his work.



Soundboard
made of two
mismatched
pieces of
spruce, with
tornavoz and
seven-strut
bracing.



The rosewood bridge has no saddle and the strings are tied in the manner of a lute.



La Leona, despite being 165 years old, is in excellent health.

Arcas said this guitar was the one
he dreamt of for his concerts



Tornavoz from a Fritz Ober guitar being built. Right: that of La Leona.

The meticulous
craftsmanship
in the marquetry
is a dazzling
testimony
to his art.



It was this
guitar that won
him the bronze
medal, attesting to
his excellence in
lutherie

1858 - The "Cumbre" guitar

José Romanillos writes that this guitar is the pinnacle ("cumbre" in Spanish) of Torres' work. Through this instrument, crafted for the 1858 Seville Exhibition, he demonstrates his skill in decorative marquetry. The guitar earned him the bronze medal, confirming his status as one of the best luthiers of his time.

To gain a first-hand account, here again, we turn to the 1931 letter by Juan Martínez Sirvent's, privileged witness to Torres' work:

"Afterwards, he made the one for the exhibition which was of rosewood and with a secret bridge* for the strings, a true work of art never seen before and with a case admirably made to match the jewel that it protected."

* The description of it being "secret" remains unexplained.

The soundboard
is extremely thin,
with a perforated
tornavoz

1859 - Llobet's guitar

This guitar belonged to Miguel Llobet, who played it a great deal throughout his career. It is this guitar that can be heard in the surviving Llobet recordings.

Herman Hauser used it as a model for some of his guitars.

The soundboard is extremely thin, with a perforated tornavoz resting against the back thanks to small supports, and seven-strut bracing (Cf. Romanillos).

Museu de la Música collection, Barcelona, Spain

Llobet's guitar
inspired – and
continues
to inspire –
many a luthier.



© Massimo Mandelli, "La chitarra di liuteria" (2).



1862 - The papier mache guitar

This is an experimental guitar, with a top of spruce, but with back and sides made out of papier mache. Torres purportedly wanted to demonstrate the importance of a fan-braced soundboard, by substituting the wood used for the back and sides with an acoustically neutral material.

This instrument is thought to have belonged first to Tárrega, and then to Llobet. It is currently held in Barcelona's Museu de la Música, which acquired it directly from Llobet's daughter.

Domingo Prat, in his 1933 *Diccionario de guitaristas*, writes:

"To prove that his secrets really resided, as we have said, in the soundboard, Torres built a gui-

tar made entirely out of papier mache, with the exception, obviously, of the soundboard, which was of spruce. This guitar has an extraordinary sound, slightly hollow, somewhat soft, somewhat deep, as the author of this dictionary was able to see, playing the instrument at Tárrega's place."

The back and sides are reinforced with cedar lattice.

Torres wanted to demonstrate the importance of a fan-braced soundboard





Tárrega played with three Torres guitars: FE 17, SE 49 et SE 114.

1864 - Tárrega's guitar

"Over and above the spontaneity of its sound, there was also, perhaps thanks to the tornavoz, its timbre as warm and clear as gold." (Tárrega, Emilio Pujol)

Tárrega purchased this guitar (FE17), his first ever Torres, in Seville in 1869. According to Pujol, it was a guitar that Torres had crafted for his own personal use. Tárrega went on to buy two other guitars by Torres: one in 1883 (SE 49) and the other in 1888 (SE 114).

Pujol claims that Tárrega played on the until 1889, after which, given the instrument's intense use, he had to replace it with another guitar by the same luthier.

On the ribs, near the lows, there are traces of cigarette burns, which attest to Tárrega's habit of smoking while playing.

Tárrega
purchased
"FE 17",
his first
ever Torres,
in Seville
in 1869

**Emilio Pujol
deemed this
guitar the best
instrument that
he had ever
heard.**





José Luis Romanillos, leading authority

He is the world's uncontested expert on Torres.

We wanted an interview with him for this special edition dedicated to the father of the classical guitar.

In 1987, José Luis Romanillos and his wife, Marian Harris Winspear, published *Antonio de Torres, Guitar maker, His Life and Work*. The book was the fruit of many years' worth of research and interviews, and offered insights into the life and work of Almería's great luthier.

With the publication of this work, which came to be the authoritative reference on Antonio de Torres, José Luis Romanillos became renowned the world over as the top expert on the subject. An interview with him was an absolute must for this edition of Orfeo dedicated to the father of the classical guitar.

Interview with Marian and José Romanillos at their home in Guíjosa, Spain.

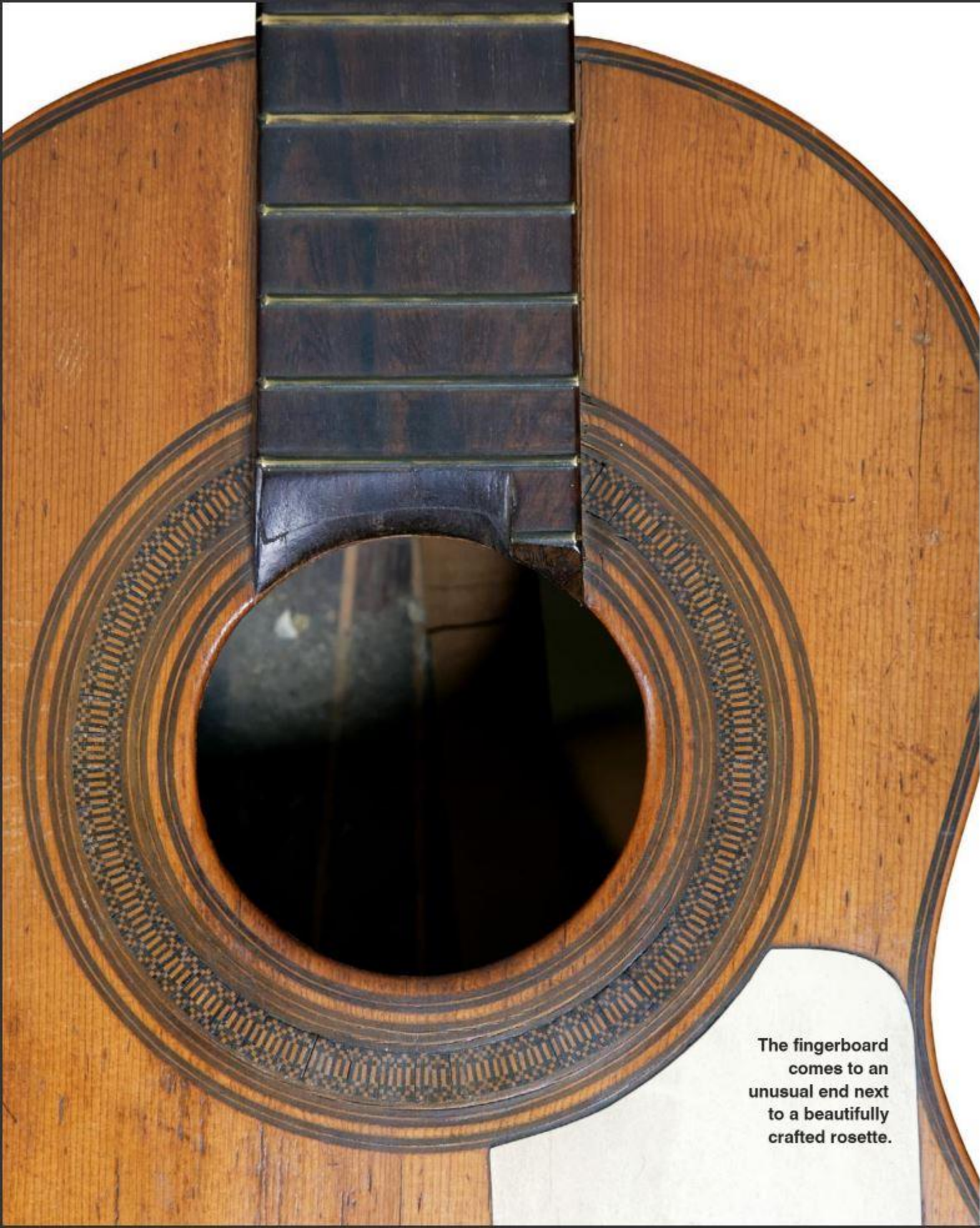
Have you managed to shed light on where and how Torres learned to make guitars?

José Luis Romanillos: The documents that we unearthed prove that he learned woodwork in Vera, near Almería. We know little, however, about what he did subsequently, and where, and with whom. Apparently his earliest guitars were built in Almería in 1852, and from 1853 onwards, he was based in Seville.

Domingo Prat, in his *Diccionario de guitarristas*, maintains that Torres studied guitar-making in Granada, with José Pernas. I am not so sure that it was Pernas who trained him. Perhaps Torres made some observations in Granada and then



The guitar that José Luis Romanillos is holding was made by José Pernas, the luthier from Granada who, according to Domingo Prat, taught Torres the art of lutherie.



The fingerboard comes to an unusual end next to a beautifully crafted rosette.

“Our Pernas has a beautiful rosette, but everything is more basic, somehow heavier.”

went on to teach himself...? I never actually came to a firm conclusion on that.

We have a Pernas guitar but, personally, I don't think that his work resembles that of Torres: the guitars are heavier and the bracing is different. A Pernas doesn't have the same workmanship and refinement as a Torres.

Our Pernas has a beautiful rosette; its inside is interesting; as is the fretboard... but everything is more basic, somehow heavier. Only the harmonic bars, with their straight, untapered ends, resemble those crafted by Torres.

One possibility is a connection with the Moya family. I have seen several guitars made by the Moyas and they are magnificent; beautifully crafted. I wouldn't go so far as to say that Torres learned with the Moyas because I have no evidence to support such a claim. Rather, I think that the inverse might be true: that the Moyas might have learned with Torres.

What sets Torres apart from all the rest?

J. L. R.: His greatest merit is that he came up with a universally accepted guitar, using a very light system of construction.

The bridge that Torres used was nothing new: Dionisio Aguado had already invented it, although there is a Furniels guitar from 1812 sporting a similar bridge with a detachable saddle. Similarly, fan bracing had already been invented; a string length of 65 centimetres had already been used; arched tops and backs were nothing new either...

As is so often the case with inventions – like for the first aircraft, for example – it's a case of one person bringing together a series of existing elements and successfully getting them to work together as a whole. Torres must have been a person of great intelligence and sensitivity: he



Rather rudimentary finishing inside this Pernas guitar.

had such a feel for wood! He understood how it needed cutting and how it would keep changing, depending on humidity and temperature.

What do you think of his use of the tornavoz?

J. L. R.: The tornavoz helps improve the bass response. It is not easy work, but if done properly,

At least three known Torres guitars are adorned with meanders

it will enhance the guitar's resonance in the lower register. I think that Torres reached the conclusion that the tornavoz, in the end, is not in fact necessary; that he could get the same results via a different route. He managed to achieve better tone in the lower tessitura by bulging the sound-board outward, thinning the pieces of wood and arranging them differently. In this way he circumvented one of the problems stemming from the presence of a tornavoz – the fact of having to remove the back for any repairs to the inside of the instrument.

Torres made a good many guitars with cypress. Are they flamenco guitars or “cheap” guitars?

J. L. R.: Here in Spain, there was a guitar in every house. A Torres guitar made of cypress was not only for flamenco; it was also less costly. We should bear in mind that flamenco is a music enjoyed by the masses, played by humble folk who couldn't afford to buy expensive guitars. The good Spanish guitars were always made of maple, walnut or rosewood – the kind from the Americas; Indian rosewood was as yet unknown.

Tell us more about the bracing and dimensions that Torres used.

**José Luis Romanillos
and his wife
Marian Harris Winspear.**



© Massimo Mandelli, "La chitarra di luteria".

J. L. R.: He didn't invent anything new here, either. You can't compare the guitar to the violin; guitars made by luthiers in Andalusia were nothing like the ones made by luthiers in Catalonia or Madrid. There was no standard model, no standard measurements.

The same is true for the fan bracing, which had been employed by Sanguino since 1760. Like I said before, Torres' great achievement was to define a consummate guitar model.

What inspired the decorative elements that he used?

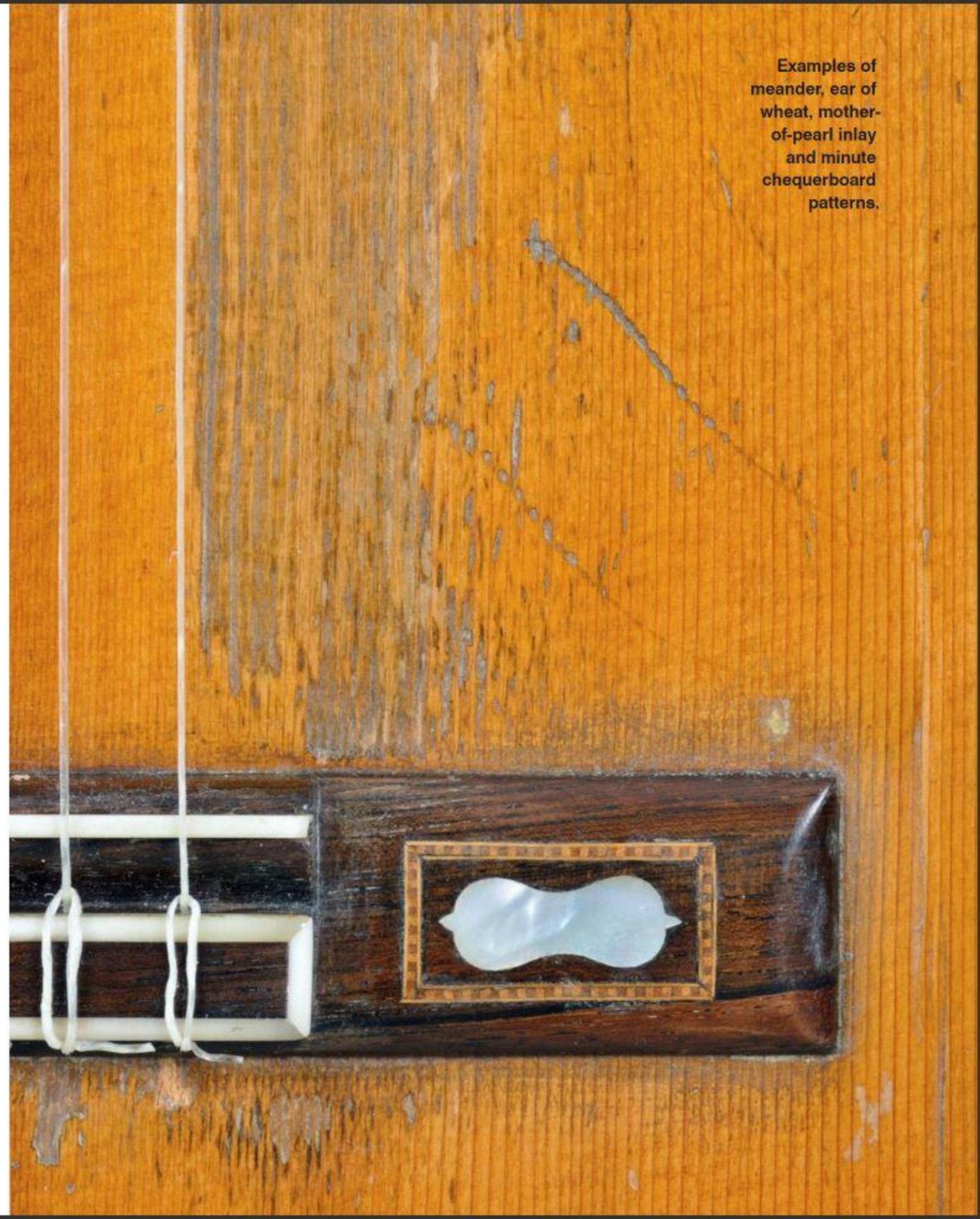
J. L. R.: The most surprising motif is the meander: at least three known Torres guitars are adorned with meanders. It is a motif from Greece, but it can also be found in other cultures. Where did he learn that design? I couldn't say.

The chequered pattern, however, was already in use in Spain, especially in Granada, with its long-standing tradition of marquetry. The ear of wheat motif also predates Torres.

Which detail is the most important on his guitars?

J. L. R.: The quintessence is the extremely light, supple sound-board.

Examples of meander, ear of wheat, mother-of-pearl inlay and minute chequerboard patterns.



Models, materials and construction

Antonio de Torres,
overcoming the
difficulties of his day,
used his skill and
ingenuity to roll all the
best inventions available
into a single, novel guitar.

1852, his early days

This guitar, one of the earliest known, built in 1852, reveals the influence of luthiers from Cádiz and Granada. The shape of the head and the decoration on the back, for example, resemble the work of José Pernas.

Description

- Soundboard of resinous wood, decorated with meanders around the edges and in the rosette.
- Back (5 sections) and ribs in Brazilian rosewood (*Dalbergia nigra*).
- Neck of Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) with fretboard in Brazilian rosewood.



The influence
of luthiers
from Cádiz
and Granada is
clearly visible
in his early
work.

Curved scroll-shaped headstock, decorated with meanders



Some guitars
by José
Pernas are
known to have
this curious
head.

- Scroll-shaped headstock, elegantly curved and adorned with meanders.
 - Four-strut bracing under the top and two thick braces on the back.
 - The label reads: "La hizo/Antonio de Torres Jurado/Almería, año de 1852"
- Musée de la Musique Collection, Paris.

His soundboards

Torres used two types of spruce for his soundboards: *picea abies* and *picea excelsa*. They were always cut radially so that the growth rings lay perfectly perpendicular to the surface. He placed more importance on the way that the wood was cut than on the uniformity of the veins or whether or not two halves matched. Very few of his guitar tops display both halves from one single piece of wood – as is common practice today. Most are separate pieces and some guitars have soundboards made from three, four and even five sections. Moreover, in many cases, the join is not in the centre, which attests yet again to the difficulties that Torres had in finding the right wood.

The soundboards are very thin (down to 1.4 mm in some places), and are thicker in the centre than at the edges. To help them better withstand the pressure from the strings, the tops are slighted domed and buttressed from inside with five - or seven - strut fan bracing.

Another feature: some of his guitars have an open harmonic bar (transverse brace glued under the sound hole) shaped like a bridge, under which struts can pass, which leaves more of the soundboard free to vibrate.

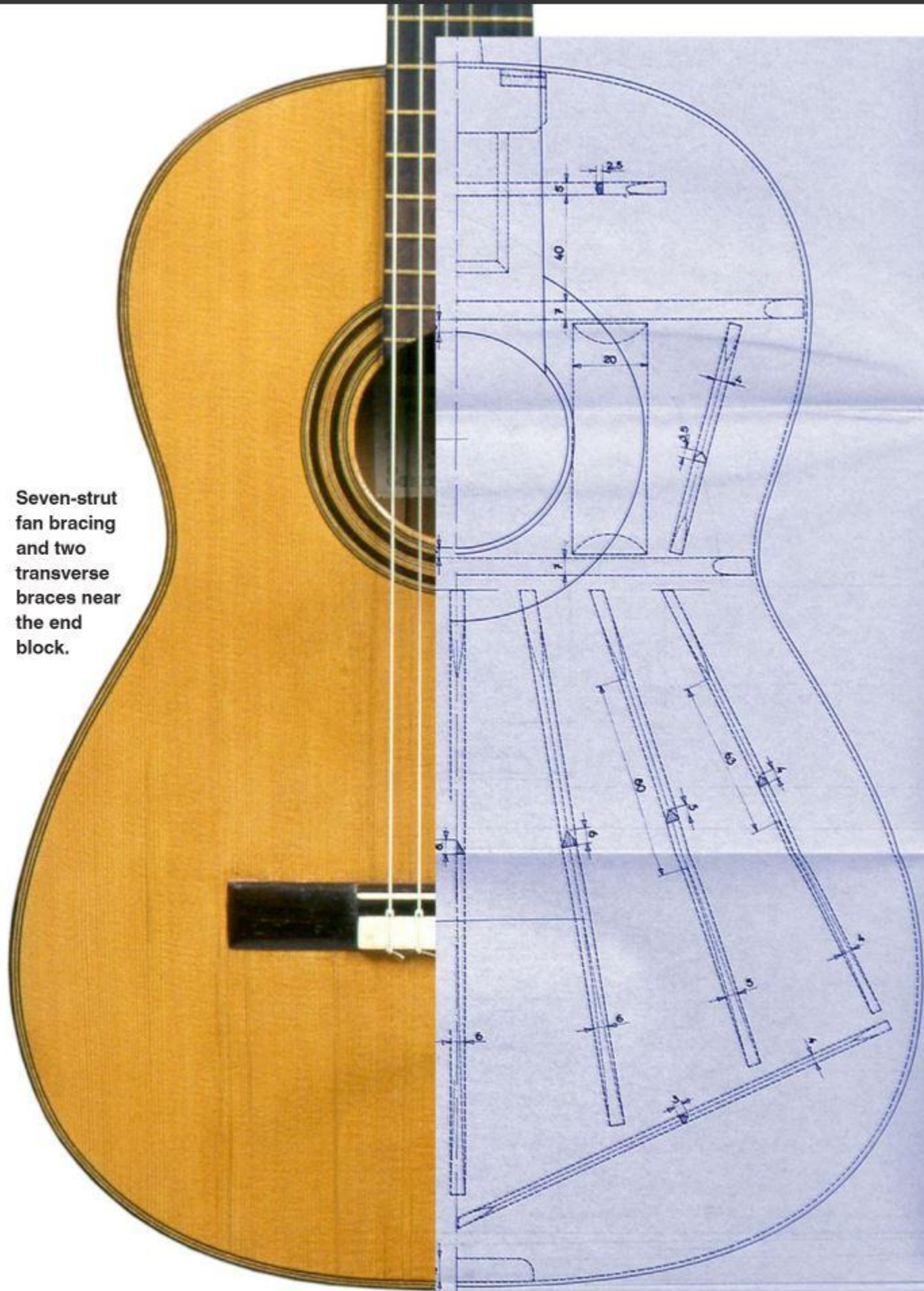


The "moustache"
bridge, a legacy of
the Romantic guitar.



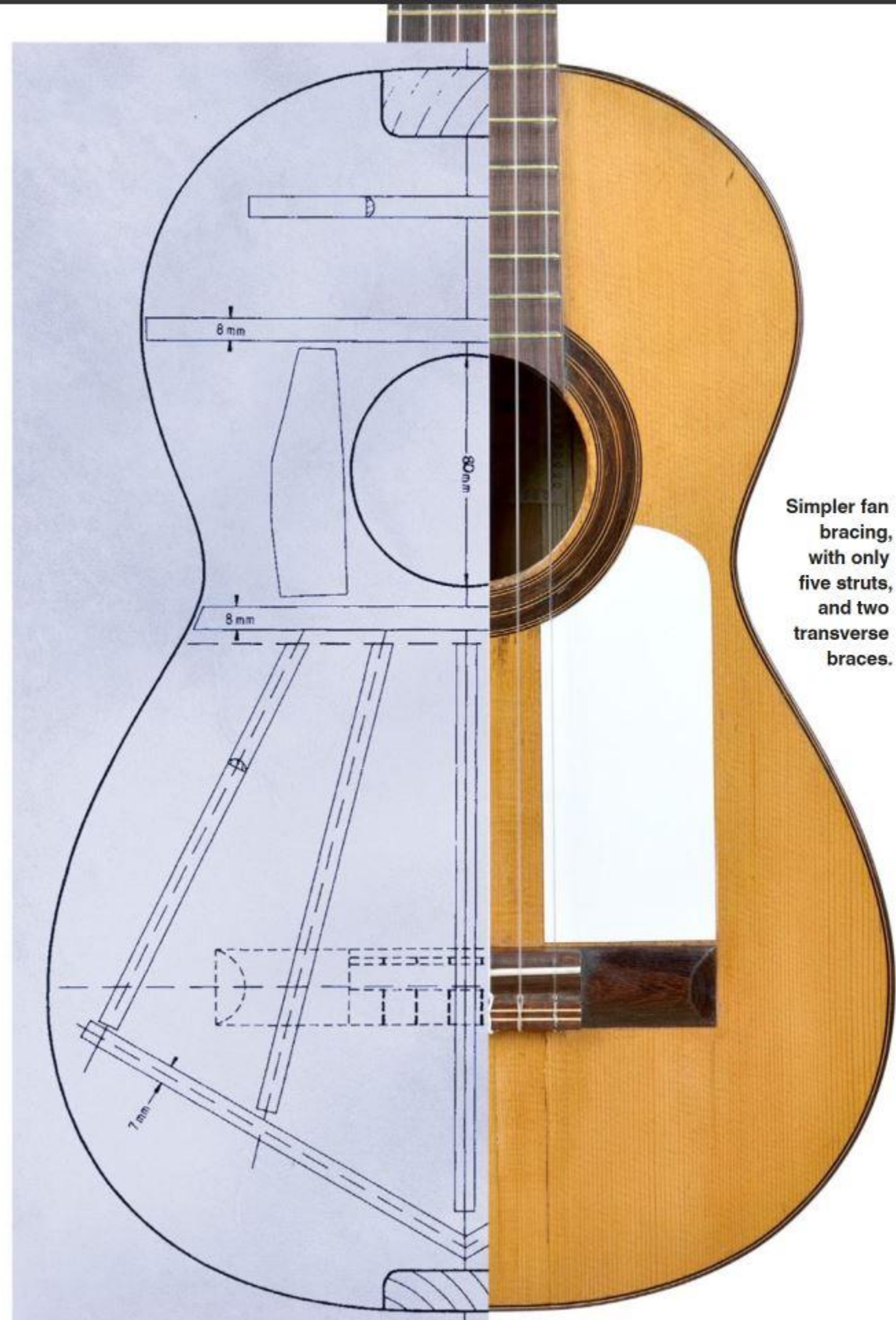
The woodwork is already of a very high calibre.

Seven-strut fan
bracing and two
transverse
braces near the
end
block.



The plans on these pages are taken from José Luis Romanillos' books.

Simpler fan
bracing,
with only
five struts,
and two
transverse
braces.



Torres used primarily three types of wood: cypress, rosewood and maple

His preferred wood

For the back and sides of his guitars, Torres used primarily three types of wood: cypress, rosewood and maple. He was also known to use carob tree, walnut and mahogany for some guitars.

It is hard to tell which wood Torres liked best. Supply problems were so common that the choice of wood was determined more by the model of instrument ordered and the availability of materials.

Cypres (*Cupressus sempervirens*): Although not native to the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean cypress was introduced by the Phoenicians, and it adapted well to Spain's climate.

Over and above its unique qualities – lightness, elasticity and durability – cypress is abundant along the shores of the Mediterranean, and Spanish luthiers could easily come by it.

Since cypress lacks the aesthetic appeal of maple or rosewood and is cheaper, it tends to be considered second best.

Rosewood: The variety of rosewood that Torres used for his "fina" (fine) guitars was *Dalbergia nigra*, from Brazil. Since the discovery of America (1492), Seville had been importing it in great quantities and it was referred to as "Palo Brasil".

Even today, the example set by Torres continues to hold sway; Brazilian rosewood is still considered one of the best tonewoods for guitar-making.

1885 Torres
guitar in
cypress, FE 13
in rosewood
and SE 111
in maple.



The wood that he used came from old furniture

Maple (Acer): Maple has been used for the manufacture of musical instruments for centuries and it is a wood prized as much for its acoustic qualities as for its beauty. Torres used it above all on his most ornate guitars, where the dark wood in the purfling would contrast beautifully with the lighter hues of maple.

Multi-section backs

The economic and social realities of 19th-century life meant that luthiers could not focus solely on producing "fina" guitars (read: concert guitars). They had no choice but to also make more affordable models and even resort to using low quality, narrow pieces of wood, meaning that they had to join several sections together in order to achieve the desired width. The quality and aesthetics of the wood would differ greatly from one guitar to another, as would the number of sections used. Torres built guitars with multi-section backs containing two, three, four, five and even up to six pieces.

Domingo Prat, in his *Diccionario de guitarristas* writes: "The wood that he used came from old furniture. Most of his guitars had cypress backs and ribs, necks made of cedar, fretboards in ebony, machine heads – although many had wooden pegs–, spruce tops, simple purfling, broad rosettes and some models were fitted with a tornavoz."

1887 SE 104,
1861 and
1865 FE 21X.

Torres decorated his guitars differently depending on the model he was making

His decorative touch

Torres decorated his guitars differently depending on the model he was making: simple rosettes with dyed strips of wood arranged in rings, or sophisticated rosettes displaying painstaking workmanship, as can be seen on his "fina" guitars. In contrast to the sumptuously ornate instruments from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of Torres' guitars were only modestly decorated. As a general rule, the decorative inlays were only in acoustically neutral parts of the guitar: sound hole, perimeter of the guitar top, joints and head.

The passage of time and the ageing of the wood and varnish have made it difficult to identify

the varieties of wood that Torres used in his rosettes.

His "plantillas" templates

Fernando Sor, in his *Method for the Spanish Guitar* (English version published in 1836), writes:

"In the goodness of the body or box, the Neapolitan guitars in general long surpassed, in my opinion, those of France and Germany; but that is not the case at present, and if I wanted an instrument, I would procure it from M. Joseph Martinez



1861



SE 43, 1883



SE 69, 1884



1852



Lacote 1840.
Body length:
44 cm, top
surface area:
970 cm².

This image shows the front view of a Lacote 1840 guitar. It features a light-colored wood body with a dark, multi-layered decorative border around the soundhole and the body edges. The soundhole is circular with a dark interior. The bridge is dark and has six white saddle pins. The neck is dark wood with a light-colored fretboard and six frets. The headstock is not visible.



Torres SE 69.
Body length:
48 cm, top
surface area:
1,330 cm².

This image shows the front view of a Torres SE 69 guitar. It has a light-colored wood body with a dark, multi-layered decorative border around the soundhole and the body edges. The soundhole is circular with a dark interior. The bridge is dark and has six white saddle pins. The neck is dark wood with a light-colored fretboard and six frets. The headstock is not visible.

The new sound of his guitars rapidly attracted attention

of Malaga, or from M. Lacote, a French maker... The guitars to which I have always given the preference are those of Alonzo of Madrid, Pages and Benediz of Cádiz, Joseph and Manuel Martinez of Malaga, or Rada, successor and scholar of the latter, and those of M. Lacote of Paris."

The soundboard surface area of the instruments crafted by Sor's recommended luthiers in the early 19th century stood at around 900 cm².

When Torres introduced his fresh guitar model and new concept of construction, with its more generous proportions – over 1,300 cm² for the "fina" guitar – he established what we now consider to be the concert guitar, or classical Spanish guitar.

His guitars came in various different sizes, most likely due to tonewood supply problems.

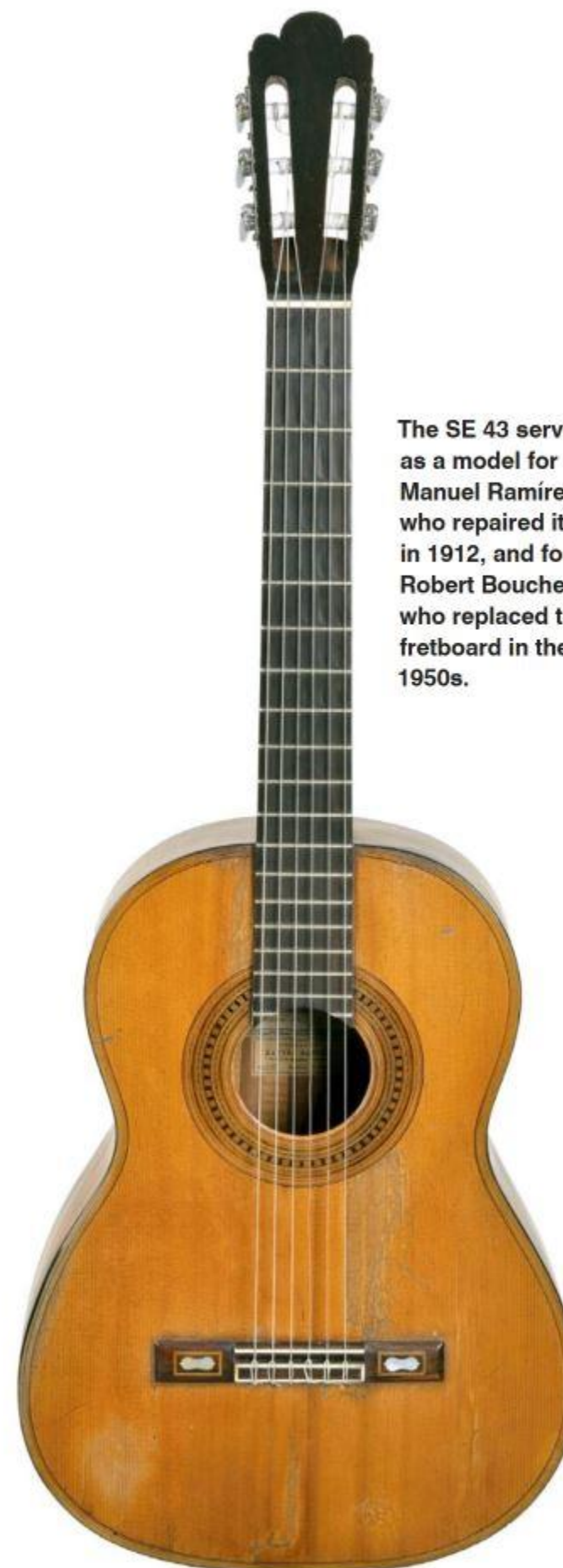
What we do know is that the new sound of his guitars rapidly attracted attention and his influence came to be felt in guitar circles all around Europe.

The "guitarra fina" (SE 43)

Here is a stunning example of a "guitarra fina" or concert guitar, held in the Musée de la Musique, in Paris.

Description

- Twin-section spruce soundboard.
- Four-section back in maple with simple rosewood purfling. Ribs of maple.



The SE 43 served as a model for Manuel Ramírez, who repaired it in 1912, and for Robert Bouchet, who replaced the fretboard in the 1950s.



The SE 83 is one of four known eleven-string guitars

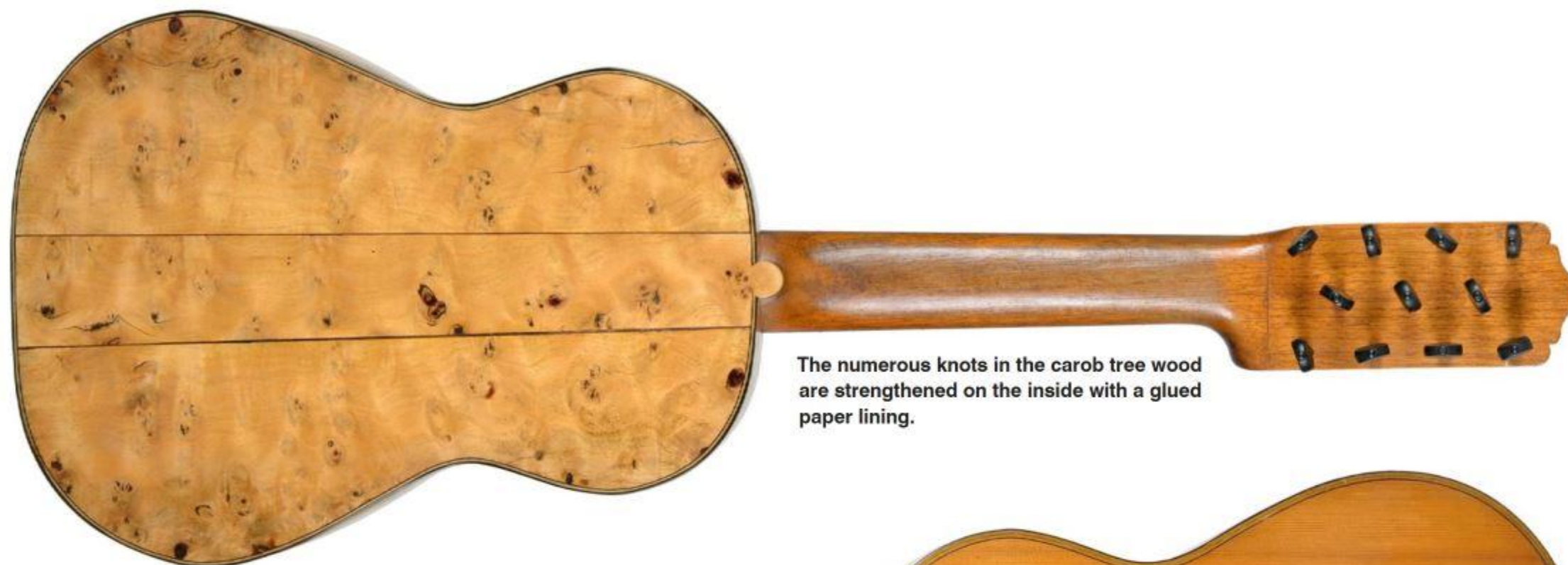
- Neck of Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) with ebony fingerboard.
- Rosewood bridge with mother-of-pearl inlay.
- Rosewood veneer headstock with tuning machines.
- Two labels: (1) "D. Antonio de Torres, constructor de guitarras en Sevilla. Vive hoy en Almería, calle Real nº 80, Cañada. Año de 1883. Guitarra núm. 43, 2a época."
- (2) "Restauró Manuel Ramírez, constructor de violines y guitarras. Año 1912. Arlabán 10, Madrid."

The eleven string guitar (SE83)

Restored by José Luis Romanillos, this guitar is now housed in the Musée de la Musique, in Paris. The SE 83 is one of four known eleven-string guitars, the others being the SE 07, the SE 71 and the SE 132. The SE 07 was converted to six strings by Marcelo Barbero in 1945.

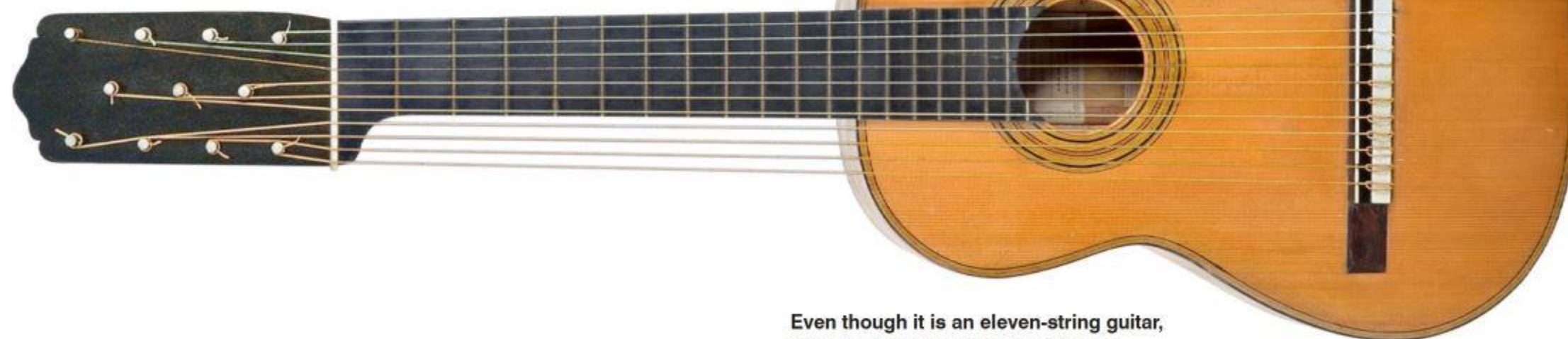
Description

- Twin-section spruce soundboard.
- Three-section back and sides in carob tree wood (*Ceratonia siliqua*).
- Rosewood bridge with ivory-topped tie-block.
- Neck of Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*)
- Fingerboard in ebony, wide enough for seven of the strings, with the remainder left floating.
- Label: "Por D. Antonio de Torres. Almería, calle Real número 23, Cañada. Año de 1885. Segunda época, n. 83".



The numerous knots in the carob tree wood are strengthened on the inside with a glued paper lining.

The fingerboard is wide enough for seven of the eleven strings.



Even though it is an eleven-string guitar, Torres used his normal "fina" guitar proportions.





© Emilio Beauchy (1889), Biblioteca Nacional de España.

“

*It is an instrument that can cry and can laugh,
and that you can tell a story with.
The guitar is perfect as Torres made it. The closer you stay to it,
the closer you stay to perfection.*

Pepe Romero

”

Stefano Grondona, Wulfin Lieske et Carles Trepapat: three contempo- rary players tell us about the Torres “sound”

Who better than a Torres guitar player to tell us about the instrument and its sound qualities? After Julián Arcas, Francisco Tárrega and Miguel Llobet, there are currently three guitarists who regularly play guitars by Antonio de Torres: Car-

les Trepapat, Stefano Grondona and Wulfin Lieske. All three give recitals and have made recordings using Torres guitars, and all three are in love with that unique Torres sound. Read on and get it straight from the horse's mouth...

Stefano Grondona

"A Torres guitar is a true musical instrument."

Why play on a Torres?

Stefano Grondona – Because a Torres is a true musical instrument and not some trendy guitar. You can modulate the sound of a Torres much as you can human vocals.

There is a "cliché" about the modern guitar: how it needs to be a powerful, percussive instrument, a kind of piano, and guitarists are trained to play loud and fast. This leads to a problem: if you hand young guitarists a Torres to play on, there is no guarantee that they would know how to bring out the beauty of its voice. The younger players have been taught – almost formatted – to play on these new-fangled guitars and to play at maximum volume. But a guitar isn't a piano: 80% of the sound made by a pianist is produced by the piano itself. It's the exact opposite with a guitar: it's up to the guitarist to find, or "create" the sound. Playing *pianissimo* doesn't mean playing less loudly; the idea behind *pianissimo* is the search for intimacy, it's a state of mind. The pauses are also very important; how to let silence in, give it meaning, expand it.

And it's not up to the guitar to demonstrate these subtleties; it's the role of the guitarist. A sound only truly becomes music when the player adds feeling. The sounds made by Glenn Gould or Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli didn't come from the instrument alone, but were borne of the relationship between those resonances and the player.

You have made recordings with the papier mache guitar. Tell us about the experience.

S. G. – The papier mache guitar is extraordinary; it sounds like a normal Torres guitar! It doesn't just sound like any other random guitar; it sounds like a Torres!

"I own three
Torres guitars:
three facets
of a single
spirituality."

Torres didn't have a scientific approach and he had nothing to prove. My understanding is that this guitar was a challenge that he set for himself, going beyond the conventional. The body is not made of cypress, maple or rosewood, which would necessarily have "coloured" the sound. No, the body was made of papier mache and the guitar sounds like a Torres.

Usually, when luthiers try to improve upon their instruments, they try out different dimensions, different bracing, different materials, but Torres's lesson to us is that a guitar is created by the luthier's personality and knowing hands.

With which Torres do you play?

S. G. – I own three Torres guitars: one made of cypress (the SE107), one in rosewood (SE 39) and one maple (SE111).

The key question isn't really about which colours these types of wood bestow upon the instruments, but, rather, about what freedom, what flexibility do they offer the guitarist?

My three Torres guitars all display minor differences in timbre, but

their individual sounds all flow from the same spiritual wellspring.

Does the tornavoz help you with the basses?

S. G. – Yes, the tornavoz enhances the lower frequencies, albeit artificially. I think that Torres used the tornavoz mostly in the early days. In the second period of his career, he had mastered everything and was obtaining the desired basses without it. It would be an understatement to call Antonio de Torres the greatest guitar-maker: he is so very much more. He perfected the humble guitar and made it a true musical instrument!



© Shinichi Kida

Stefano Grondona with his SE 39 from 1882.



Wulfin Lieske with La Leona.

Wulfin Lieske

"I play La Leona because it sounds so good!"

Why do you play with "La Leona"?

Wulfin Lieske – I don't play with a Torres just because he is a famous guitar maker and I don't play La Leona just because it is a famous Torres guitar. I play it because it sounds so good!

Nor am I playing on La Leona for historical reasons – it was played by Arcas and Tárrega – but, rather, for the musical qualities of this guitar.

Believe me, I am not old fashioned: I know many luthiers, and I have played guitars from Lacote to Smallman but, for me, there were three absolute geniuses: Torres, Santos and Hauser. Of course, there are wonderful Bouchets, wonderful Fletas, but everything had already been said and done with these three guitar makers.

I recorded a CD with Fabian Spindler and we played Albéniz's "Iberia" on two Torres guitars: La Leona and the FE 13. The result was unbelievable: it was like listening to the sound of an orchestra, very complex, with millions of colours. No other guitars could have achieved that.

You are playing a guitar from 1854 and yet guitars reputedly have short lifespans.

W. L. – I'm not sure... Wind musicians don't play old instruments because they get out of tune, tend to be very fragile and so on. Lute players never play old lutes: they become deformed and difficult to tune. With the violins it's differ-

ent, although very often it is actually a question of prestige. In my case, if I play with La Leona it is because the guitar is in perfect shape and I don't need to take it to the workshop every month. After Benno Streu's restoration in 1991, the guitar hasn't budged. It's unbelievable, especially to think that the average thickness of the top is 1.4 mm: it's as thin as a credit card!

"After Benno Streu's restoration in 1991, the guitar hasn't budged. It's unbelievable, especially to think that the top is as thin as a credit card!"

Do you have the feeling that the repertoire of this guitar is limited?

W. L. – It took a while to me to understand La Leona. In the beginning, I was still sceptical and I started out by playing Renaissance and Baroque music on it. But everything changed during a recording of modern music for EMI, when I played with La Leona and a guitar from Fritz Ober. The sound engineer came to me to say that both sounds were excellent but that with La Leona, there was something more in the background, like a history behind the notes.

That's the point: La Leona has a vast palette of sound colours. It's pure music.

In La Leona everything is balanced: the basses are there, the high notes are there; they may not be loud but they are good. If you play an E minor chord with La Leona it's like medicine, it's balsam for your heart. You don't hear a guitar; you hear music. That's the timeless quality of this guitar.

Carles Trepát

“Tornate all'antico e sarà un progresso!”

Why play on a Torres today?

Carles Trepát – First of all because I'm lucky enough to have one! And secondly because it surprises me every day, with new tones, which I might not necessarily have been seeking, but which come out nonetheless. Some guitars might come close, but this one seems to offer the best of everything.

My passion for the Torres never ceases to grow. There is depth to its sound and it offers excellent projection. When I play in a hall with good acoustics, I can feel it resounding right down the back. And yet if the acoustics aren't up to scratch and I find myself having to force the guitar, the Torres will say no! In such cases it is better to resort to slight amplification.

A while back I was playing in Stockholm to five hundred people in a beautiful auditorium, with no amplification and using catgut strings, as in Llobet's day. I played softly, because they were vintage strings and I didn't want to damage them, knowing that every note brought their demise a little closer. My listeners told me that the audience could hear everything, right up to the back row.

I know that not all concert halls are right for a Torres. If I'm asked to give a recital in an unsuitable setting, I prefer to refuse.

What can you tell us about your guitar, the SE 153, from 1892?

C. T. – My guitar is one of the last ones crafted by Torres' hands and has been well looked after. A surprising aspect is just how narrow the ribs are. I think that when he built this guitar, toward the

end of his life, he was hoping to recreate the sound made by a guitar with a tornavoz, by bringing the soundboard and the back closer together. I'm no longer really comfortable taking the guitar out of the house, nor travelling with it. Unless I have some event that I feel is important, I avoid taking it out.

“My passion for the Torres never ceases to grow. There is depth to its sound and it offers excellent projection.”

What results do you get if you play very gently?

C. T. – You get more colours and this seeming fragility awakens guitar, enabling it to expand throughout the recital. I get the feeling that these days we are so used to noise that we have lost the ability to listen quietly, and sometimes it is actually difficult to get the audience to remain silent. Finding an audience with the necessary refinement is increasingly becoming a challenge.

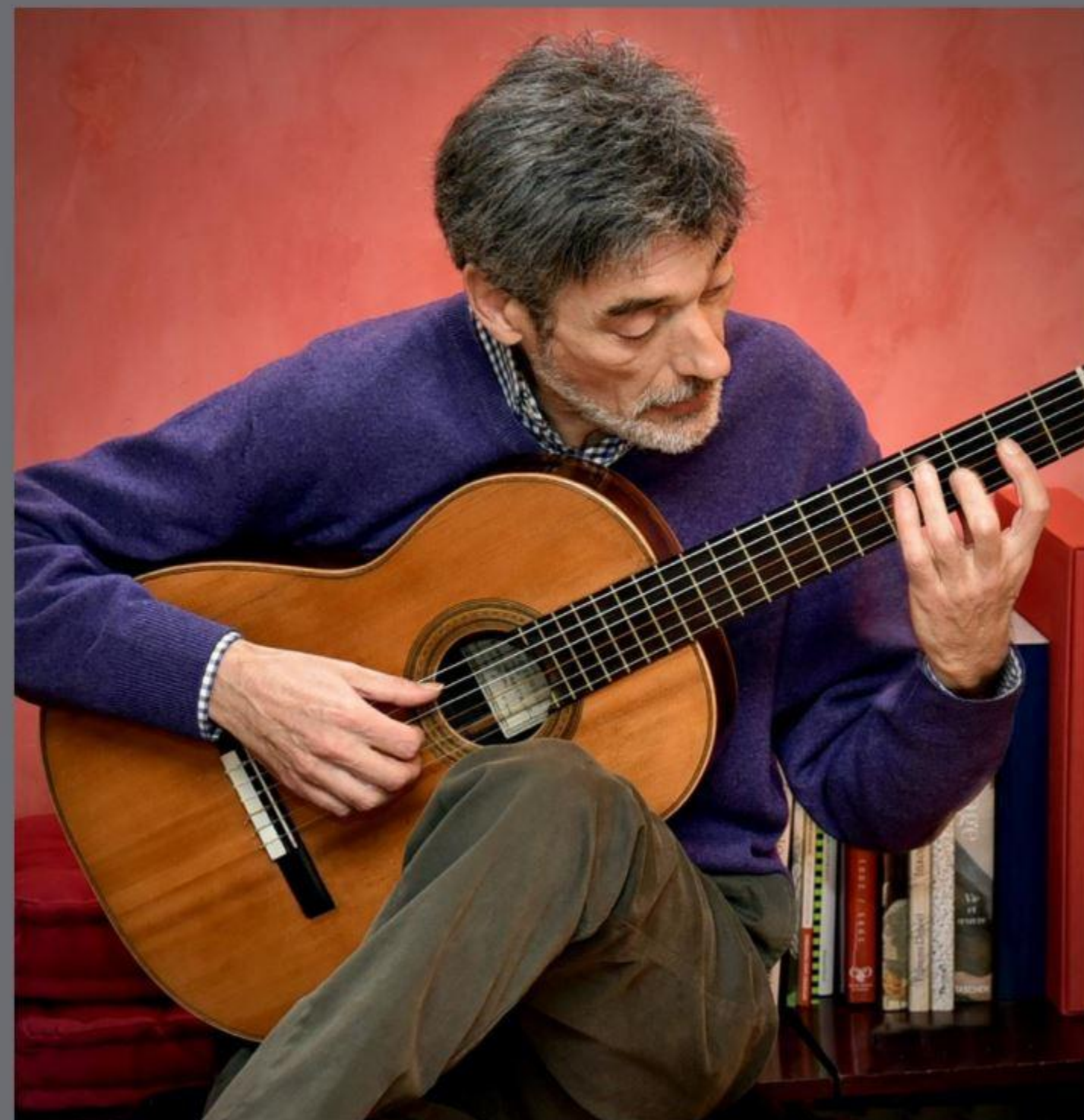
Have you ever played on other Torres guitars

C. T. – Yes, I've played on several. I particularly remember Tárrega's one; the first Torres guitar that he ever had. I recall having to

play very gently, just as Tárrega did, but that the sound was unbelievably smooth.

I think that the guitars that come closest to a Torres are the flamenco guitars in cypress; those by Manuel Ramírez, Santos Hernández and Estesó. I'm in demand at the moment. Maybe those who come to listen are sick of listening to high volume instruments. I realised some time back that Giuseppe Verdi was right: “Tornate all'antico e sarà un progresso!”

*Let's go back to the old ways and that will be progress!



Carles Trepát with SE 69 from 1884.

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