



Orfeo

N°8

MAGAZINE

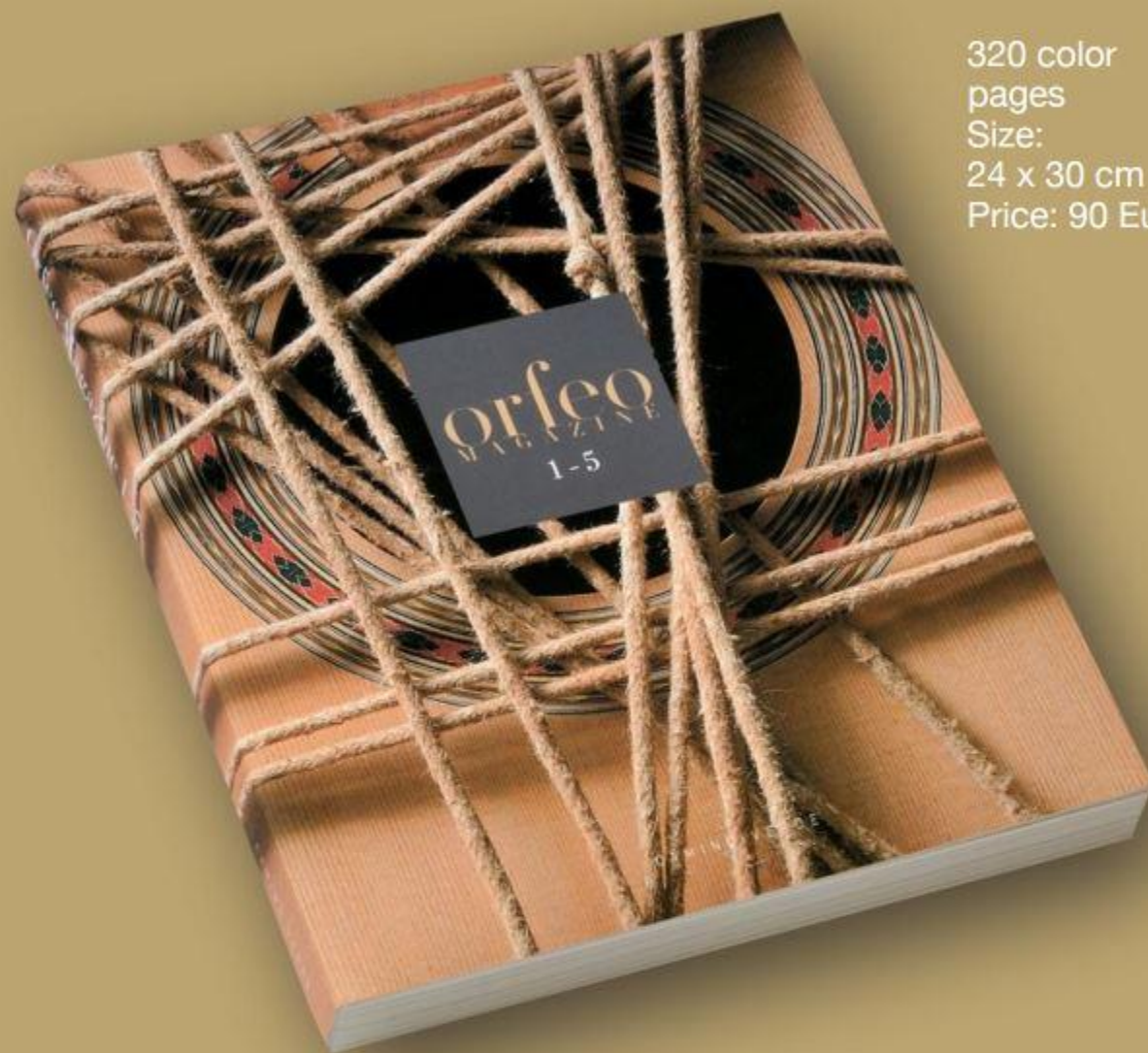
Interviews

Antonio Marín
Manuel Bellido
Paco Santiago Marín
Rafael Moreno

Discover

The Alhambra in Granada

N° 8 - Autumn 2016
English Edition



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From the Editor

orfeo

M A G A Z I N E

N°8

Granada, home to 250,000 people, is unique in the world: more than forty luthiers currently ply their trade in and around the city. And not all of them are Spanish: many have come from other countries, attracted by the locals' expertise and generous nature. Today, Granada has become the guitar capital of the world.

We invite you to take a tour of four workshops: those of Antonio Marín, Manuel Bellido, Paco Santiago Marín and Rafael Moreno.

But no introduction to Granada's guitar-building tradition would be complete without consideration of the city's historical, artistic and cultural references. Granada, and especially the Alhambra, has influenced, seduced and captivated innumerable writers and musicians such as Manuel de Falla, Francisco Tárrega, Claude Debussy, Andrés Segovia, John Irving, Marguerite Yourcenar, Victor Hugo, Federico García Lorca...

Enjoy your visit!

Alberto Martinez

Granada and the Guitar



Guitar crafted
by Rafael Vallejo
in 1792 for King
Carlos IV.

From the sixteenth century onwards guitar making has been a major industry for the city of Granada.



**Francisco
Manuel Díaz.**

From the sixteenth century onwards guitar making has been a major industry for the city of Granada. The oldest known masterpiece of Granadan lutherie can be found in London's *Victoria and Albert Museum*: the guitar crafted by Rafael Vallejo in 1792 for King Carlos IV. It is a marvelously decorated sixteen-course guitar (double strings).

From the nineteenth century, guitars became less ornate and more suited to the new musical techniques of Fernando Sor and Dionisio Aguado. These new instruments hailed from a fresh generation of luthiers: Agustín Caro, Antonio Llorente and José Pernas.

The next chapter in the history of Granada's guitar-building industry opened in 1875, with the *Casa Ferrer* dynasty, founded by Benito Ferrer and subsequently run by his nephew, Eduardo Ferrer (the young Segovia's artistic beginnings were on a Benito Ferrer guitar).

The Ferrer family and Manuel de la Chica – deemed the originators of the Granada's contemporary school – trained numerous luthiers, giving the city its current reputation and making it the guitar capital of the world.

Guitar district

Casa Ferrer has always been located on the main access road to the Alhambra: the steeply sloping Cuesta de Gomérez. More and more studios gradually popped up around the Ferrer workshop, creating a "guitar district".

The street ends at the *Puerta de las Granadas* (Gate of the Pomegranates), one of the city's most beautiful arches, which leads into the Alhambra's grounds. Built to commemorate the visit to Granada by King Carlos I of Spain in 1526, it owes its name to the three decorative pomegranates that can be seen above the imperial coat of arms. Souvenir shops have started elbowing the luthiers' studios out, but luckily some are standing firm and perpetuating the district's guitar making tradition.



**In the 1960s,
Eduardo Ferrer
was a mentor
for Yamaha's
luthiers. His
granddaughter,
Ana Durán
Ferrer, still
keeps the
shop.**



**José López
Bellido,
brother
of Manuel
Bellido.**



Souvenir shops for tourists are slowly replacing the guitar workshops. Below, the *Puerta de las Granadas*.

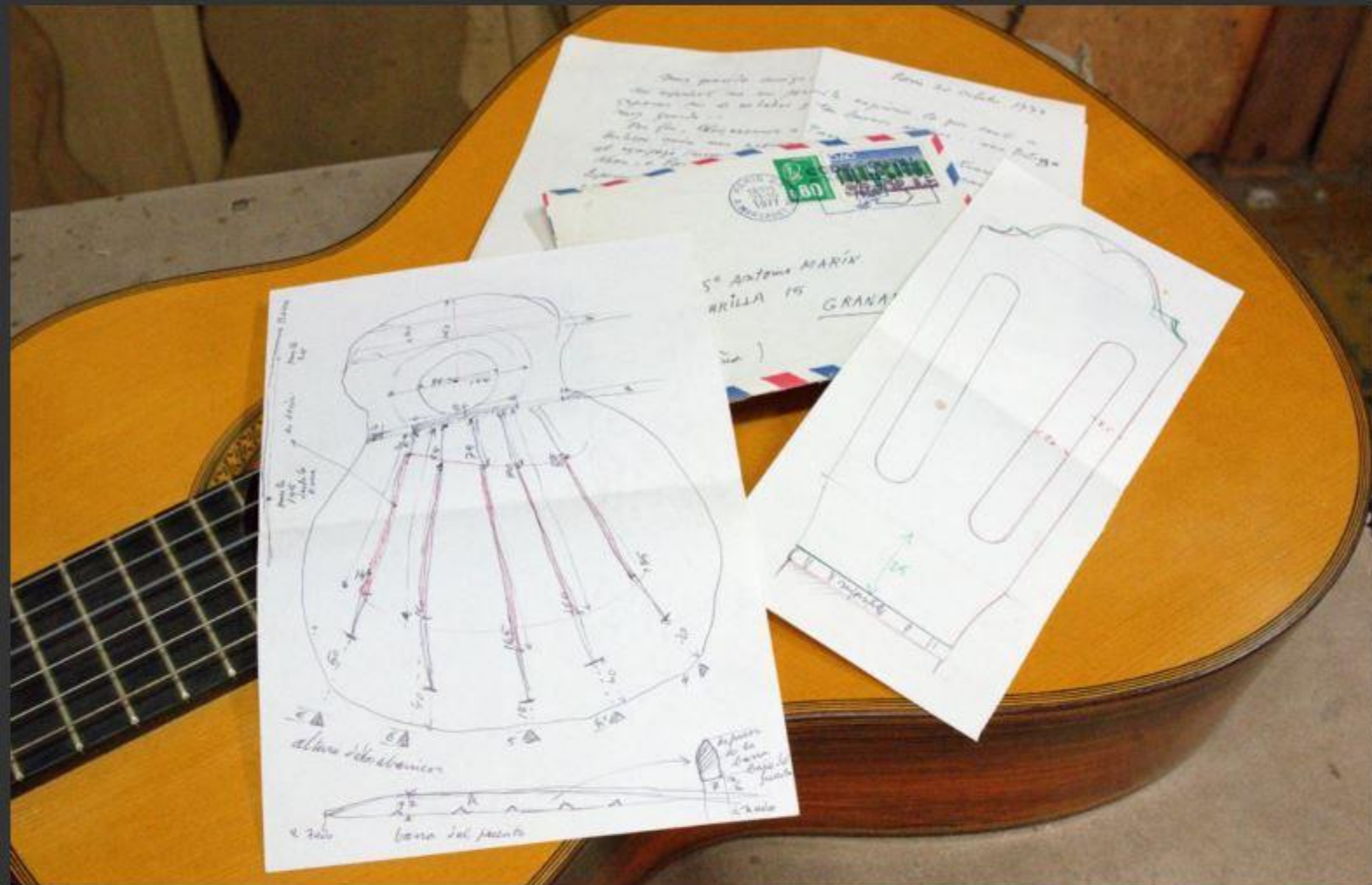




José Marín
Plazuelo and José
González López
inspect the guitar
made by Antonio
Marín and Robert
Bouchet.

He built guitars under
Manuel de la Chica
and Eduardo Ferrer, set
up shop with Manuel
Bellido and was a friend
of French luthier Robert
Bouchet. Antonio Marín
has helped many a
young guitar maker and
is still known for his
unstinting willingness to
assist his colleagues.

Antonio Marín, patriarch of Granada



Robert Bouchet's letter describing the construction of his guitars (1977).

“The Bouchet system gives the guitar a nicely balanced sound.”

At the age of 83, he still works in his Cuesta del Caidero workshop, alongside José Marín Plazuelo (his nephew), José González López (Plazuelo's brother-in-law) and Juan Antonio Correa Marín (Antonio's grandson). Antonio Marín is Granada's undisputed leader.

Orfeo – Tell us about your friendship with Robert Bouchet.

Antonio Marín – Our friendship stretches back to 1977 when I travelled to Paris to meet him, upon the advice of a Japanese friend. I was especially interested in the way he braced his soundboards. In Bouchet's system of construction, there is a transverse bridge bar and the struts are progressively thicker up towards the highs. The Bouchet bar gives the soundboard greater consistency in the region of the trebles, resulting in a guitar with a nicely balanced sound and ample sustain. He



Jacques Bertier, Robert Bouchet, Guy Déséglise and Antonio Marín (1979).

wrote to me after my visit, detailing his method of crafting guitar tops, suggesting a new shape for my guitar heads and a design for my labels.

He later came and spent a month in Granada and that was when we built, together, this guitar here, which I've kept all this time. In 1979 we met up again in France, this time at the house of a common friend, Guy Deseglise, and in the three months that we spent together we made three guitars, which remained in France. Bouchet was surprised to see the skill and speed with which I worked.

Orfeo - Your production capacity is astonishing. How do you do it?

A. M. – If you are well organised, then making one guitar or four amounts to exact-

ly the same thing. One of the explanations for my efficiency is the pleasant atmosphere; we work as a family. We prepare all of the different guitar components (necks, rosettes, tops) in batches ahead of time. Depending on the day and the humidity, we perform either cutting or gluing. Then we all get down to the actual assembly, each working on our own guitar, but all the while helping one another. Varnishing, on the other hand, is really time-consuming, taking almost as long as it takes to build a guitar, so we outsource that to professional varnishers.



(Ed. - Antonio Marín has created over 2,000 guitars in his 60 years as a luthier; José Marín Plazuelo,

Antonio's workshop.

180° view
showing the
inside of a guitar
by Antonio with
the "Bouchet
bar".



Antonio's
signature:
elegance,
sobriety
and quality
materials.



“If you are well organised, then making one guitar or four amounts to exactly the same thing.”

some 800 guitars in 42 years of activity; and José González López, about 200 in 27 years).

Orfeo – What distinguishes your classical guitars from your flamenco guitars?

A. M. – For my classical guitars I use the Bouchet system, whereas my flamenco guitars are braced with struts alone, as per Torres.

Moreover, my flamenco guitars have thinner tops. The aim is to achieve a brighter sound, a more “crystalline” sound, as they say in flamenco circles. Another difference is the rosette design: I use one design for flamenco guitars and another one for classical.

The fretboard on a flamenco guitar needs to be flat so that a capo can be fitted. In contrast, that of a classical guitar is slightly radiused and has progressively more space under the bass strings down toward the sound hole.

Orfeo – Which details are the most important on your guitars?

A. M. – For me, the soundboard and its bracing are still the most important, but I also aim to ensure overall harmony, the aesthetics of the guitar.



The guitar's components are prepared in small batches.



Spruce soundboard under construction.



José González López attaching purfling to one of his guitars.



The cutting room.

“Working as a family makes for a good studio atmosphere.”

The gluing is of critical importance and can only be done in dry weather. If there is any humidity, we don't undertake any gluing; we won't glue any bars or struts. Guitars travel a lot and if the gluing is performed in damp conditions, the guitar will suffer as it changes climate.

Today everyone is obsessed with volume, but... what for?

Those new-fangled guitars that each weigh as much as a piano may indeed offer volume, but the sound has no quality, no colour, no balance. All they do is make a racket!

I don't believe that the guitar needs greater volume. I remember when, as youngsters, we would go and listen to Segovia when he came to the Granada auditorium. He played with no amplification whatsoever and his guitar could be heard perfectly well from the back row.

Another advantage that guitarists observe with the Bouchet system is that the sound is very balanced and better projected. It is crucial that the bone used for the bridge's saddle is centred on the bar, ensuring that the pressure

from the strings is exerted precisely on the bar.

Orfeo – On the subject of the bridge, do you always make it with 12 holes?

A. M. – Not always. The advantage of tying the strings this way is that they can all rest in an identical manner on the saddle. Flamenco guitarists have more readily embraced this system than those playing classical. Some classical players have also adopted it: the guitars that I built for Pepe Romero and Vicente Cobes are made this way.

Orfeo – What is your opinion of antique guitars?

A. M. – We are very familiar with them; we get the occasional Torres or Santos in our workshop for repair. It is clear to me that the voices of these old guitars have changed over time and so I don't believe that you can ever replicate them.

There's no imitating the effect of time: the wood aging, the glue crystallising, the effects of playing. It's a bit like wine... you just can't copy a vintage wine.



José Marín
Plazuelo, 40
years working
alongside
Antonio.

Manuel Bellido, the quest for balance



He learned his craft under Eduardo Ferrer, then went into a partnership with Antonio Marín, before finally setting up his own workshop. Thanks to his on-going desire to perfect his guitars, he has overhauled his bracing style, design and construction several times.

Manuel Bellido
and his sons,
Jesús and
Mauricio.



Jesús Bellido chooses a top from the family's superb collection of wood.



The Bellidos produce different rosette styles.

“Apart from his skill, Jesús has another very positive attribute; he’s not afraid of getting things wrong.”

Today, aged eighty, Manuel Bellido continues crafting guitars in his workshop in Paseo de las Palmas, along with his sons, Jesús and Mauricio.

Orfeo – Have you always worked with your sons?

Manuel Bellido – I never pushed them to work with me. Mine is an honest profession and it offers a lot of satisfaction but it's not a job for wannabe millionaires. My sons came of their own volition.

The first was Jesús, who, at the age of 13, wanted to buy his first motorbike and so started building two guitars with me, to earn a bit of money. Naturally, I helped him and offered advice. When the guitars were finished, it so happened that we had a visit in the studio from Ivor Mairants, who had a major guitar shop in London, and he

was so surprised to see Jesús making guitars at such a tender age that he bought one of them and promised me that he'd declare Jesús the world's youngest guitar maker for the Guinness Book of World Records!

Apart from his skill, Jesús has another very positive attribute; he's not afraid of breaking stuff or getting things wrong. To my mind, that's a huge asset, because we can also learn from our mistakes. Jesús can complete 20 to 25 guitars in a year; of all of us he is the one with the greatest output.

Mauricio also came to work in the studio off his own bat. He initially did the varnishing and he still does an excellent job varnishing our guitars, but a while back he started building guitars, too. French polishing is very difficult and requires considerable patience. The result depends on myriad factors and everyone needs to find the

“The soundboard is not the only critical element; when building a guitar, everything counts.”



© Clémentine Jouffroy

“I never pushed my sons to work with me.”

technique that works best for them: shape of the rubbing pad, hand movements, pressure... Today, Mauricio is up there with the best. Working with family offers more than just a pleasant atmosphere; it is also excellent for organising our work. For example, if we're making bridges, we make bridges for everyone at once and then we each assemble them on our guitars in our own way. I have never pushed my sons to make their guitars the same as mine.

Orfeo – What can you tell us about the way that your guitars are built?

M. B. – Some luthiers have their own pet way of constructing guitars and they stick to that method for life, making very few changes. My approach is the exact opposite; I prefer trying out different solutions.

Right now I am making this new model, called *Auditorio*. The top isn't braced with the traditional fan-shaped layout; instead it has nine diagonal struts in parallel. With this kind of bracing, I can make the



soundboard quite a lot thinner. The outcome is a guitar that maintains its sound beautifully, and is well balanced with good trebles.

Unlike Torres, I don't believe that the soundboard is the be all and end all. It is important, obviously, but I do feel that the way in which the entire guitar is constructed has to be in equilibrium. Everything plays a role.

Nor do I focus too much on the bracing: For the bracing to do its job effectively, the guitar's many other elements also have to be well made. I have built guitars with five struts, seven, eight and nine struts. Some are reinforced under the bridge; others no. The wood is never identical.

The one thing that does remain constant is that I have always made my soundboards thicker on the treble side.

Guitar-playing has come a long way; with their improved techniques, guitarists now require instruments offering better balance, and greater accu-

An unfinished soundboard with nine diagonal struts in parallel.



The Auditorio model with the back of the head completely closed.



His rosettes are inspired by the Court of the Myrtles (Patio de los Arrayanes) in the Alhambra.



Close-up showing how he combines the different types of wood for making rosettes.



Mauricio
varnishes
the guitars
in a separate
room.



Several guitar parts are made in small batches.



“The traditional hot glue cools down rapidly and this leads to problems when there is a large surface to be bonded.”

racy from every single part of the fretboard. The guitar has reached such heights of perfection that now it is only the tiniest details that make all the difference.

Meanwhile, guitarists might have made great gains in virtuosity, but have lost in subtleness of ear. They seek ever-greater volume, but fail to focus on quality.

Orfeo – What are the other features of the Auditorio model?

M. B. - I noticed that when I installed tuning machines instead of wooden tuning pegs, at the behest of some of my clients, the personality of the sound changed. So I tried closing off the back of the guitar head in an attempt to recover rigidity. I was pleased with the result and so I stuck with it for the *Auditorio*.

As I mentioned, it has nine-strut diagonal bracing. I make the heel from one solid piece of wood because I think that it is stronger that way.

Gluing is also of vital importance and glues have changed a lot over time. The traditional hot glue cools down rapidly and this leads to problems when there is a large surface to be bonded. The solution was to warm up the parts before gluing, but it was always very time consuming. Modern glues have resolved these issues. I really enjoy working with cypress, but when I'm using Brazilian rosewood, which

is prone to splitting, I line the inside with a layer of cypress on the back and sides. The advantage of laminating it like this is that the guitar will be much stiffer and there is less likelihood of any warping. I don't think that it alters the sound much at all; the aim is, above all, to strengthen the rosewood.

Once upon a time, travel was a much slower affair and instruments had time to acclimatise gradually. These days, you can board a plane in Madrid and get off just a few hours later in Mexico, where the climate is totally different and the poor guitar is completely unprepared for the change. It's a nightmare!

I reinforce the neck with a carbon insert. I used to use ebony or rosewood, but the addition of carbon means that I can offer a thinner neck if necessary. Everything contributes to the overall balance. I build guitars because it's what I love doing, and I take as much time as I need to do it

as well as possible. Whether they sell or not is neither here nor there.

Since the *Auditorio* is the fruit of a lifetime's work crafting guitars, I would be thrilled if Mauricio were to continue making this model.

Orfeo - What differences are there between your classical guitars and flamenco guitars?



Heated press mould for shaping ribs.



"I build guitars because it's what I love."

"I don't use cedar for the tops of flamenco guitars; only for classical."

M. B. - There isn't much difference.

Having a good guitarist on hand, someone who can try out the guitars, is very useful for any luthier wanting to make progress. Here, due to affinity and tradition, we naturally have more contact with flamenco guitarists.

I don't feel the need to go making "negra" flamenco guitars. Why would I, when the "blanca" guitars sound so good?

I add a zero fret to my flamenco guitars. It is more comfortable for the left hand and enables better string alignment. It is almost like a permanent capo. I only offer a zero fret for flamenco guitars; classical guitarists are more conservative. On the other hand, I don't use cedar for the tops of flamenco guitars; only for classical.

I remember back in the early 60s, when I was working with Antonio Marín, that we had some trouble finding good tonewood for our soundboards and we bought some Canadian cedar

— practically unheard of at the time — just to try it out. We made several guitars with Canadian cedar tops, but nobody liked them because they were so much darker than the usual spruce. So we gave them a layer of "Spanish white" to lighten the colour! That was Spain in an entirely different era, where the aim was to merely to survive, building guitars to earn a crust.

Orfeo - What makes a guitar from Granada distinctive?

M. B. - A guitar from Granada has a unique sound and unique construction. It is light, comfortable and not very broad. The guitars that Jesús makes are the closest to the typical Granadan guitar. They take their inspiration more from Santos Hernández than from Torres. But it is difficult to make a comparison with vintage guitars: guitars have changed, strings have changed and our ears have also changed.



Ornamentation of the Alhambra

The beauty of the Alhambra's ornamentation has long been a source of inspiration for guitar makers designing their decorative rosettes.



The last rays of a winter sun grace the Alhambra and the peaks of Sierra Nevada.







“The Alhambra is at the very summit of perfection of Moorish art.”

Join us for a tour of this magnificent palace, guided by the writings of English architect Owen Jones: *The Grammar of Ornament*.

This seminal book, first published in 1856, was to become tremendously influential in its day, since it encouraged architects to open up to other forms of decorative art, stemming from cultures and countries that Jones had visited or studied. The appendices included over one hundred plates depicting ornamentation from China, Persia, the Indies, Arabia and other cultures, reproduced thanks to the invention of chromolithography.

Owen Jones went to Granada in March 1834, along with French architect Jules Goury (who succumbed to cholera there), with a view to undertaking a comprehensive study of the Alhambra. During their intensive six month stay, they produced a range of sketches, drawings, elevations, plaster casts, tracings and hy-



Owen Jones.

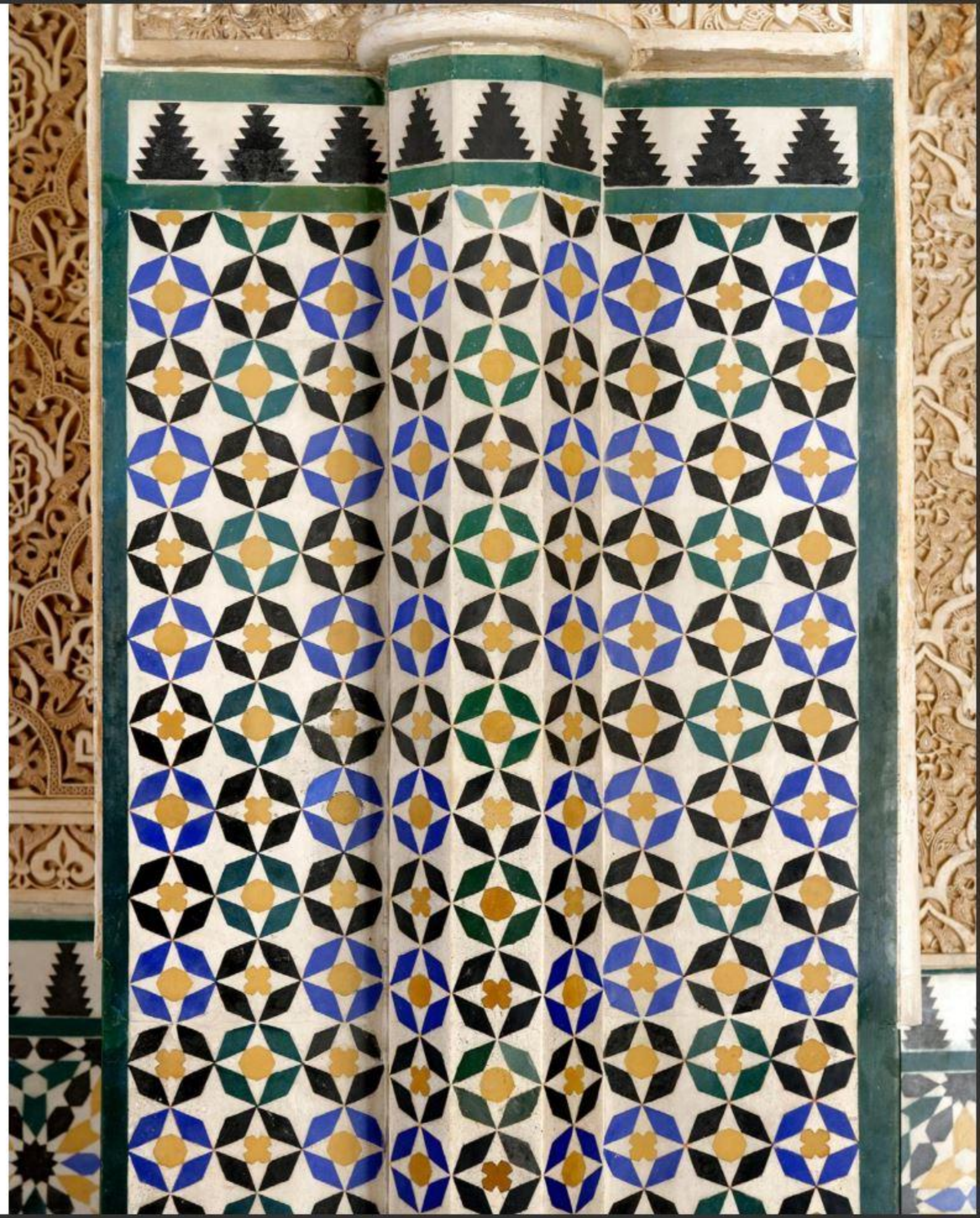
pothetical colour reconstructions, culminating in what can be considered the first exhaustive study of the Alhambra's chromatic and ornamental aspects.

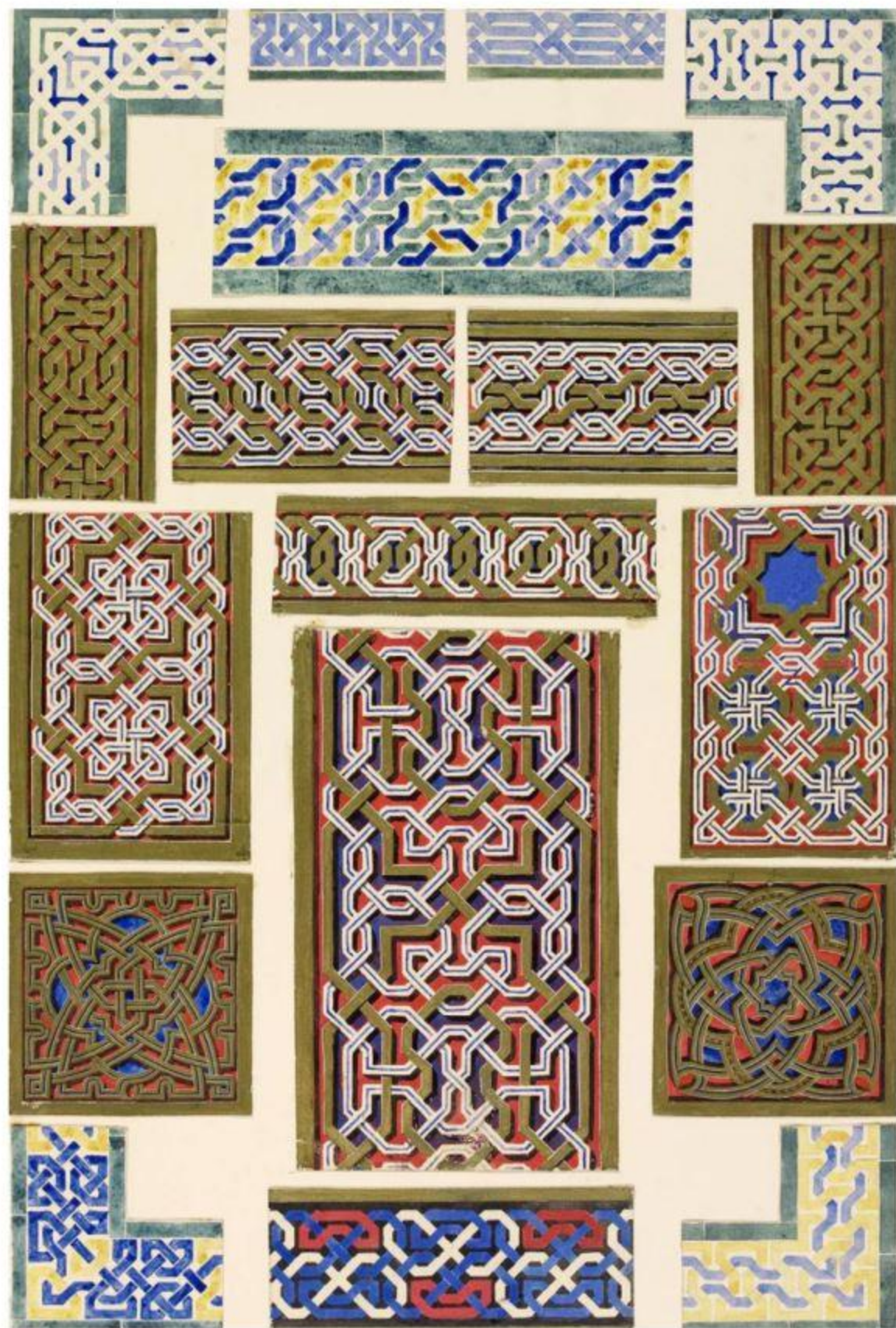
The Grammar of Ornament

“Our illustrations of the ornament of the Moors have been taken exclusively from the Alhambra, not only because it is the one of their works with which we are best acquainted, but also because it is the one in which their marvellous system of decoration reached its culminating point. The Al-

hambra is at the very summit of perfection of Moorish art, as is the Parthenon of Greek art.

We can find no work so fitted to illustrate a Grammar of Ornament as that in which every ornament contains a grammar in itself.





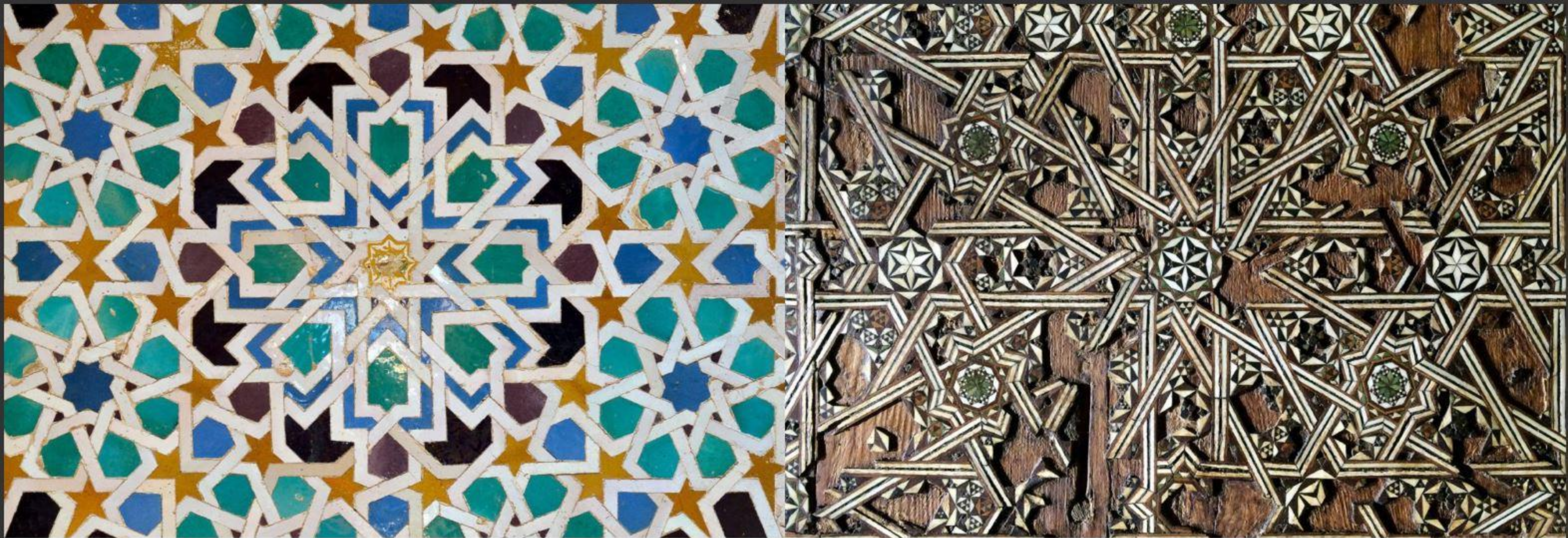
Owen Jones and Jules Gourey original drawings.



Owen Jones and Jules Gourey original drawings.



The Alhambra's three main decorative themes: inscriptions, vegetal backgrounds and geometrical patterns.



“It is the one
in which their
marvellous system
of decoration
reached its
culminating point.”

We find in the Alhambra the speaking art of the Egyptians, the natural grace and refinement of the Greeks, the geometrical combinations of the Romans, the Byzantines and the Arabs. We believe that true beauty in architecture results from that “repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections are satisfied, from the absense of any want”. We never find a useless or superfluous ornament; every ornament arises quietly and naturally from the surface decorated. All lines grow out of each other, there are no excrescences, nothing could he removed and leave the design equally good or better...”

Owen Jones, London 1856



Paco Santiago Marín, birth of a new model: the “50 Aniversario”

Witnessing, alongside the luthier, the very first notes ever to be coaxed from a freshly finished guitar is always an emotional moment. And witnessing the birth of a brand new model even more so.

Paco finishes the
nut of the first ever
50 Aniversario.

“I strive to make the best possible guitar, taking even more care with the details, selecting my wood even more critically.”

We are in Granada, in Paco Santiago Marín's workshop, and Paco is especially nervous: he has just put the strings on his new model of guitar, the *50 Aniversario* and he is awaiting the arrival of its future owner, Japanese guitarist Ichiro Suzuki....

Paco Santiago Marín started working at the age of twelve in his father's cabinetry workshop and later learned the art of guitar making with his uncle, Antonio Marín. He crafts his guitars in the traditional manner, but his constant search for perfection has led him to create new models, each imbued with the knowledge he has gained over a ten-year cycle of work. His studio is in the very heart of Granada, where he works with his son, Luis.

Orfeo – Tell us about the *50 Aniversario* model.

Paco Santiago – I have changed the dimensions slightly and modified some of the details vis-à-vis my previous model, the *40 Aniversario*. The body is about half a centimetre wider, supporting the right arm a bit more. Incredible though it may seem, just



Back made from rosewood and maple.

making that tiny adjustment has changed the sound, improved it, and I am pleased with it.

I always try to satisfy the demand from guitarists who seek higher quality, better balance, greater sustain. The *40 Aniversario* was already quite powerful; I don't think that I could enhance that much further without getting into modern materials. I prefer to stick with the old-fashioned way of making guitars and I think that traditional construction already offers everything we need. I am lucky that I can count on several high-level and very exacting guitarists (Ed.: Joaquín Clerch, David Martínez) who have pushed me to constantly improve my models, slowly but surely, culminating in this latest one, the *50 Aniversario*. I strive to make the best possible guitar, taking even more care with the details, selecting my wood even more critically and taking even more time to craft it. For now that is the best that I can

do; I have put my absolute all into this model, everything that I have learned in 50 years of guitar making.

Orfeo – How do you work your soundboards?

P. S. – I am one of those luthiers who see the soundboard as all-important. My

The *50 Aniversario* combines everything that Paco has learned in 50 years of work.





A new mould was needed for the different proportions of the 50 Aniversario.



tops have very traditional, Torres-inspired asymmetrical fan bracing, but they have evolved over time, as I performed more research and gained experience.

For me, the choice of wood for the soundboard and for the bracing is of equal importance. I gauge the struts by touch and choose them according to their strength. Their flexibility, resistance and the way that they are crafted – every single aspect counts. Each plays a role in the overall balance. Ultimately, the way in which the soundboard is to be made is decided by the hands.

Depending on the order, I use either spruce or cedar. We Granadan guitar makers are quite accustomed to using spruce even though it isn't the easiest of woods with which to work. I find that it takes more knack to get a spruce-topped guitar to sound good than a cedar one. Cedar is more a workable timber, albeit softer and more fragile. I have recently experimented with tops made from American Sitka spruce (*picea sitchensis*) and I was pleased with the results. It is a slightly softer wood than German spruce and produces a sound somewhere between that of spruce and cedar.

Unlike many guitar makers, I am not convinced

that there is one part of the soundboard corresponding to high notes and another to lows.

I have always felt that the guitar needs to be seen as a whole. For example, in the 50 Aniversario model I tried enhancing the highs by further reinforcing the area traditionally considered for lows. And the results are outstanding!

I only ever make changes very gradually – I always fear that any benefits gained in one aspect could be offset by impairments in another. That is why I try, every ten years, to bring together everything that I have learned and accomplished. I was seeking even greater sustain and balance. It is easy to achieve good bass; the hard part is getting good trebles, with the top and second strings being the trickiest of all.

Orfeo – Which woods do you use for the back and sides?

P. S. – I make mostly classical guitars, very few flamenco guitars. It's not out of dislike; it's just that I have focussed more on classical.

I like working with Indian rosewood. I find Brazilian rosewood less user-friendly, so I opt for the Madagascan variety, especially for its looks. My Asian clients are fond of decorative woods. I prefer guitars with a more subdued appearance,

The
30 Aniversario
model is still his
bestseller.



The three-piece back is typical
of many guitars from Granada.



The bracing of the 30 Aniversario
revealed in a ghost view.

Paco's rosette
design bears the
hallmarks of the
Marín family.





Paco with the second guitar that he ever completed unaided.

“The 30 Aniversario is my best-known guitar and still gets the most orders.”

with fewer patterns. A guitar is an instrument, not a piece of furniture; the most important thing is how it sounds.

My son, Luis, also makes guitars and he helps me in the workshop, preparing some components in batches: necks, tops... And yet his guitars are totally different to mine.

Orfeo – Do you still make the 30 Aniversario model?

P. S. - The 30 Aniversario is my best-known guitar and still gets the most orders. One of my earliest ones was for Leo Brouwer in 1991 and we have been good friends ever since. From then on he used that guitar for all of his compositions. I was pleased with the concert guitars that I was producing, but I wanted to take them further, improve them even more, take more time over the details and achieve even higher quality. That's when I decided to pool everything that I had learned over the years, the fruits of successful experimentation,

Cuban postage stamp in honour of Leo Brouwer.



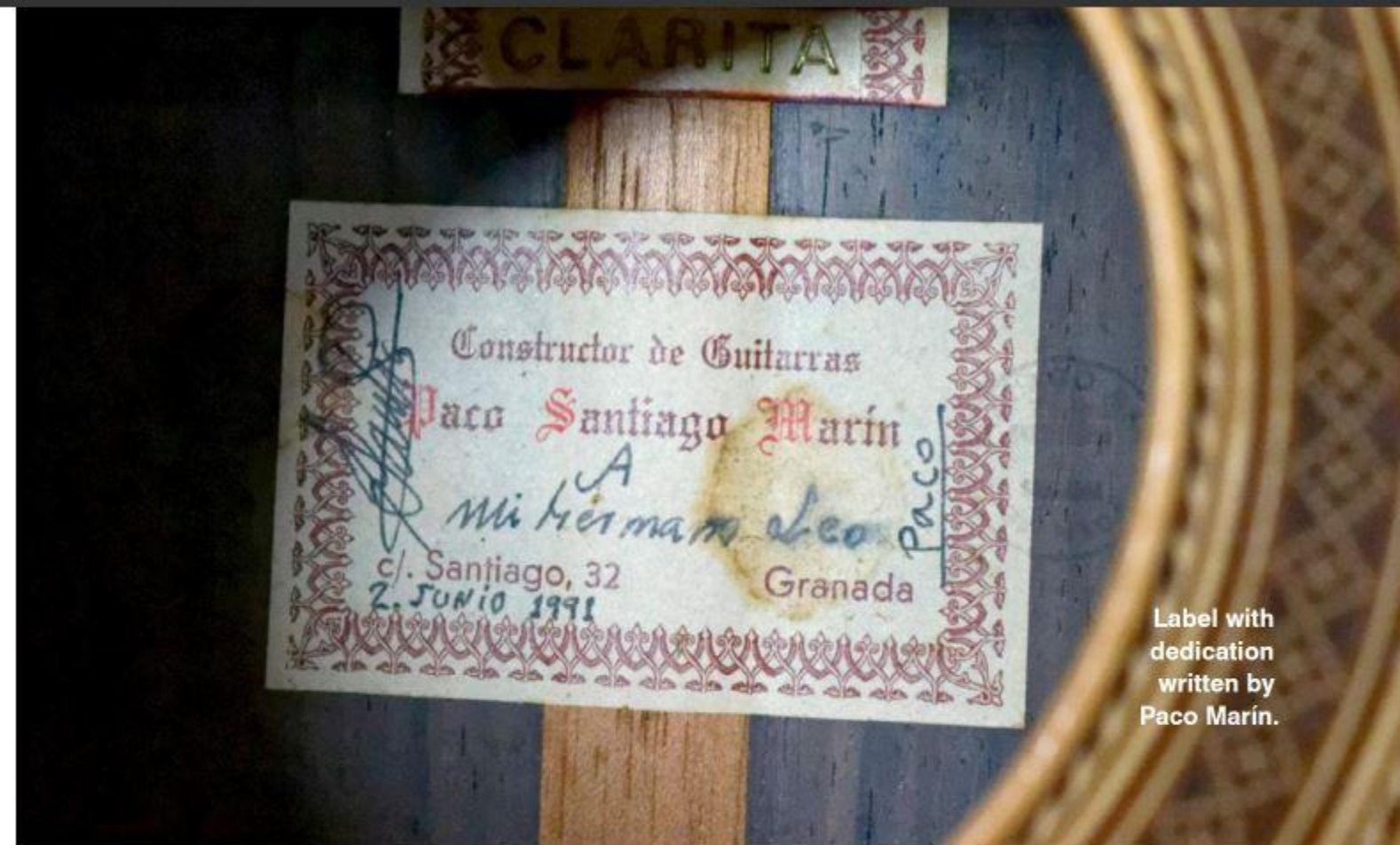
alter the proportions a little, fine-tune the bracing thicknesses and select the very best, most consistent woods.

I sell the 30 Aniversario at a special price, for guitarists with a more modest budget.

Orfeo – What are these two guitars here in your studio?

P. S. - One is the second guitar that I ever built, in 1967. It is very simple, made when I was still learning with Antonio Marín. It has a nice sound, but can't hold a candle to the guitars that I produce these days. In terms of quality, there is simply no comparison. Since I didn't have my own labels at the time, it bears one of Antonio's labels, but with my signature on it.

The other guitar is the one that I made for Leo Brouwer in 1991; it has come back to the workshop for some fresh varnish and new frets. We are such good friends that Leo has had our initials engraved on the head. It's a 30 Aniversario and it featured on a Cuban postage stamp in 2014 in commemoration of Leo's 75th birthday.



Label with dedication written by Paco Marín.



Leo Brouwer's guitar sporting the initials of both luthier and guitarist.

In the street named Calle Jesús y María, Rafael Moreno is in his small studio, finishing a guitar by tracing figures of eight with a rubbing pad, filling the rosewood's pores with pumice, in readiness for the final varnish. From a radio behind him, the tones of Enrique Morente's *cante jondo* fill the room...

Rafael Moreno, the man who talks to wood



Rafael Moreno worked with Manuel Bellido, Antonio Marín and Eduardo Ferrer before setting up his own studio.



"A guitar needs to be beautiful, endowed with its own overall harmony."



The elegance of the bridge, with its 18 holes.

Orfeo – With which woods do you like to work?

Rafael Moreno – It's all the same to me. The firmer, the better: Brazilian rosewood and ebony are my favourites. Cypress, too, if it is a hard specimen. The bonus with cypress is its pleasant, long-lasting fragrance. When I get home after working all day with cypress, my wife asks me not to shower off straight away because she loves the scent that follows me home!

The trouble with timber is that no two pieces are alike. One day Pepe Romero came into the studio with one of his guitars – that I myself had made – and he asked me to create an exact copy but this time with a slightly wider neck. I replied that it would be impossible to perfectly replicate it, but what I could do instead was widen the neck on that self-same guitar. Since the wood can never be the same, you can never make two identical guitars!

Orfeo – What kind of bracing do you use?

R. M. – I have tried various bracing styles, always asymmetrical, but the re-

sults vary little. I am currently bracing my soundboards with an inverted fan, with six struts that open out toward the sound hole.

What is vital, however, is understanding the language of wood. Knowing when it is asking "make me thicker", or "make me thinner", and being able to hear what the wood is saying. When you touch it, the wood itself is already telling you how to proceed. It's not a language taught in schools; it's something that you learn with experience, by making many guitars.

Orfeo – What makes a flamenco guitar and a classical guitar different?

R. M. – There is really only one guitar. I see no difference; I don't think that we can distinguish between classical guitars and flamenco guitars.

Obviously, when I'm crafting a flamenco guitar I make the body narrower and I place the strings in a lower posi-



An unfinished soundboard with inverted bracing.

“What I am aiming for, above all, is to create a balanced instrument. It isn’t a question of volume, but rather of colour, nuances.”



The chain motif is typical of Moreno's latest guitars.



« Not everyone likes
my pomegranate
headstock; some
think it looks
breakable. »



“Gluing is key;
it needs to be
flawless, so that
no vibrations
are lost.”

tion, but the actual construction is the same and the same amount of work goes into it. Each guitarist has a unique way of playing and the same guitar will sound different under different players. What I am aiming for, above all, is to create a balanced instrument. It isn't a question of volume, but rather of colour, nuances. A guitar is like a pair of shoes: you can't go asking someone else to try them on for you.

Orfeo – Not all of your guitars have heads shaped like a pomegranate – why is that?

R. M. – It depends on the order. Not everyone likes my pomegranate; some think it looks breakable. I have always made two designs and some customers prefer the more traditional, Torres-inspired one.

Orfeo – What are the most important features of your construction technique?

R. M. – A guitar is an architectural creation! I aim to bolster the parts that are under most stress. For me, the gluing is key; it needs to be flawless, so that no vibrations are lost. And I make three-pieced backs, adding a central strip to strengthen the middle – the part that works the hardest and has to withstand the most pressure.

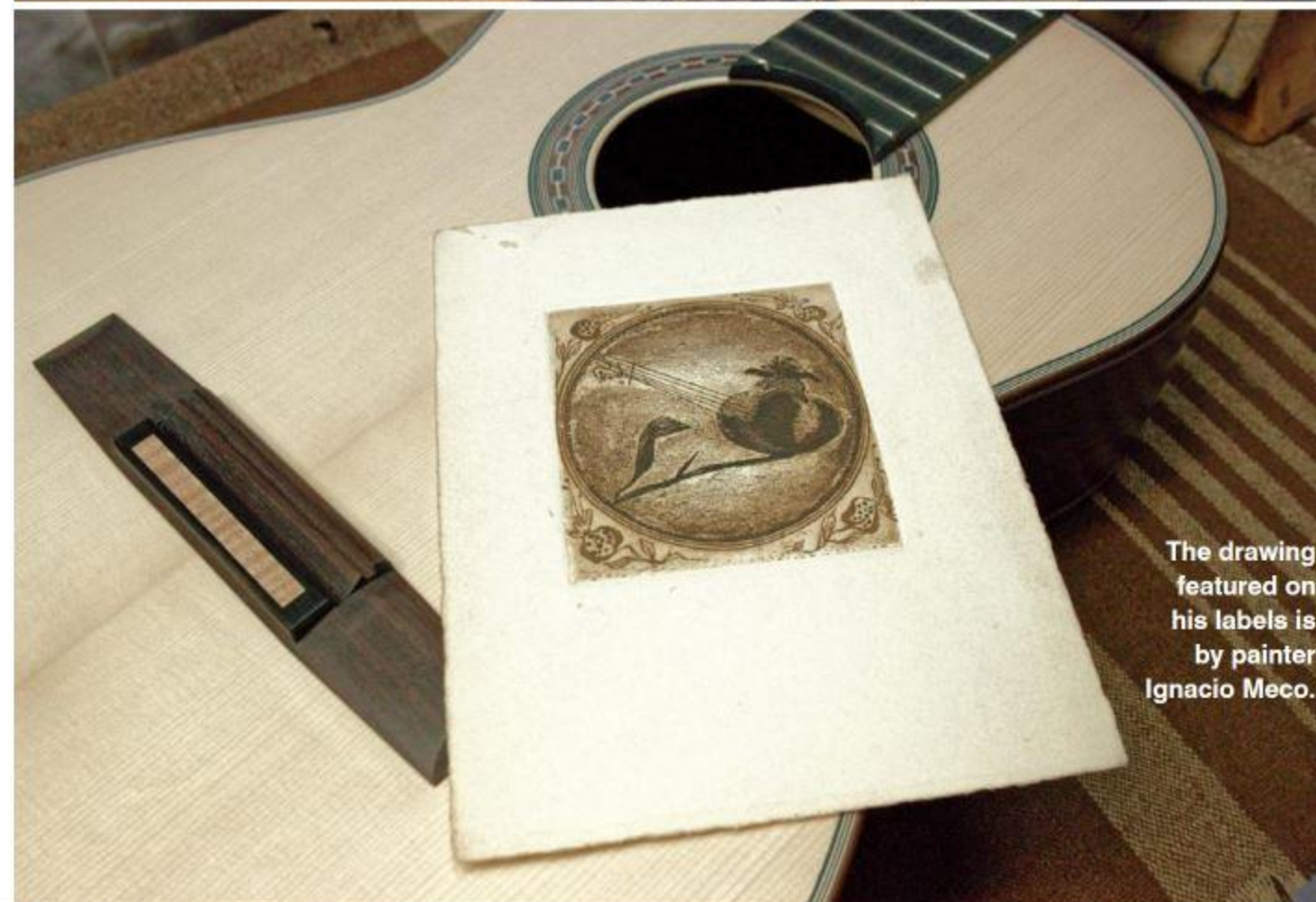
Another detail is the way in which the strings are tied at the bridge; I want the stress exerted by the strings to be as low as possible so as to avoid the bridge tilting forward over time. A slightly domed



**Two headstock styles:
the pomegranate and the
Torres shape.**



« I like making
everything
for the guitar
myself, and
doing things
as I see fit. »



**The drawing
featured on
his labels is
by painter
Ignacio Meco.**

“There’s no fast way to make a slow-cooked stew. And the same goes for making a guitar.”



Eleven string guitar (2003).

top is also imperative, for countering the bridge’s movements.

Personally, I like making everything for the guitar myself, and doing things as I see fit, right down to the bone components. I buy beef bones from the butcher, then cut them myself and whiten them with hydrogen peroxide.

A guitar should be beautiful, endowed with overall harmony.

A well-made instrument is more likely to sound good, regardless of the bracing or wood used. There really are no secrets... what truly counts is the sensitivity with which you work, the care that you put into it. It’s a bit like cooking. The home-cooked meals served by our mothers, our grandmothers, were always so tasty. Why? Because they took hours and hours to prepare, and there was no skimping on the time required to cook



The pot used for heating glue, silent witness to the passage of so many guitars...

them. There’s no fast way to make a slow-cooked stew. And the same goes for making a guitar. Practice makes perfect; all the theory in the world will never substitute practice. You have to keep striving, keep learning. He who thinks he knows it all is mistaken.

I always say that there are guitar makers and there are *guitarreros*, the true luthiers. The guitar maker is out to earn a living; the *guitarrero* wants to create a legacy, not wealth. The *guitarrero* works from passion, pouring love into the craft, and that makes all the difference! If you feel a pang when you finish a guitar and watch it go out the door, if the parting hurts you like you were losing your son, then you know you’re a *guitarrero*!

Each of Rafael Moreno’s friends has a personalised cup hanging in his studio.



Federico García Lorca

(1898 - 1936)

Few poets have written so eloquently about the guitar as Federico García Lorca. He felt a great love for the instrument, not only because of its ancient roots, but also as a form of flamenco expression.

Lorca, born in Fuente Vaqueros, a small village near Granada, is the most-read Spanish poet and playwright of all time. Much of his work was inspired by folk traditions as well as by flamenco and gypsy culture.

In 1922, Lorca organised, along with his friend, composer Manuel De Falla, a *cante jondo* contest in Granada, concerned that otherwise 'these generations-old treasures would go to the grave with the last of the old artists'. In 1928, his poetry collection entitled *Romancero Gitano* (Gypsy Ballads), earned him great renown.

The following poems are excerpts from his *Poema del cante jondo* (Poem of the Deep Song, 1921).

Adivinanza de la guitarra (Riddle of the Guitar) is one of the poems that García Lorca dedicated to Spanish guitarist Regino Sáinz de la Maza and which inspired, in 1956, the guitar solo *El Polifemo de Oro* that British composer Reginald Smith Brindle wrote for Julian Bream.



Above and right, two drawings by García Lorca.

The Guitar

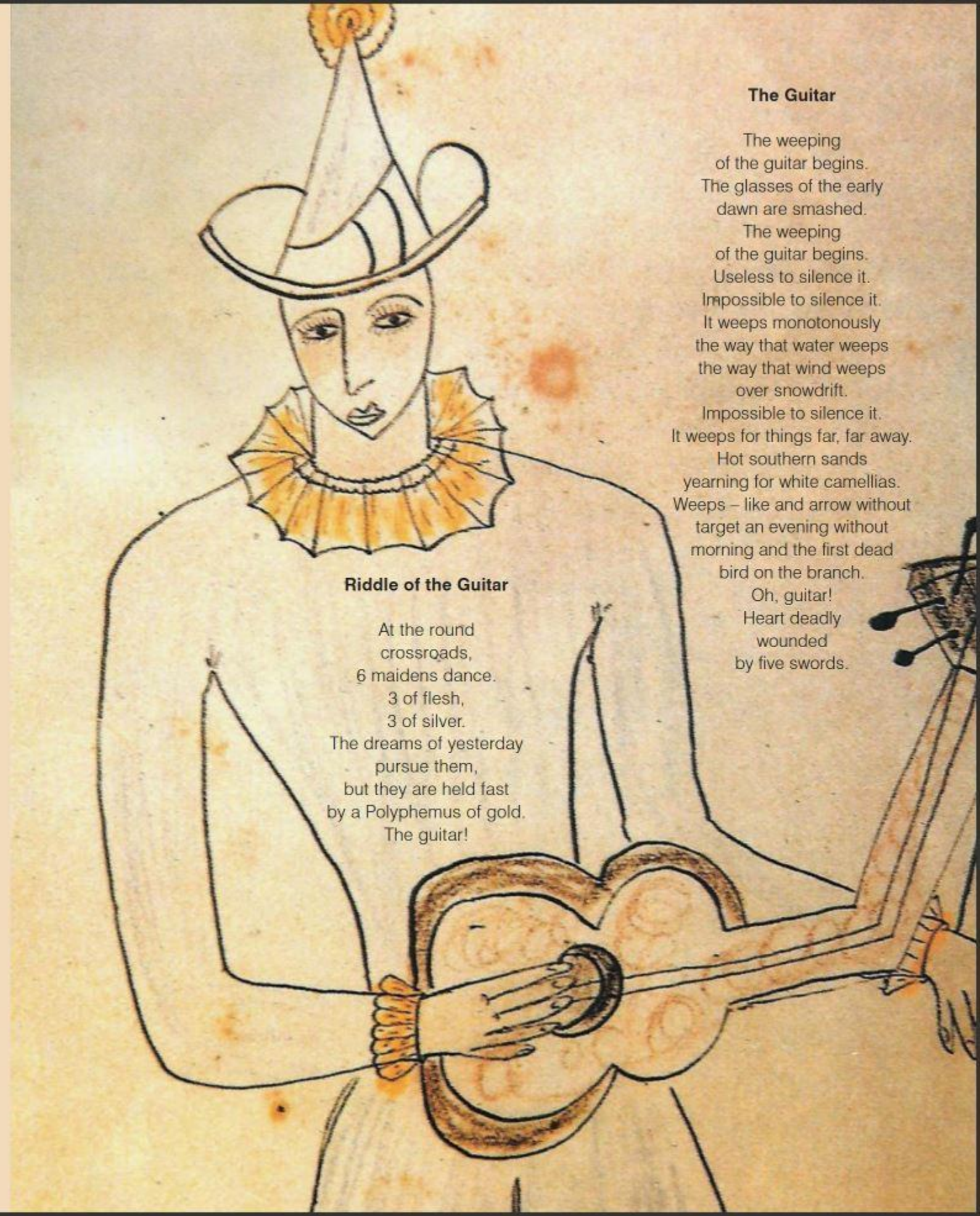
The weeping
of the guitar begins.
The glasses of the early
dawn are smashed.
The weeping
of the guitar begins.
Useless to silence it.
Impossible to silence it.
It weeps monotonously
the way that water weeps
the way that wind weeps
over snowdrift.

Impossible to silence it.
It weeps for things far, far away.
Hot southern sands
yearning for white camellias.
Weeps – like an arrow without
target an evening without
morning and the first dead
bird on the branch.

Oh, guitar!
Heart deadly
wounded
by five swords.

Riddle of the Guitar

At the round
crossroads,
6 maidens dance.
3 of flesh,
3 of silver.
The dreams of yesterday
pursue them,
but they are held fast
by a Polyphemus of gold.
The guitar!



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