



Elvis in the flesh. From Guitarmaker Magazine, #12.

THE SUNBURN SHROUD OF ELVIS

For the the countless avid Elvis fans and true believers in the ongoing legacy of "The King", we thought A.S.I.A. members should be aware of these unprecedented images of Dick Boak, reverend of the notorious Church of Art in Nazareth, Pa. Now documented along with the innumerable other shrouds and legends of his immaculate and everlasting life, Elvis miraculously appeared in the form of a small patch of sunburn on the Reverend's left shoulder nape. Before going to the beach one sunny afternoon, Rev. Dick applied a generous portion of Coppertone sunscreen to what he thought was his entire body. Obviously, an area was missed, and the incredible result speaks for itself. It is Elvis all right and in the flesh you might say, once again "on stage" with his back to a gigantic audience of freckles, playing his D-18. Closer inspection of this undeniable miracle reveals in the image, a highly defined microphone in "The King's" right hand and the slight hint of a pompadour hairdo spewing forward in his legendary style of gyration and charisma.

Should you wish to order actual photographic reproductions of these priceless remembrances and visions of hope (signed by Rev. Dick) \$19.95 each, documents of authenticity included at no extra charge, simply dial:

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Musical Chord Wheels

Having never learned music theory as a child, transposing (changing keys) of songs was a major challenge for me. When I discovered that a simple wheel could be utilized to transpose chords, I made several versions. With each adaptation, I attempted to incorporate more useful information for the guitarist or musician. In the process, I began to understand the underlying mathematical structure of various chord forms.

My first and last chord wheels are shown in their unassembled form below and on the following page. After cutting out the circles and removing the various internal windows with an Exacto knife, the wheels

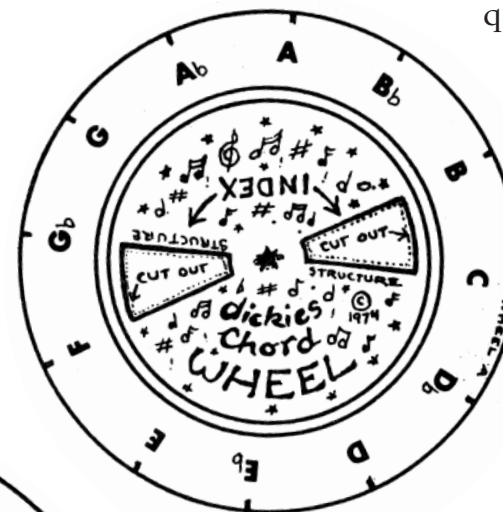
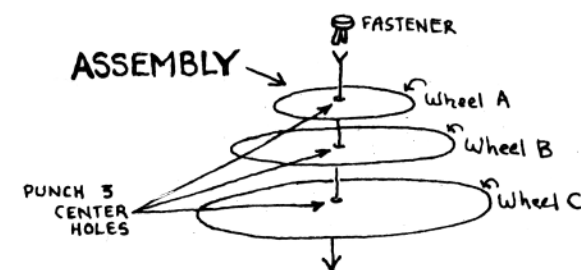
can be stacked and assembled using a simple brass fastener. The most basic *dickie's Chord Wheel* has two basic uses: to transpose the key of a song and to determine the specific notes in a given chord.

As I immersed myself in guitar construction and playing, I learned more about noting, open tuning, chording, major and minor keys, and harmonics. Over the course of several years, I worked through seven evolutions and finally arrived at a final version that I felt was possibly marketable to the broader guitar playing public.

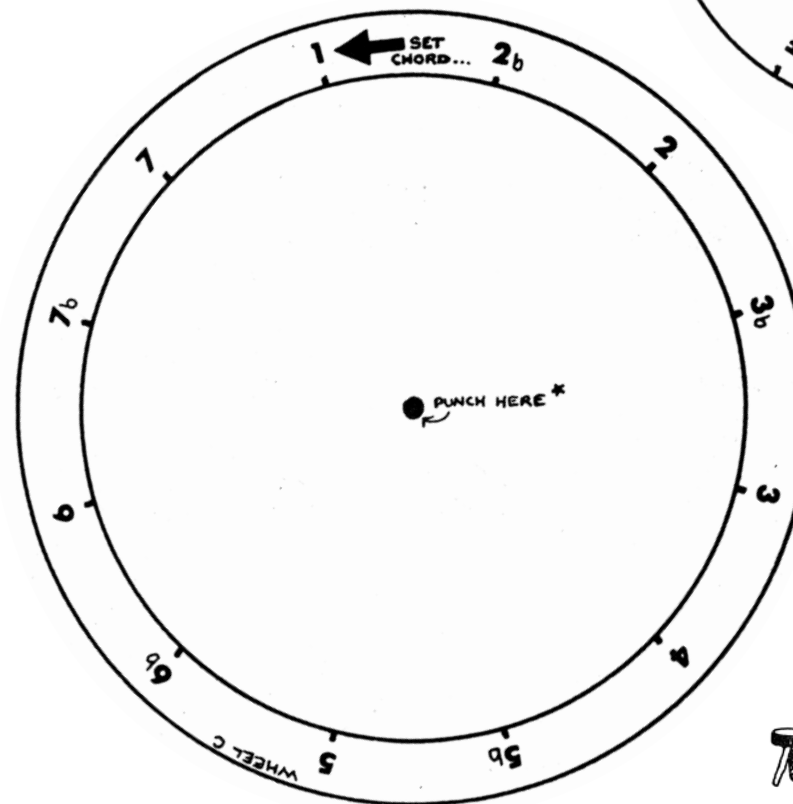
I had seen circular slide rules that were laminated in stiff plastic with a much more sophisticated center hub. These were manufactured by a small company in New Jersey. I visited them with a prototype of my latest variation. They gave me price

quotes that were pretty sobering so instead, I published the *dick boak's Musical Chord Wheel For The Guitarist* in poster form – some assembly required.

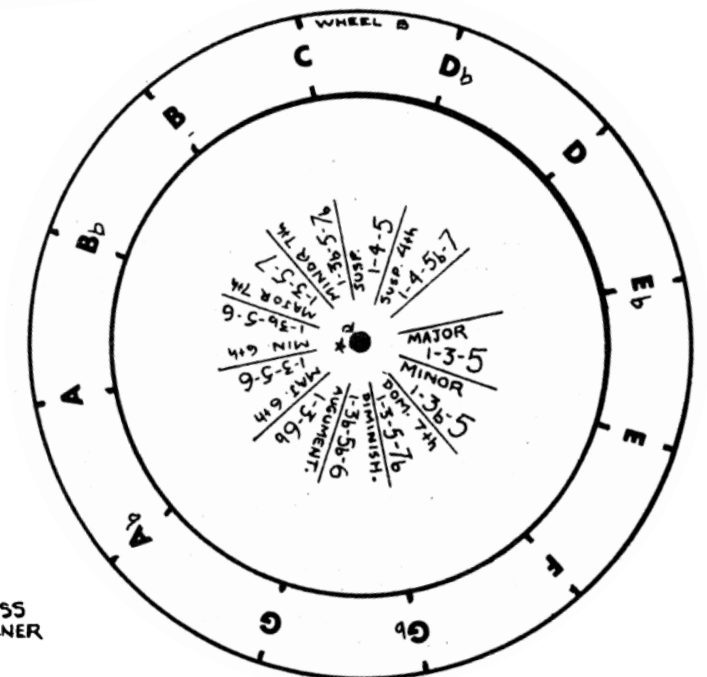
"dickie's Chord Wheel," Pen & Ink, 1974

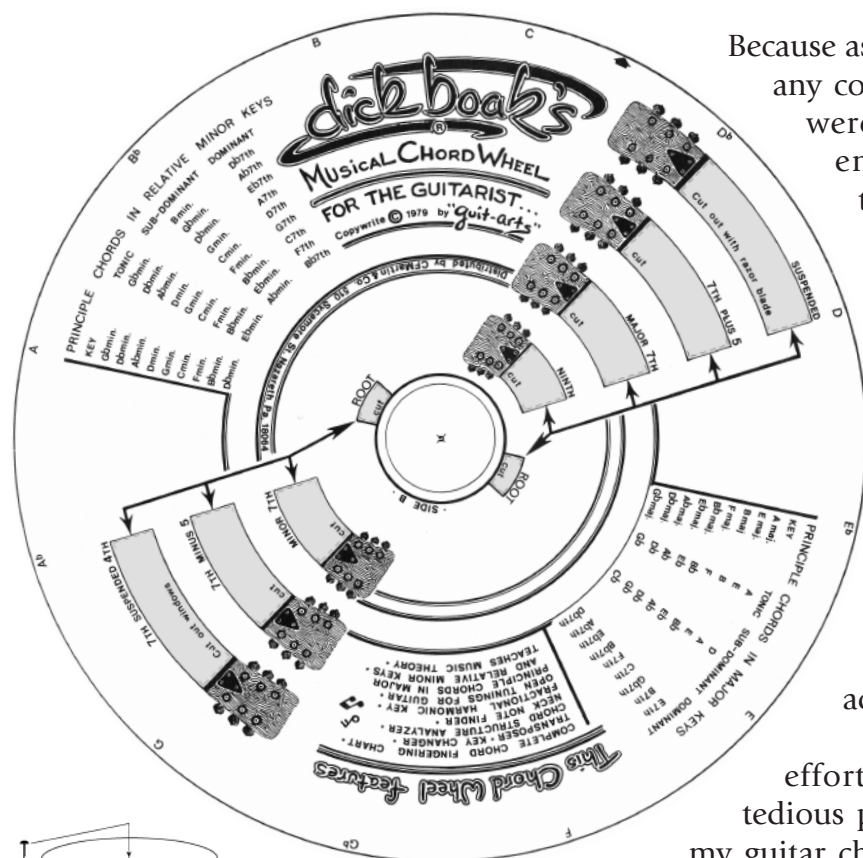


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BRASS
FASTENER





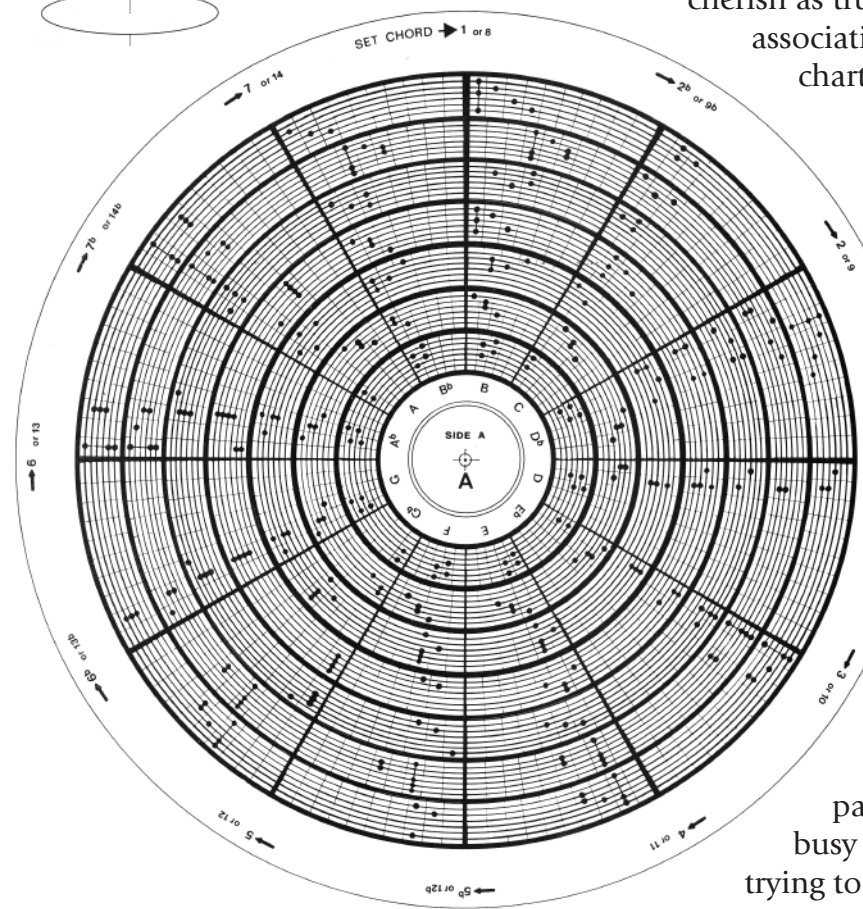
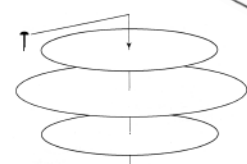
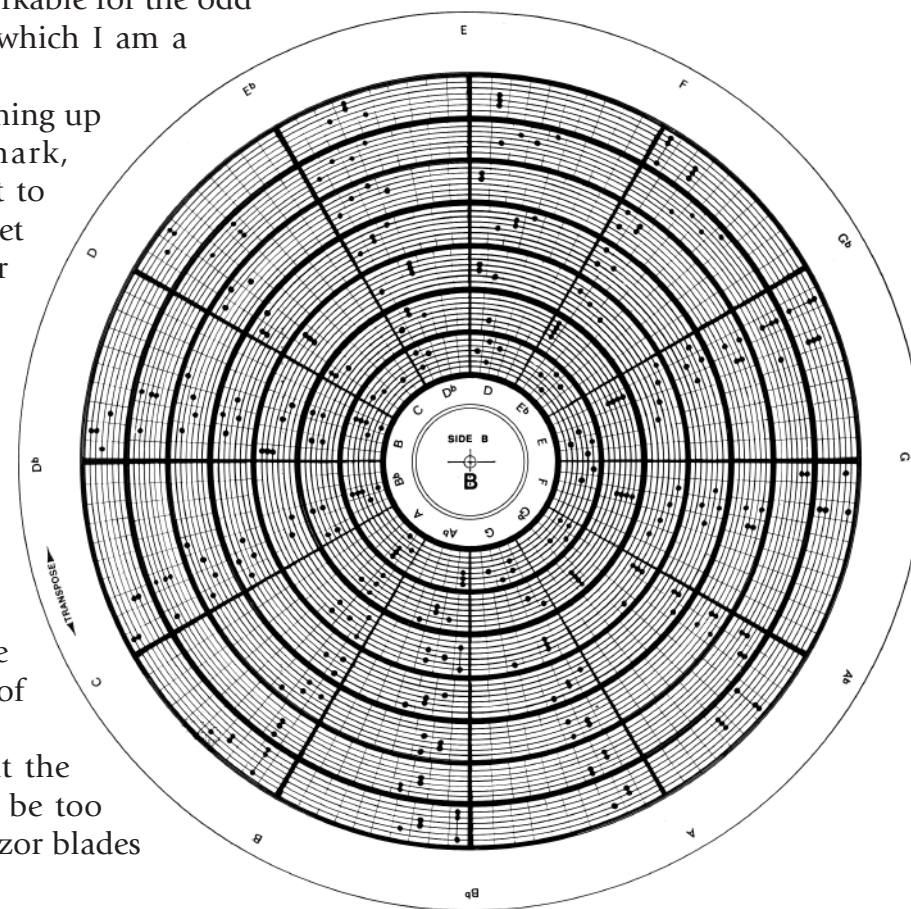
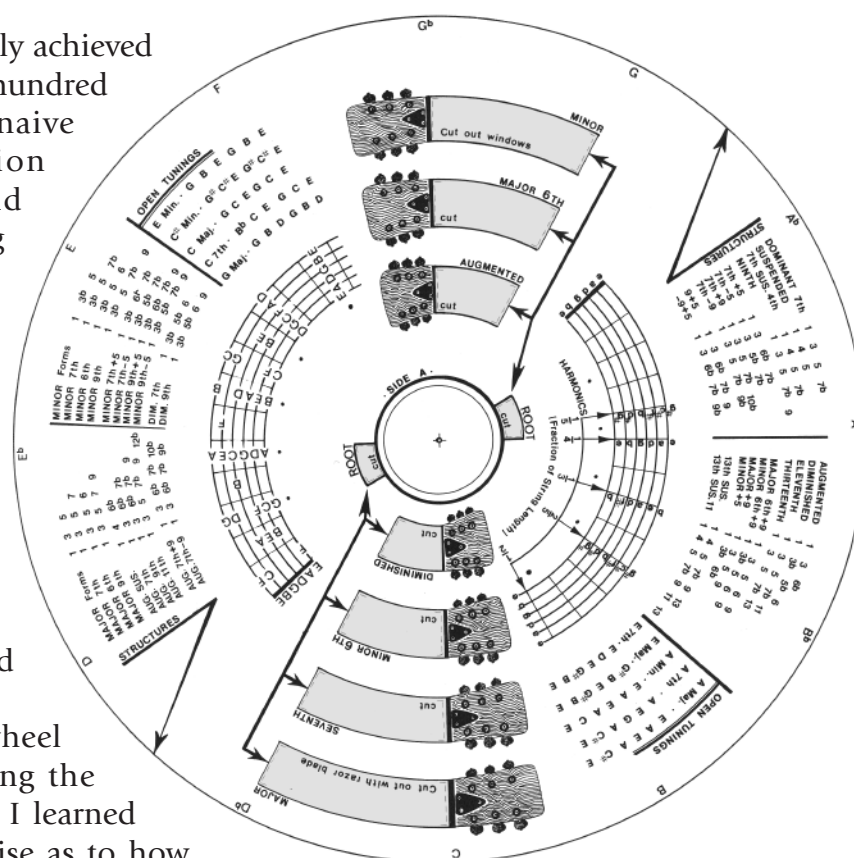
Because assembly is a bit daunting, the wheel never really achieved any commercial success, though I suppose several hundred were sold. For those dedicated, dexterous or naive enough to have actually put the contraption together, I hope that some fascination and usefulness was reaped. I shouldn't be making apologies though. In hindsight, the idea is actually quite clever.

If you wish to try this out, place the page on a photocopier, enlarging the wheels to a greater diameter if possible, since the circles on this page have been reduced to approximately half their actual size. The two large wheels at the bottom can be carefully aligned and spray-adhesived back to back. The two smaller windowed wheels can then be positioned accordingly and assembled.

This is most likely the last of my chord wheel efforts. They served their purpose for me. During the tedious process of inking and illustrating the wheels, I learned my guitar chords and fabricated my rather twisted premise as to how music works. Piano instructors shriek at the gross simplification of what they cherish as true, but the whole system remains quite workable for the odd association of musically-challenged guitarists of which I am a charter member.

I certainly was proud of myself for coming up with the ingenious *Guit-arts*™ trademark, though as of yet it has never been lent to any other project. Occasionally, I meet young inventors that have made their own compulsive stabs at unraveling the musical DNA. In fact, many of them actually seek me out as a sage or advisor. I always try to explain that their passion for the analysis of musical structures may never reap the big payoff. They all seem so surprised at this, but the sad reality is that guitar music can survive and prosper quite well without the use or need of any of these contraptions.

Nonetheless, there are long lines at the patent office. You won't find me there. I'll be too busy on the floor with my scissors, glue and razor blades trying to put this damn thing together!





*Pinstripe Electric Guitar (1 of 2) by Dick Boak, 1979
Mahogany, maple, rosewood, Haz Labs active electronics.*



Business Card For Ken Dieterly. 1980

Ken Dieterly

Martin's Purchasing Manager Bill Minnich had previously worked in the furniture industry. When Martin sought a woodworking shop to outsource the lamination and machining of E-18 electric guitar bodies and necks, Bill remembered his old friend Ken Dieterly of Milford Furniture Company. Ken was the perfect choice. He was an old school woodworker with a particular expertise in jury-rigged efficiency. He loved the challenge of a difficult project and tackled everything with a "can do" enthusiasm.

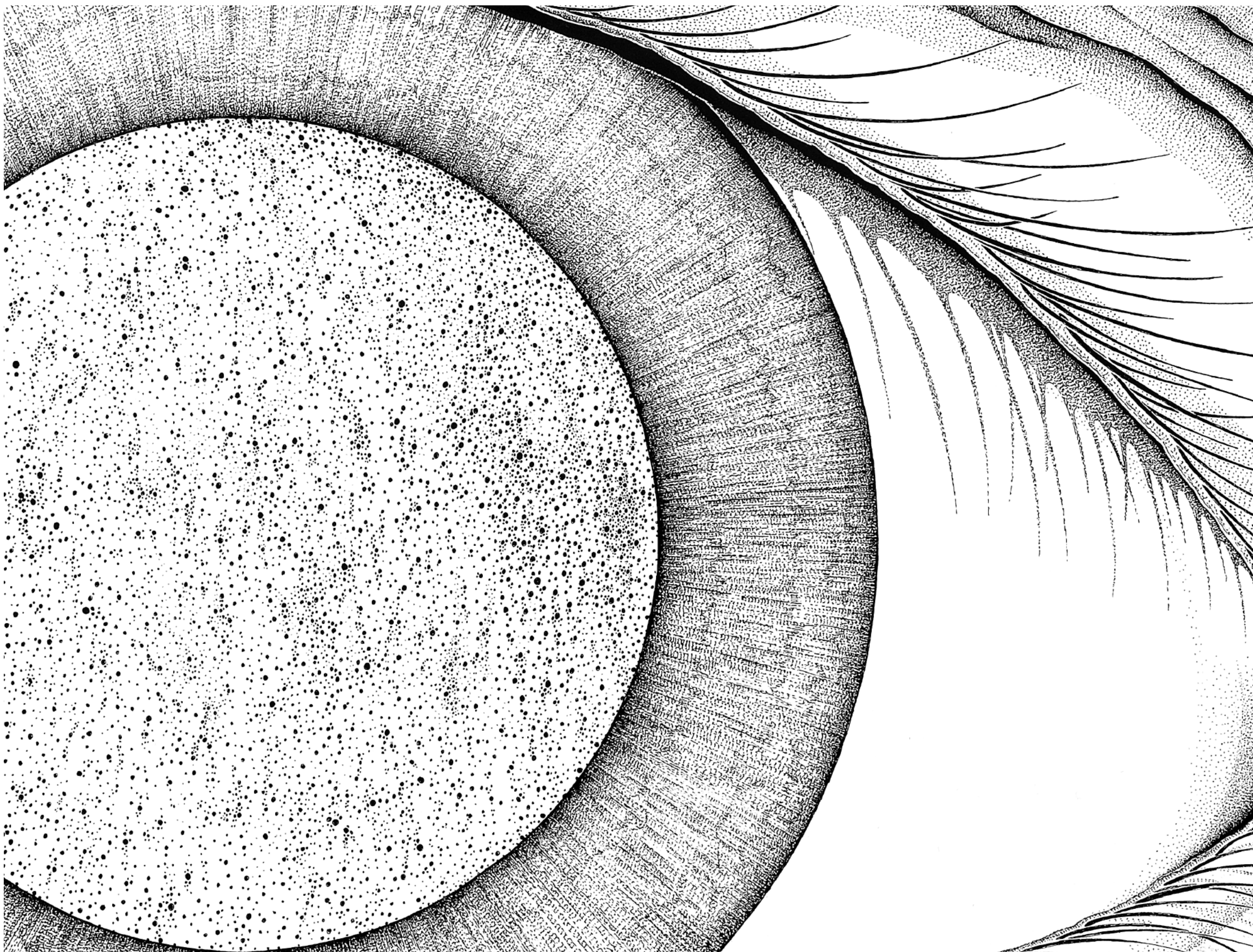
I developed a great respect for Ken and we became friends. His machining and finishing capabilities enabled us to collaborate and complete several personal guitar projects that were intended to extend the designs that Martin had settled upon. Our mutual obsession with lamination combined with his abundance of native hardwood cutoffs yielded the two neck-thru-body prototypes shown on this page. He also produced a popular line of Martin-branded butcher block cutting boards made with similar contrasting wood patterns.

Ken knew many great woodworkers. Through him, I became friends with a local woodturner named Mike Mode whose passion for lathe turning inspired me. Mike went on to become one of America's most respected turners.

When the *Church of Art* started to take shape, I enlisted Ken's talents to fabricate the beautiful maple and walnut kitchen cabinets in the church and Mike made special ebony and boxwood drawer pulls. This was all in keeping with my desire to construct my entire reality out of wood.



*Pinstripe Electric Guitar (2 of 2) by Dick Boak, 1979
Walnut, maple, mahogany, rosewood, Haz Labs active electronics.*



Galactic Eye; Pen & Ink, Erased Colored Pencil, 1981.

The Apple And The Rose

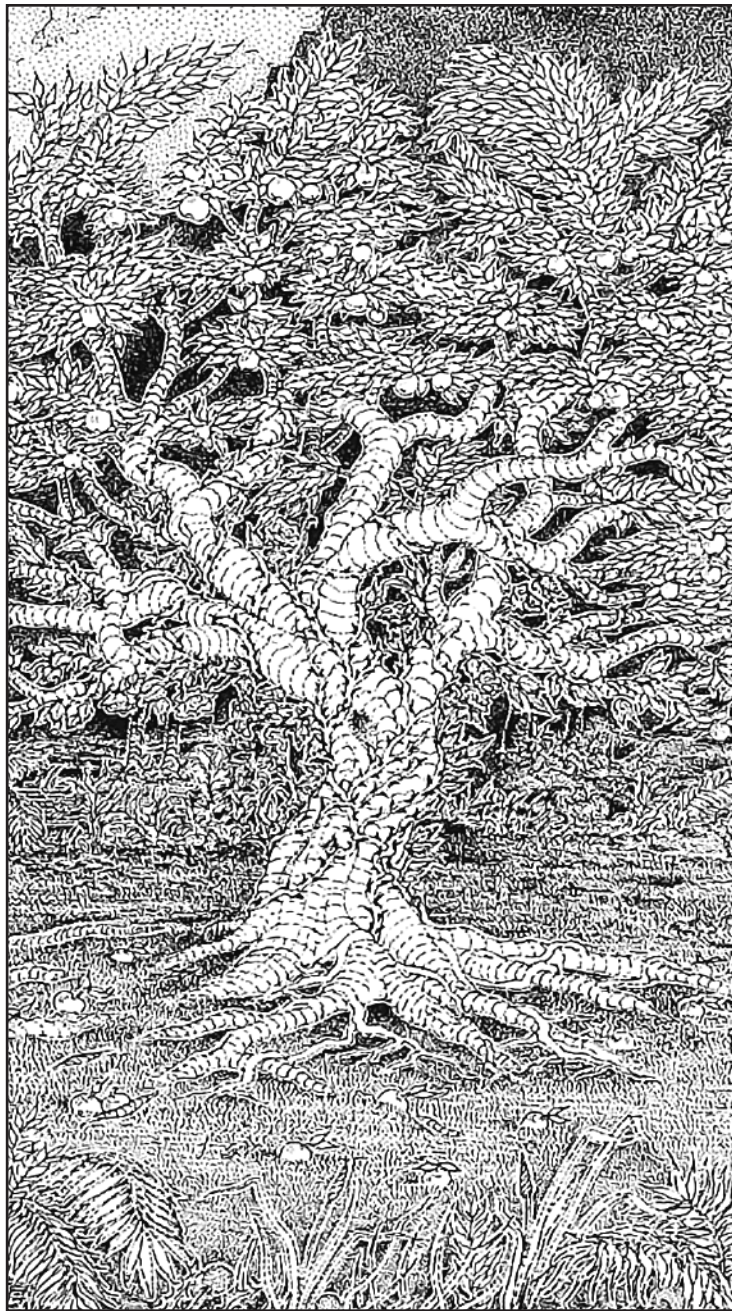
During my last month in Gettysburg, I had discovered a wild apple tree in a remote corner of the woods. The gnarled tree was entwined with a rose vine around its trunk (*See page 33*) and the resulting expression in the branches was one of beautiful suffering. I couldn't relinquish the image from my mind. The symbolism was too pertinent.

One afternoon, I found myself driving near Chambersburg with no pressing commitments and decided to take the longer route past Ortanna, camera in hand, to seek out the tree. Retracing my blurred recollection of the path we had taken that day, years before, I wandered through the thickets, crisscrossing back and forth between the barbed wire perimeters, but the large property wasn't a regular rectangle. It wasn't even a comprehensible shape. I gave up at dusk, emerging in a daze through the thick entangled trees over a wall of loose fieldstones into the parking lot of an abandoned dairy bar. The cars whizzed by on Route 30.

I began to wonder whether my recollection was perhaps induced, or a sheer figment of an overactive imagination. It didn't really matter. I had already staked my emotional claim to the image. It bore simply bore too much meaning to ignore.

So, I quartered a sheet of illustration board and attempted to draft the symbiotic tree and vine, first in pencil, then in ink. My mind, however, had allowed the setting to evolve toward an ideal that was simply too vivid to capture. Blind to the futility, I worked for three years on the drawing and in doing so achieved a higher degree of tediousness than I ever thought possible. I had hoped that such a time commitment might somehow enable a deeper meaning to be revealed, but instead the drawing was overworked, static and devoid of emotion – doomed from the start perhaps, by the simple constraints of india ink and paper.

Even though the analogies didn't emerge clearly for onlookers, the drawing still serves to clarify and commemorate my own memory of the apple and the rose. I published prints and used them as the starting point for telling the greater story. I suppose this was useful, but the real dilemma was that there was an ever increasing disparity between the images in my mind and the images that I could render. I



had reached a technical wall with no further desire to pursue detail for detail's sake. This would not be my last drawing, but it certainly would signify the end of my extended efforts.

Instead, my Macintosh was beckoning with its intriguing collection of resident font families, as if to insinuate that the hand would eventually surrender to the screen, mouse, and printed circuit. I wanted to publish books. To do so with any integrity, I would need to learn every aspect of the process: writing, design, scanning, image manipulation, page layout, pre-press, editing and proofing. I soaked my pens in ammonia and set them on my shelf.

The Apple And The Rose

The roses wrap their vines around
the gnarled apple root
and spiral up the trunk
into the branches bearing fruit.

With symbiotic dignity
upward from two seeds
they grew together gracefully
as if they share the need.....

To flourish, then to blossom,
to bud, and then to flower;
the roses poised in passion,
the apples poised in power.

But as they grew, the apple tree
shot upward toward the light.
The rose vine counteracted
and pulled the branches tight.

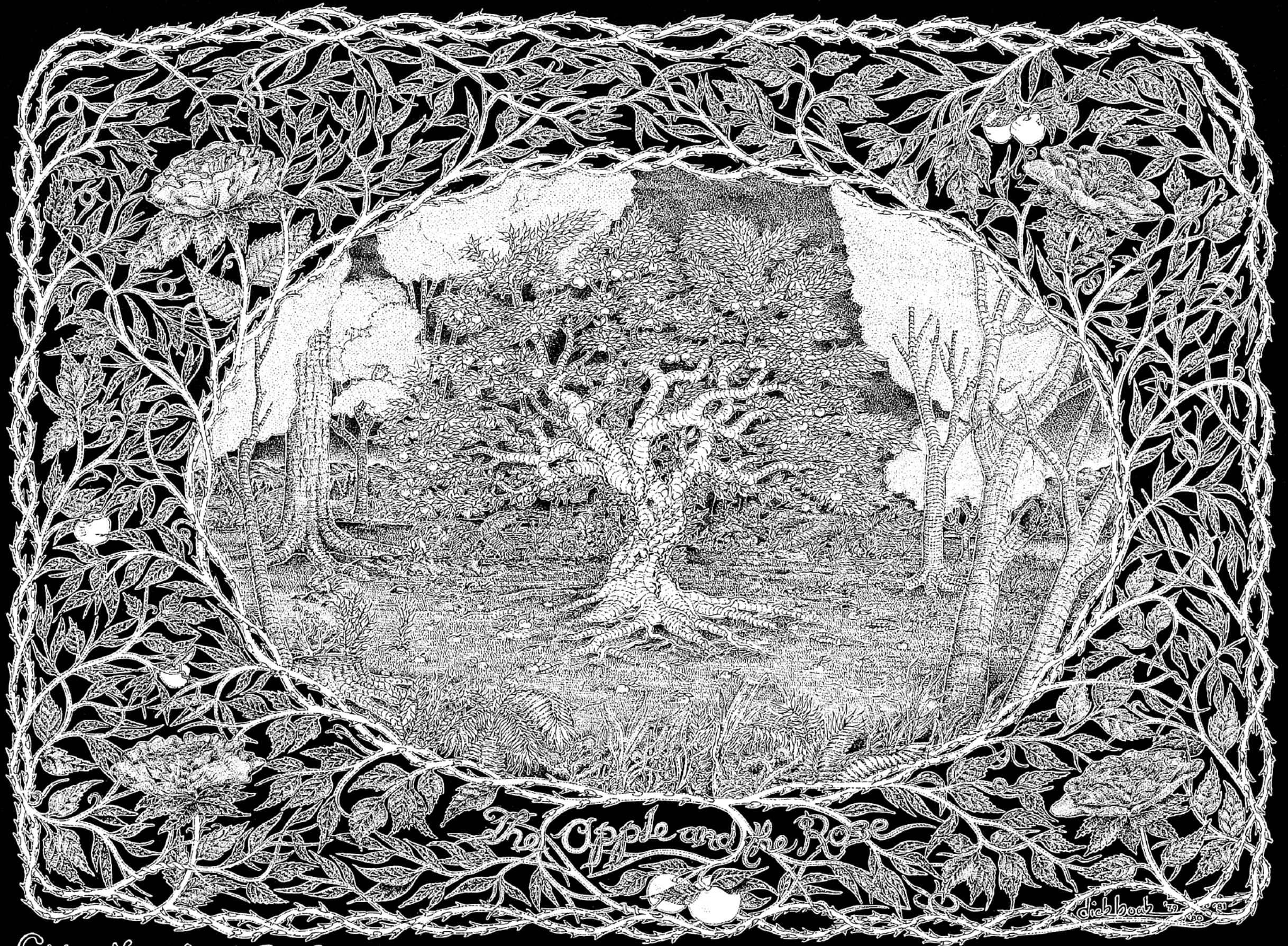
Resulting in a compromise
of harmony and pain
brought on by spring's emerging sun
and fueled with summer rain.

When August saw its final days
the apples turned to red.
The roses too had blossomed.
Like wounds their colors bled.....

.....into a scene more beautiful
than any tree could be
or any bud that bears its flower
before humanity.

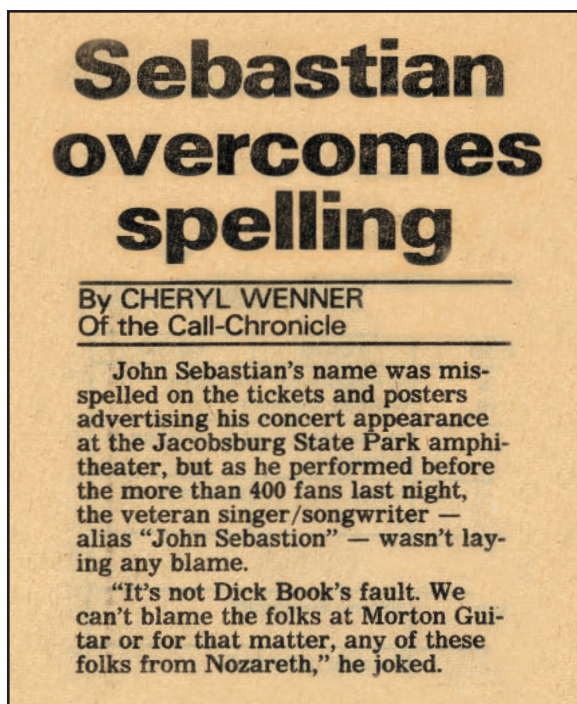
Some will pick the roses.
Some will weave the crown.
Some will shift their ladders
to pull the apples down.

But I will stand in awe
and wonder where the knowledge goes
The hidden beauty locked within
the apple and the rose.



Caledonian Visions from the Final Frontier

The Apple & The Rose, Pen & Ink, 1979-1981



"Sebastion" strikes back with intro to Call-Chronicle review.

Concerts In The Park

The summer nights in the church were unbearably hot. I had noticed that there was a thriving classical concert series at Jacobsburg State Park and I approached the park director with a proposal to hold some Church of Art events at the park's lovely outdoor amphitheater.

The first event was *Paxton In The Park*, featuring folk singer-songwriter Tom Paxton. Although we barely broke even, it was a fun and comfortable evening and I immediately made plans for a second night with *The Lovin' Spoonful's* John Sebastian. Mike Krisukas and Mark Golin opened for John on electric guitar and special effects violin. I promoted the event heavily with newspaper coverage and hand drawn posters, and in spite of my blatant misspelling of "Sebastion's" name, the show drew a nice turnout. We collected our five dollar admission at a small card table along the mulched pathway leading to the stage.

The rain held back long enough for the music to hang suspended in the humid air. Afterwards, I joked with Dale Prinkey, the park director, about my poster misspelling and the overall success of the evening, alluding to the possibility of expanding the scope of future shows.

"Thanks for letting me do this," I offered. Dale responded, "It's sure great that your church is sponsoring these events. It wouldn't work without your non-profit status."

"Ahhh," I stuttered. "It's not exactly a nonprofit." "What?" shrieked Dale. "You can't charge for events in a State Park unless you're a nonprofit. I thought you were a minister at a church!"

"Well, it's the Church of Art, and it's in a church building, but it's where I live and I'm not exactly a minister."

So that was the end of that. We jointly agreed to keep the impropriety to ourselves, for the park's sake and for my own. I began looking for better venues, but the summer was nearly spent. I had become accustomed to attending the Philadelphia Folk Festival every year with the Martin van packed to the gills with guitars, strings, and literature. I invited Dale Unger to help me manage the stand, and just so we had plenty of time to enjoy the music, we decided to take our sleeping bags and camp out.



Susan

Dale and I were busy hawking our wares at the Folk Festival when all of a sudden there she was, a vision in her shorts and her tank top – my wife-to-be – Susan Ellis. She was there with her two sisters and a larger group that included one of my artist friends, Bruce Fackenthal from Easton. They were all camping over in tent city and we were invited over for dinner. How could we refuse – fresh corn on the



Church of Art Kitchen. Photo by Susan Ellis. 1985

cob and sirloin steak. In spite of the slightly ineffective protectiveness of her older sisters, we were drawn by each other's gravity. I played songs for her on the autoharp and we talked for hours. When the campfire coals grew dim, we snuck away to her tent.

After returning home from the festival the next day, I just couldn't get her off my mind. I called Bruce for her number. She was surprised but pleased to hear from me. In the months that followed, we grew inseparable. She loved the Church of Art and shared my dream of fabricating a culture from the ground up. Sue was a capable artist in her own right and was studying studio art at the Tyler School of Art, a division of Temple just north of Philadelphia. She was adept in ceramics, especially on the wheel. She was also enthralled with glass blowing – a particular specialty at Tyler. I visited her there often and on weekends she came home with regularity on the Carl Bieber Bus Lines.

By Christmas time, Sue was commuting to Philadelphia in her baby blue Beetle. Its rusted parts were falling by the wayside, but miraculously, the Volkswagen flourished.

Our relationship flourished too. I had always been told that I had a "challenging" personality and that it would take a special woman with particular insight and patience to harmonize with me. Sue possessed a sense of humor that seemed to nest well with mine, and of course, our mutual commitment to art was a critical component of our union.



Raku Bowl by Susan Ellis. 1985

One endearing aspect that I learned early on about Sue was that she had only nine toes. This was not a deformity but rather the result of a rather traumatic childhood bicycling accident. It was actually her "ring" toe – the little Piggy that had none! Sue was somewhat sensitive about this slight impairment. She certainly didn't wish to draw attention to it. Enter, yours truly.

I had some very rare pink ivory wood from Africa, highly prized in the art of wood marquetry for its remarkable fleshlike color. The cannibals are rumored to kill and consume those foolish enough to attempt smuggling the sacred tribal wood, hence the laws of supply and demand make it all the more worthy of poaching. In my infinite sensitivity and wisdom, I decided to sculpt a prosthetic toe for Sue from the pink ivory. I picked a perfect piece and spun it on the lathe into the approximate but slightly oversized shape. From there I rasped and filed it to its final shape. For the toenail I had a lovely slab of Mother of Pearl that I cut and inlaid in a half moon crescent. My plan was to use loop and hook Velcro to attach it, but the further I got with my project the more I realized how weird and obsessive I was being. There was no way that Sue was ever going to put this thing on her foot and be seen in public, though I confess that I still envision her in elegant high heels, all nine toes fully exposed and one lovely imposter hiding among the bunch. Now that little project resides appropriately in a dusty

little box somewhere in the basement.

Sue is a hard worker and early on in our relationship, she showed her true colors. Perhaps we had been watching a few too many episodes of *This Old House*, because she decided to tackle painting the trim on the front of the church. This was particularly difficult because there is no simple way to position a ladder on or near the steps. I had built a makeshift platform out of 2 x 4s and plywood that nested nicely onto the steps and as I headed out to do some errands, I encountered Sue stirring a gallon of white latex paint. The ladder was perched with one side on the top cement step and the other precariously leveled upon my makeshift platform. I handed the gallon of paint up to her as I departed.

When I returned several hours later, I sensed something was very wrong. There was white paint everywhere – on the ladder, on the steps, running in tiny porcelain rivulets down the street. An empty



Church pews. Photo by Susan Ellis. 1985



Three Raku Vases by Susan Ellis. 1985

paint can lay on its side in a puddle with the brush. There was no sign of Sue except for a footprint near the front door. Cautiously I entered, following the white alternating footprints to the shower where I found her, glazed in white like a porcelain sculpture.

She had needed to move the ladder and climbed down to jockey it to its new location, but she had neglected to bring the paint can down from the top rung. In one jerky motion the can came down with its full gallon of liquid directly upon her head, giving new meaning to the term "white girl." At the time she missed the humor, but gradually she recognized the hilarity of the situation. In our marriage, there have been many incidents of this nature, but generally I am the one wearing the ridiculous expression.

Sue joined fully in planning the concerts and adding a woman's touch to my otherwise haphazard lifestyle. We strived for diversity with our Church of Art happenings, co-hosting a batch of private weddings for friends and family. In the basement, Sue's pottery studio was in full swing.

That time was a crowning moment for the Church of Art. Our mutual quest for creativity and craft blended into a comfortable culture. Our studios, concerts, and dinner parties were a perfect diversion from any weekday duress. I was immersed at Martin and Sue had taken a job in the Summer Programs office at Lafayette College. Everything seemed to be fitting together.



Black Sun. Pen and Ink Sketch. 1982

Anti-Man

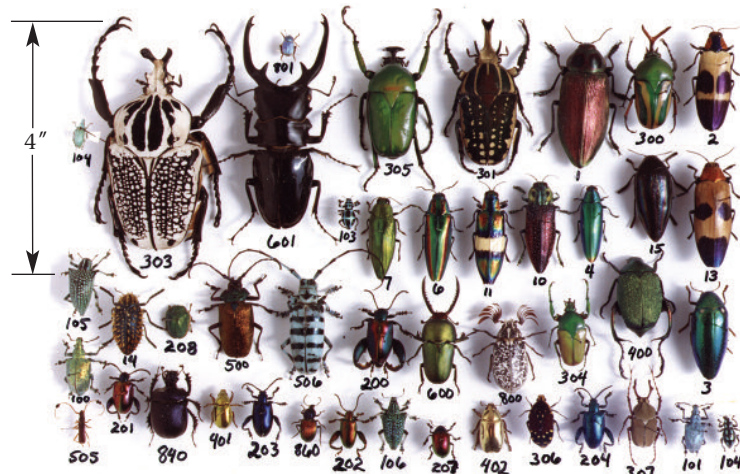
I continued to perceive my laborious technical obsession as being in direct conflict with my reverence for the graceful and overwhelming perfection of nature – not to mention the ongoing human obliviousness and disregard for its ecology and preservation. Rebelling against my own internal notions, control was abandoned in favor of physical expression. Tedium deferred to brevity. Industriousness succumbed to economy.

A year later, Sting would sing of a little black spot on the sun, but my sun had already been rendered fully dark, in protest of the human blight. As punishment, mankind would rarely be allowed to participate in my parallel world.



The Bugman Cometh

At the Peters Valley Art Community in northwestern New Jersey, I met an artist named Bob Natalini who was supplementing his sculpture and jewelry making by mounting and framing exotic beetles from around the world. I became enamored with the colorfast splendor of his insect array and commissioned him to enroll me in what came to be known (in our household) as *The Bug Of The Month Club*. At some point, my thoughtful and realistic wife Susan put a stop to the beetle invasion, rescuing me from a path that would surely have rendered our home uninhabitable, but not before I had amassed several dozen of Bob's most disturbing specimens. As a final gesture, I urged him to "compose" a new species from his collection of replacement beetle body parts, but this was not in his repertoire. Bob did however, mark the back of each mounted beetle with the species and country of origin, insuring that each of those locations would never ever appear on the Ellis/Boak list of potential vacation destinations.



Bug collection obsession. Photos courtesy of Bob Natalini.



Organicism. Pen and Ink. 1984

Organicism

Well, I guess I've had it wrong all these years. I looked up "organicism" in the dictionary and it said: "the theory that the total organization of an organism is the determinant of life processes, rather than the functioning of individual organs." That's very holistic, but not what I had intended at all.

When I say "organicism," I mean "organic" (derived from something living) or "natural" (determined by nature) as opposed to inanimate, technical, mechanical or lifeless. Lines drawn organically cannot be generated with rulers and compasses, rather they grow in the same way that their counterparts do in nature. They are free and loose and alive – they go where they wish to go, in search of light and nourishment.



Vignette. Pencil, 1983

Guitar Immersion

I quickly noticed on the Martin bulletin board that employees were allowed to buy one guitar per year at employee prices. I didn't waste any time getting over to the sales department to see how this worked. I ended up buying a T-28 tiple on the spot. It was a beautiful little instrument – one of Mr. Martin's favorites – inspired by the folk instruments of Central and South America.

I loved that little tiple and quickly learned to play it in open tuning, but the intonation was off and soon the extreme tension on the thin bridge caused it to separate. I designed an alternate pin-style bridge with an angled saddle based upon a five-concourse twelve-string arrangement without the pair of bass E strings. That seemed to solve both problems.

During work time, I became so tremendously immersed in drafting guitar parts that in the evenings, in my own shop, I would put what I had learned to the test by delving into what I considered experimental instrument making. It wasn't long before a local guitar enthusiast named Jay Black joined me in my basement as an apprentice of sorts. We put together a batch of guitars, some with extra strings (at right) and some with unique or odd tonewood combinations. Jay became very proficient with lacquering, no thanks to me, and soon his career took him off to the highly esteemed repair shop of Roger Sadowsky in New York City.

So I was left to my own devices. Fascinated by the tonal effect of variable sizes, shapes, and materials, and given my unprecedented access to nearly fifty exotic wood species at the Martin Sawmill, I began to test the viability of a wide assortment of beautiful tonewoods, in particular the harder species that were appropriate for the reflective surfaces of the back and sides. These experiments were often met with less than successful results, since the alternating humidity and dryness in my string of shops was always out of my control, plus the woods that appealed to me were often the unstable ones.

In particular, I was enamored with the tonal possibilities of ebony and had bought a then rare bookmatch, wide enough to make a 00 12-fret sized instrument. David Nichols agreed to help me with a "Church Of Art" inspired inlay plus a three-stranded infinity logo that bore particular meaning for me.



*Modified Martin T-28 Tiple, 1976
With 5-Concourse Pin Bridge & Drop-In Saddle*



*9-string acoustic guitar by Jay Black and Dick Boak, 1978
Sunburst top, rosewood back and sides, treble strings doubled.*



*First Martin "Custom 01" (Serial #410400) 1979
Style 45 neck, Style 41 Body, Gold Schallers, Toned Lacquer*

The guitar was spectacular in spite of my tendency to overset the neck angle and I included it at a local exhibit with my drawings. I learned the hard way that internally lit display cases can cook guitars dry to the bone. That poor instrument imploded.

Nonetheless, I forged on to complete a surprising array of handcrafted instruments, many of which are shown in the pictorial gallery of guitars that follows. Generally I wasn't concerned with selling my guitars, because I would invariably grow quite attached to each one. I did enjoy playing them, limited though I was in musicianship. Furthermore, I certainly didn't want to jeopardize my position at Martin by giving the impression that I was interested in competing in the company's broader marketplace. My collection of personal instruments began to grow and so did my comprehension of exactly what makes a guitar tick.

I spread my efforts equally between acoustic and electric instruments, going off on tangents wherever possible. In keeping with the idea that all individualized components should be optimized and coherent in design, I rarely would allow the use of plastic or metal where there was the potential for a purer fabrication in wood.

As a result, the instruments were often more sculptural than practical, but valuable to me nonetheless. Experiencing the challenges and frustrations of building increased my respect for Martin's underlying ability to garner an assembly line of hand craftsmanship. Rarely a year went by that I didn't take advantage of my employee guitar purchase privilege and in 1979, after a year of arguably obnoxious prodding, Martin agreed to build me what in hindsight was a rather plain customization. It was a D-41 with a D-45 neck upgraded from utilitarian Grover tuners to the more prestigious gold Schallers with vintage-toned top lacquer and a Barcus Berry under-the-saddle pickup. The most significant aspect of the guitar was its serial number. It was Martin's first official Custom guitar – a detail for which I am most proud.

Many more guitars followed through the Martin Custom Shop. Each was an attempt to stretch the boundaries of what a guitar could or should be. The process of conceptualizing instruments on paper and commissioning the experts to do the work set the stage for what would become my real value and contribution to Martin.



*"Church Of Art" 00 12-fret acoustic by dick boak, 1982
Old growth spruce, striped Macassar ebony back and sides.*



8-String Acoustic Guitar (doubled basses) by dick boak, 1982
African black ebony back and sides, black lacquered top.

Black In The Saddle Again

While Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder were singing *Ebony and Ivory*, I was immersed in the basement of the Church of Art with a pile of noxious sawdust and the smell of freshly-sawn water buffalo horn. Somehow I had managed to find a set of African black ebony large enough to make a full size instrument. There wasn't much precedent for such an item given that ebony is unstable and subject to cracking, but I had tapped it around enough to hear its tonal attributes and I forged haphazardly ahead.

The theme didn't start out to be entirely black, but it ended up there. Every time it rained, water seeped down the walls and lay in puddles around the edges of the shop. And as usual, the excess humidity caused my stockade of precious wood to swell. When everything dried out, that's when the problems would occur. The top seam of the ebony guitar was another casualty, but I persevered, glued it back together and sanded the ridges flush. Black lacquer then became a necessity and to complement the overwhelming darkness, I sought out a piece of black water buffalo horn to use for the nut.

Designed for open tuning, two extra strings were added to the bass notes to accentuate the rhythm. A pregnant bridge with more of David Nichols' elegant inlays accommodated the extra strings. When it was all done, John Sebastian happened to be visiting. After me, he was the first person to play this guitar and he liked it well enough that while watching me struggle to record a new answering machine message, he offered his experience and assistance:

"Hi, this is John Sebastian. Dick Boak isn't here right now, but if you leave your name and number he might let you play his really beautiful new ebony 8-string guitar."

That it were so easy. After the first season, the seams started to creak and the pores expelled their incompatible resins up through the surface of the lacquer. The following November when the temperature dropped, the clear topcoat of lacquer had already begun to yellow and the back began to shrink, pulling the neck into an angle that rendered it tenuous at best.

That's the risk you take when you experiment. The guitar has recovered somewhat, but not enough to justify my lack of judgement. Let it be.



8-String Acoustic Guitar (back view)
African ebony back, gloss black lacquer neck, gold hardware.



*Honduras rosewood acoustic by Dick Boak, 1983
Mother of pearl, old growth spruce, ebony, red padauk trim.*

Honduras Coverup

We were cutting several hundred Honduras rosewood logs in *The Sawmill* for The Musser Company, a division of Ludwig Drums that manufactures high-end marimbas. The logs were only about a foot in diameter, which is typical for the species, but one of the logs was uncharacteristically large. I decided to resaw a large billet into a bookmatched flitch for instrument sets. The wood had a beautiful salmon color and since it made great xylophone bars, I figured it would be tonally ideal for guitars.

I started the guitar during the filming of the ABC television special (*See pages 171-172*). It didn't take long for a calamity of errors to intercede in my project. The humidity was way out of balance in my basement shop and a small crack started to creep up along the bottom of the back. I masked it by wet sanding it with superglue and proceeded to glue up the rim. I had planned to trim the guitar with red African padauk, but the thin strips had wild grain that split while I was applying them to the tight curvature of the waist.

While all of this was transpiring, my friend David Nichols of Custom Pearl Inlay was hard at work creating the extraordinary inlay for my special guitar. His parts arrived like medicine and everything seemed to go smoothly until I had completed the lacquering. To my horror, a long crack began to open up below the bridge. In a panic, I laid in a thin splint of spruce and relacquered the top, but the repair showed like a scar on the face of a young woman.

There were other problems too innumerable to outline here. Each of these provided an opportunity to add ornamentation to hide the errors, in fact I came to believe that the decor of guitars was originally conceived to hide poorly crafted seams.

In spite of these calamities, the guitar bellowed like an inebriated Pavarotti. In due time, I engaged Tim Teel to relacquer the body and neck with a padauk-tinted lacquer to try to hide the more obvious incongruities, but I know they're there and now so do you. Most instruments have flaws that add or detract, and in the process they take on character just like people do. And just like people, the incongruities are masked beneath the layers and hidden behind the seams. Oh, but how they sing!



*Honduras rosewood acoustic (rear view)
Mahogany neck with gloss burgundy lacquer, pearl buttons.*



The opening segue from ABC's "Primetime" show.



The Church of Art during the snowy winter of 1984.



The Church of Art marquis with neon blazing.

Fifteen Minutes Of Fame

For many years, my friend Jay Griffith managed the export division for Martin, traveling around the world nurturing all of the overseas distributors. In addition to his impeccable attire, he was a warm and charismatic character, and he knew how to enjoy himself. On one of his trips to Europe, Jay went skiing with one of his clients and injured his knee badly in the process. He gradually healed with the help of a local physical therapist named Vince Smolczynski.

Vince was very interested in guitars and arranged with Jay to meet me at Martin for a special tour. Vince and I hit it off immediately. We shared a love

of bohemia, music and woodworking and soon I agreed to help Vince through the process of making his own acoustic guitar.

It took a few weeks to gather materials. By the time we started, Vince's friend Steve Scarpa had caught wind of the apprenticeship and wanted to get in on the action. Steve played electric bass in a Philadelphia band. He wanted to build the optimum bass guitar, but he didn't exactly have a handle on what that might be. Nevertheless, Steve was very excited about building an instrument with us, and since he was a publicist, he immediately pursued ways of attracting media attention for our guitar-making project.

One of Steve's media contacts was Bev Aaron. He

was one of the producers for WPVI Channel 6, the ABC affiliate in Philadelphia, and was managing a popular TV show called *Primetime*. Steve showed up one evening very excited that Bev was considering doing a *Primetime* feature about the Church of Art, Martin Guitars, and our three-way guitarbuilding collaboration.

We scheduled the shoot. Bev arrived with his cameraman and sound technician. Vince and I were busy gluing up our tops and backs and by a stroke of sheer coincidence, Tom Paxton had come to Martin that same day looking for me. When he heard I had taken the afternoon off, he came over to the Church to find the cameras rolling. As we sat down to talk guitars and converse over coffee, Tom tried several of



Marking the centerline of the top prior to glueup.



Clamping up the back to the rim of my guitar.



Vince frees up the dovetail on his MC Cutaway.



ABC films C. F. Martin III during the tour of the factory.

the special instruments I had on display at the Church of Art. He especially liked the little 1/4 size guitar I had made. Somehow we got onto the subject of how reckless the airlines can be with instruments and the resulting frustration that musicians suffer at the hands of baggage handlers.

Tom had had a bad experience with *Republic Airlines*. They had broken the neck on one of his valuable Martin guitars. When they wouldn't reimburse him for the value of the instrument, he threatened to write a song about them, and he did! The song was called *Thank You Republic Airlines*, and he sang it for us and the cameras. The whole afternoon went so well that Bev expressed interest in lengthening the segment.



Tom Paxton samples the Custom OMC 12-String Deluxe.

In the weeks that followed, ABC returned to Nazareth twice: first to film a tour of the Martin factory, then back to the Church of Art to chronicle the fitting of Vince's neck to body dovetail and to capture the slow progress that Steve was making on his brightly-colored padauk bass. Just prior to these visits, Jim O'Brien, the charismatic weatherman and host of the *Primetime* show, died tragically in a freak parachuting accident. Jim's devastated friend, sportscaster Gary Papa, reluctantly took his place narrating the show.

Bev Aaron wished to return one last time to film our three completed instruments in concert. To accommodate this request, I booked an exceptional jazz guitarist named Chuck Anderson for a Saturday



Tom tells his hilarious story about Republic Airlines.

evening concert. A very select group was invited to the show. The ABC crew arrived early to set their microphones and tripods. After an inspired performance from Chuck, Vince and I played our finished guitars. Unfortunately, Steve's bass was not quite complete, but he appeared on stage with us anyway, the electronic guts of his guitar dangling from the routed cavity like a wounded salmon.

True to Andy Warhol's prediction, this was one of our shining moments. It felt pretty good. Though I knew I would never be a Dylan or a McCartney, I would have many more opportunities to ham it up in front of the TV cameras, ultimately receiving far more than my allotted fifteen minutes of notoriety and local fame.



Jazz virtuoso Chuck Anderson performs in Nazareth.



Steve Scarpa with his not quite complete padauk bass.



Vince and I perform on our freshly completed guitars.



*Solid Thinbody Electric Acoustic Guitar by dick boak, 1988
Double cutaway, flamed maple, mahogany, African ebony.*

Crossing Over

When Guild Guitars was put up for sale in the late '80s, Martin sent a crew to Rhode Island to look at the facility and consider the viability of purchasing the company. In spite of their many problems, Guild had one model called *The Songbird* that caught my eye. It was clearly designed for a crossover market that bridged the gap between the acoustic and electric worlds. Electric players were intimidated with acoustic guitars and vice versa, so the successful *Songbird* was their attempt to split the difference with a thin-bodied acoustic electric that would appeal to both factions.

With this at the forefront of my mind. I returned to Nazareth and started construction of a thin and lightweight instrument with two symmetrical cutaways that gave the basic front-on appearance of an electric guitar, but without the usual humbucking pickups. Instead, I installed an active version of Fishman's *Thinline* acoustic bridge pickup that one might expect would produce a more acoustic sound.

In my experimentation with electric guitars and basses, I had become convinced that one-piece through-the-body necks with pre-angled neck sets were more cohesive and elegant than glued or bolted necks. This was a key feature of my flamed maple-topped acoustic electric, but upon completion it seemed that a top with a traditional soundhole and rosette might yield a more appropriate acoustic appearance, especially if it were ever to be a Martin product. So I made another prototype, this one with a single cutaway, an ebony soundhole and the face-view appearance of an acoustic guitar. The result was quite attractive, comfortable to hold and Martin-esque in its styling, though the amplified tone seemed to lack resonance and warmth. Regardless, the guitar was stunning and any tonal shortcomings could be remedied with slight modifications to the electronics.

The sad reality was that having failed in the electric guitar department so many times, Martin wasn't going to be in any mood to jump in for another round. And though my second prototype was innovative and looked like an acoustic guitar, it was merely a sheep in wolf's clothing destined, I'm afraid, like so many of my other projects, to occupy a dark cold space under the eave of my attic.



*Solid Thinbody Acoustic Electric Guitar by dick boak, 1988
Single cutaway, Sitka spruce, mahogany, ebony, rosewood.*



*Peter's Valley "Spruce Goose" (back view)
Sitka spruce back, mahogany neck, ebony headstock veneer.*

Spruce Geese

There has long been a direct relationship between the select cuts of spruce used for the strong but lightweight wooden ribs of (now vintage) aircraft versus the similarly vertical-grained bookmatches of spruce prized for guitar soundboards. For decades, spruce for musical instruments could best be found in special stacks designated as aircraft grade.

It's likely that Howard Hughes had a profound impact upon the spruce trade in the Pacific Northwest during his day. Many of his planes specified spruce ribbing, including the gigantic, notorious and ultimately doomed Spruce Goose that neared completion as World War Two came to an end.

While managing Woodworker's Dream, I occasionally received calls from archtop guitar and dulcimer makers that respectively required thicker and longer cuts of quartersawn spruce. Accordingly, I ordered a thousand board feet of "aircraft quality" Sitka spruce from a vendor in Washington State and while unloading the truckload, there were several planks that were particularly special. I saved them.

In my second year of teaching the acoustic guitarmaking course at Peter's Valley in northwestern New Jersey, I had arranged for enough assistance that it was possible for me to personally construct an instrument in the midst of the chaos. The first "Spruce Goose" guitar emerged with Sitka spruce top, back and sides and a mahogany neck. The guitar was understandably extremely light in weight, akin to a potato chip, and the resulting tone was very vibrant, breathy, crisp and clear.

The odd byproduct was that the tone could be muted by holding the back of the guitar tight to the chest. People at Martin were intrigued enough to allow me to initiate two additional prototypes. These were made with spruce necks and headplates as well as bodies and braces, but the real appeal of doing an edition involved using the catchy "Spruce Goose" name. This was expected to be quite a legal hurdle.

Nearly fifteen years later, a third round of prototypes confirmed all that I had discovered in the first two, but like Howard who was no doubt rolling over in his grave, it seemed unlikely that my spruce geese would ever fly in any significant way.



*Peter's Valley "Spruce Goose" by dick boak, 1990
Sitka spruce, ebony, mahogany, herringbone, gold hardware.*



*Early Martin EB-18 Laminated Electric Bass, 1978
Maple, mahogany, rosewood.*

Covering The Basses

On the electric bass front, I delved into the fabrication of a fretless instrument. Without frets, there are virtually no critical dimensions and there is a great sense of purity, ease and satisfaction in bringing them to fruition. For strength, design and sustain, I gravitated toward multiple laminates, first in the laying up of bodies, then finally inclusive of the necks. Hidden glued-in mortise neck joints gradually evolved to more contiguous through-the-body designs.

My favorite aspect of working with multiple laminates is the sheer topographic thrill of creating contours on the rounded sculptural edges of the body and neck. I sold my favorite bass (shown at left and right) to my good friends Russ & Becky Jeffers of *Smokey Mountain Sunshine* in Nashville, but like any of my creations, I regretted letting it slip away.

Chris Martin's best friend Matt McFadden was a proficient bass player and his opinions were certainly influential within the company. We had tried our hand with electric basses, but Matt had always encouraged Chris to have Martin make an acoustic bass.

Being a latent bass player at heart, I had built an odd bass-like instrument with a short guitar-sized neck and a mariachi-sized mahogany body. It was abominable, but it whet my whistle to do it again correctly. When Chris mentioned that he wanted to initiate an acoustic bass with a jumbo body and a 34" scale, I was thrilled. Unfortunately, our production manager at the time was not. He viewed such a project as a diversion and fumed that it would cost \$60,000 and take six months to execute. Infuriated that the project was being stonewalled, I marched in to Chris and offered to prototype an instrument in two weeks at a cost of less than \$200.

In the *Woodworker's Dream* shop at North Street, I trimmed one of the EB-28 through-the-body electric neck billets and glued a heel extension into place. Borrowing a standard mahogany jumbo rim, I braced a partially scalloped top with slightly modified tone bars and quickly completed a body. With the cooperation of the lacquering department, the components were ready for neck fit and glueup within a week. I fashioned a proportionately-sized belly bridge and turned four end pins down to a



*Laminated Fretless Electric Bass by Dick Boak, 1979
(Courtesy of Russ & Becky Jeffers.)*



*Laminated Fretless Electric Bass (Back View)
Maple, mahogany, East Indian rosewood, ebony.*



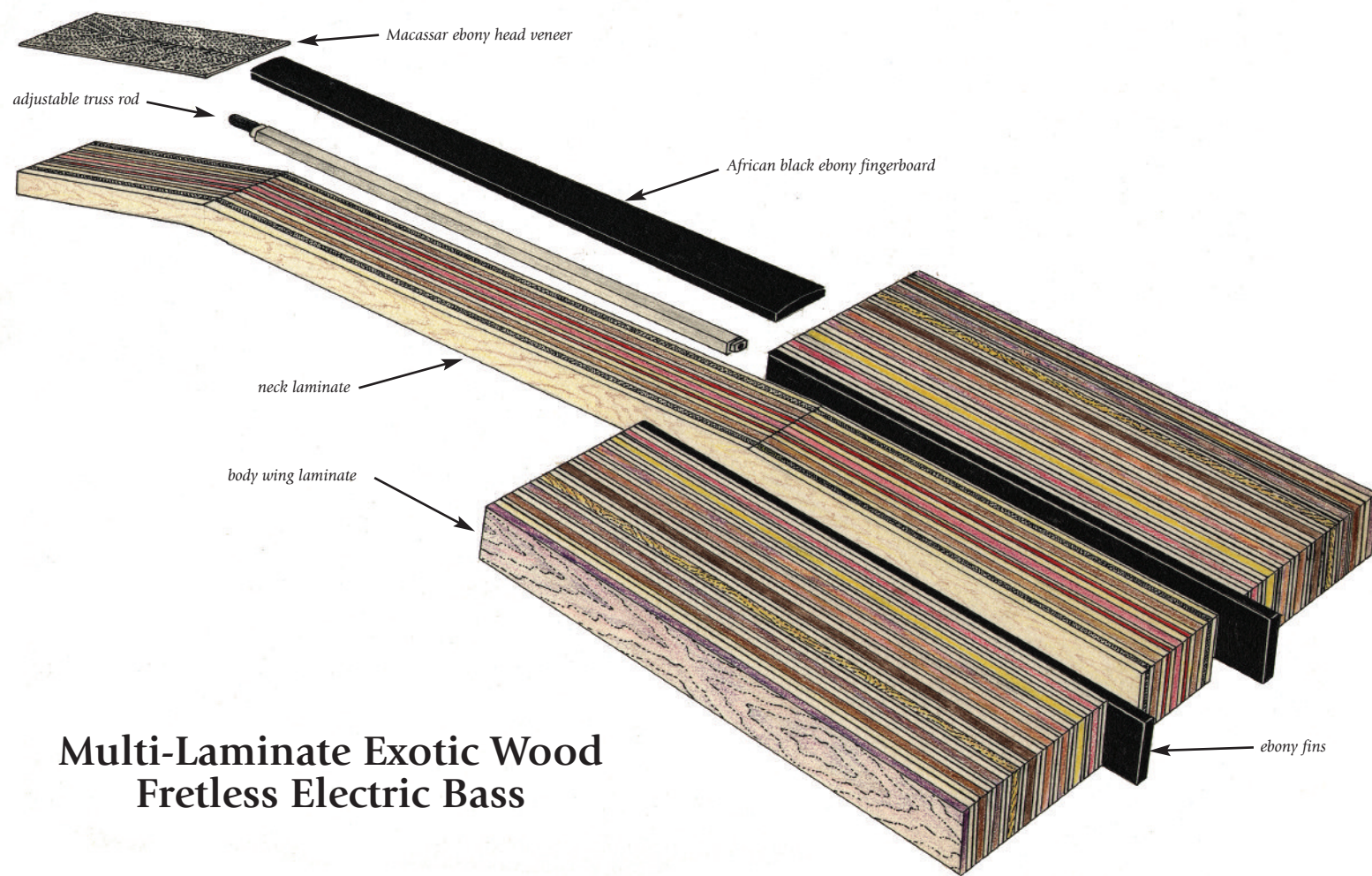
*Multi-Laminate Exotic Wood Fretless Electric Bass, 1986
Headstock Detail. (See following page.)*

suitable diameter with sandpaper in the drill press chuck. The bass was strung up and complete with four days to spare. The instrument sounded terrific, unlike many of the so-called acoustic basses on the market that had nominal acoustic sound.

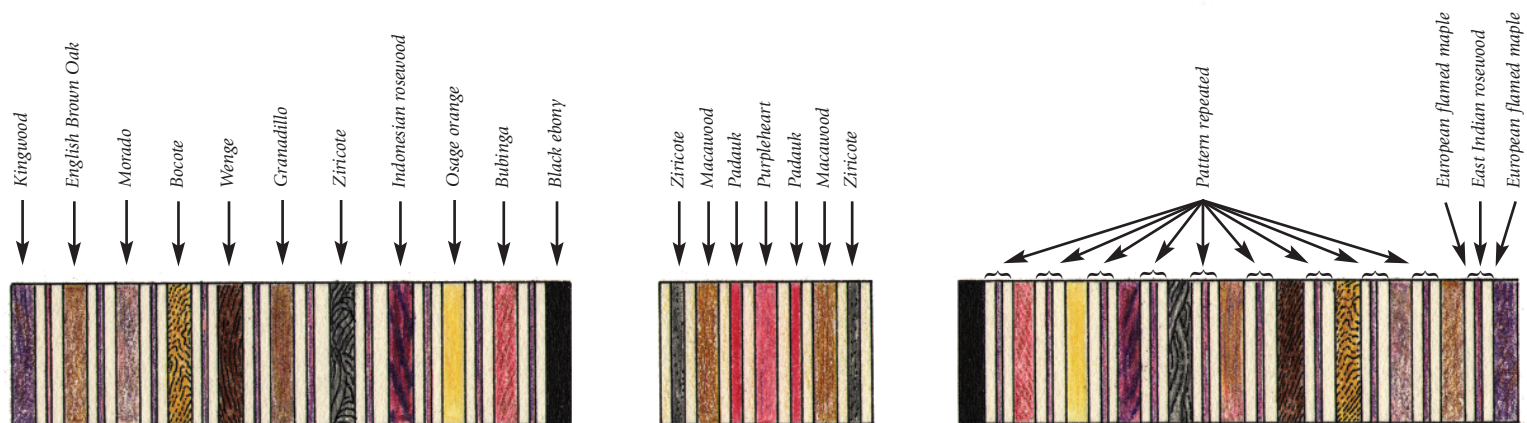
This small success was a large embarrassment to the production manager who was soon to vacate his position. For this, I felt some responsibility, though tensions had been mounting for some time. Perhaps some justice was served. In any case, we were into the acoustic bass market much quicker as a result and the instruments received positive reaction from bass players, especially in the bluegrass community. Oddly, one of the first acoustic bass endorsees was punk rocker Brian Ritchie of the *Violent Femmes* who created quite a craze for the Martin instrument with his raucous playing.



*B-18 Acoustic Bass Prototype #1 by dick boak, ca. 1982
Mahogany, East Indian rosewood, Sitka spruce, electronics.*



Multi-Laminate Exotic Wood Fretless Electric Bass



While rummaging through the exotic planks over at Woodworker's Dream, I decided to build a display showing all of the wood species that Martin offered. Many boards were carefully selected and resawn to produce sanded index card samples. With the leftover trimmings, I saw a great opportunity to create a special laminated guitar and after much deliberation, I enlisted an unfortunate bystander to help with the tedious laminating process. After a

gallon of glue and considerable mess, the pieces were clamped and set aside to dry. The resulting slabs were so striking that I immersed myself in the project for the next eight months. The finished solid body electric bass is comprised of at least 127 separate pieces of wood representing 25 different species. I was extremely proud to have my photographs selected for inclusion in Fine Woodworking Magazine's prestigious *Design Book Four*.

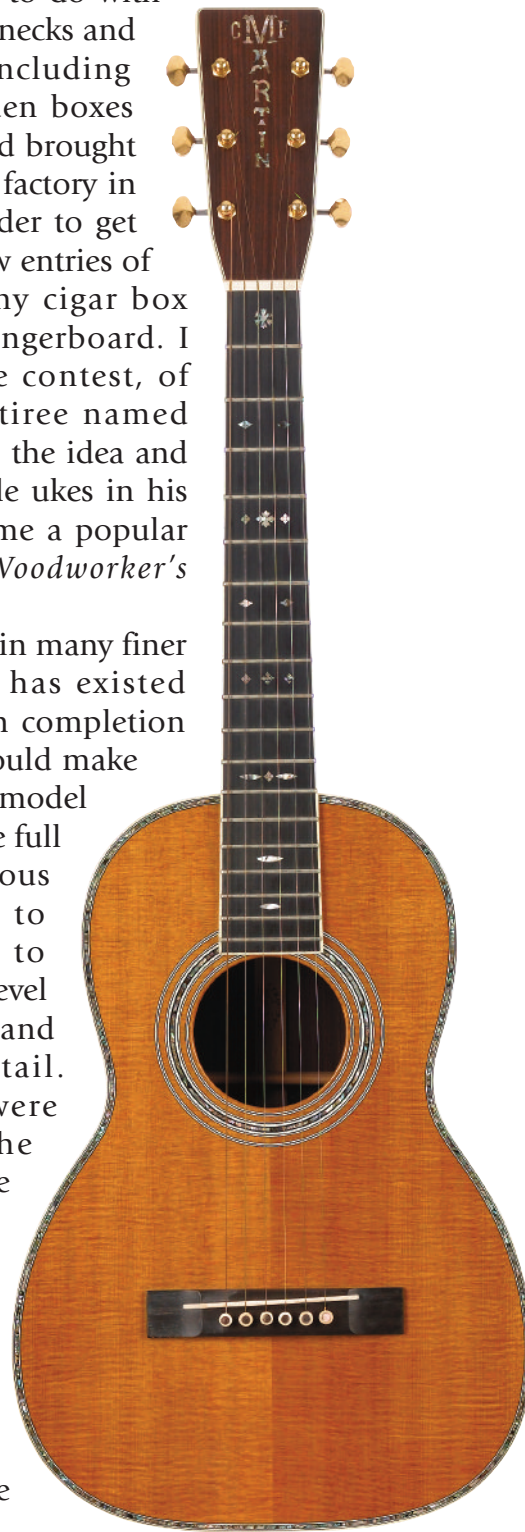


A Smaller Reverence

While running the Martin Wood Products Division, I decided to hold a contest to figure out what to do with an attic full of old ukulele necks and oddball leftover parts, including many small square wooden boxes that Chris Martin and I had brought back after the Levin guitar factory in Sweden had closed. In order to get things started, I made a few entries of my own, including a tiny cigar box ukulele with a fretless fingerboard. I recused myself from the contest, of course, but a Martin retiree named Adam Strohl picked up on the idea and made a batch of these little ukes in his basement that soon became a popular consignment item at *Woodworker's Dream*.

And speaking of small, in many finer craft fields, a tradition has existed among guilds where upon completion of study, the apprentice would make a miniature working scale model or "apprentice piece" of the full sized object. These precious samples were easy to transport and served to demonstrate the mastery level of each craftsman's skill and attention to fine detail. Apprentice pieces were common both in the furniture as well as the violin-making fields.

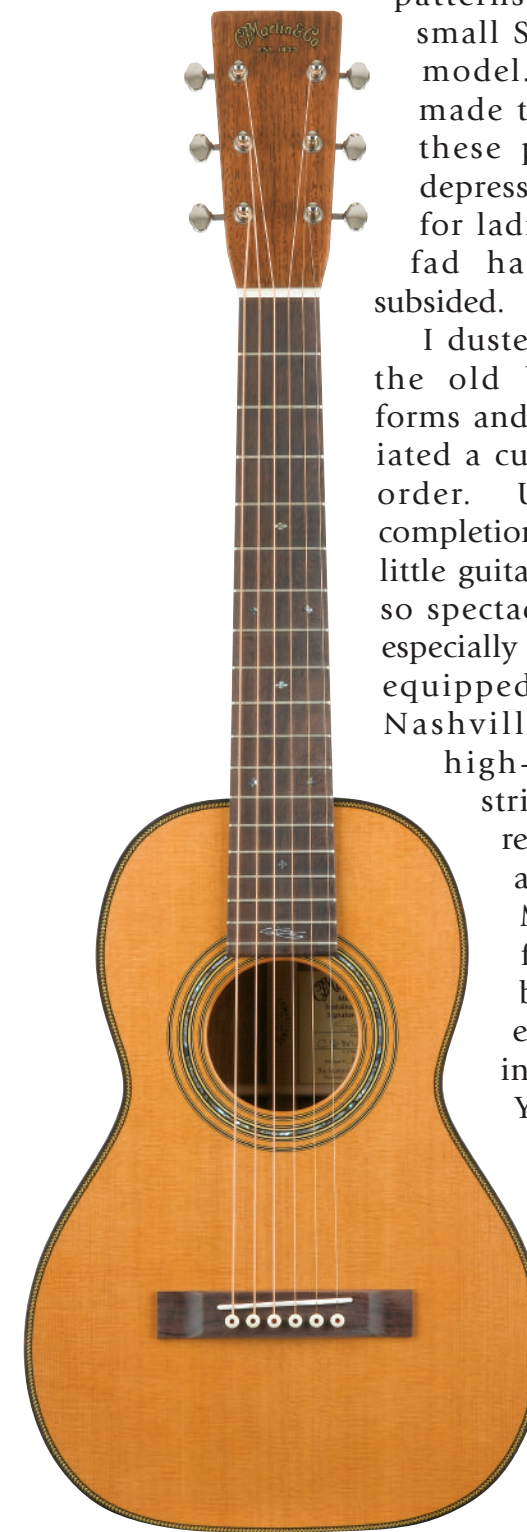
Given my fascination with minute illustrative detail, I quickly became captivated with smaller musical instruments. I loved my little ten-string tenor ukulele-sized tiple and soon attempted to replicate that specific size as a miniature 1/4 size six-string guitar.



Custom Martin 5-41V
High Strung "Terz" or "Parlor" Guitar, 1998
Prototype For Mini Martin Special Edition.



1/4 Size 4-41 6-String Guitar
by Dick Boak, 1981
Based On The Tenor Ukulele or Tiple Size.



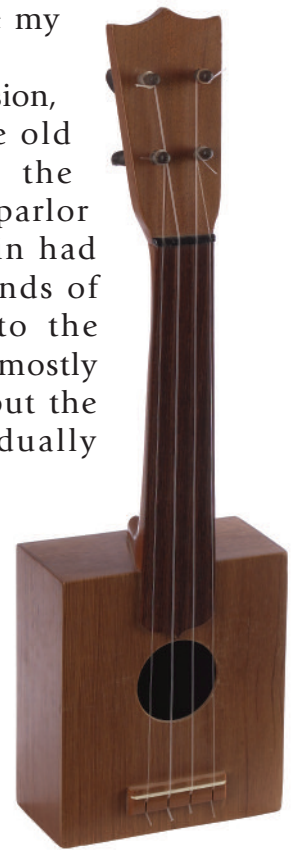
Sting: Mini High String "Terz" Guitar.
Martin Limited Edition, 2005
Padauk, Western Red Cedar, Katalox.

That little instrument became my apprentice piece.

To further explore my obsession, I sought out the old patterns from the small Size 5 parlor model. Martin had made thousands of these prior to the depression – mostly for ladies – but the fad had gradually subsided.

I dusted off the old body forms and initiated a custom order. Upon completion, the little guitar was so spectacular, especially when equipped with Nashville-style high-octave

strings, that it deserved and received considerably greater attention. The popular Mini-Martin Special Edition followed with a customer base made up of many extraordinary musicians including Eric Clapton, Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen, John Mayer and Sting. In fact, Sting recorded the beautiful song *Dead Man's Rope* from his *Sacred Love* CD with his Mini Martin – spurring the inevitable Sting: Mini rainforest friendly edition of 100 little guitars – and proving once and for all that size does matter... or is it that size doesn't matter at all?



Cigar Box Uke
by Dick Boak, 1981



Martin Custom OMC-12 Deluxe, 1983
With Original Vine Of Harmonics Fingerboard

Pushing The Limits

Fascinated with the mathematical relationship between the harmonic locations of the strings, the fractional subdivisions of the scale length and the actual positioning of the frets, I decided to attempt to create an inlay pattern that bore some connection to these mystical relationships. I started with a piece of illustration board and demarcated Martin's standard long scale string length of 25.44", this being the compensated distance from the nut to the saddle. I divided this distance in half and made a small mark with my ink pen. Then I divided the string length in thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths, sevenths, eights, ninths, and so on, ad infinitum, each time making appropriate marks along the line of the string. Clusters of marks emerged near the primary harmonic locations at the 5th, 7th, 12th and 20th frets. Secondary clusters accumulated close to the 4th, 9th and 16th frets. Smaller patterns and clusters emerged in other areas, not seeming to bear much harmonic significance, but nevertheless closing the gaps. Projected lines from the primary clusters laterally helped to locate areas of the vine intersections, while the remaining projections became the terminations of branches weighted by my assessment of their significance. I came to call the inlay pattern that resulted the *Vine of Harmonics*.

Having become close friends with inlay artist David Nichols, I was very aware of the difficulties in hand cutting pearl patterns. It seemed to me that bookmatched patterns might be cut from two slabs of shell glued together. The slabs could then be immersed in water to separate and unfold into the symmetrical design – twice the pattern for half the work!

I suspected that such a pattern might be useful to slide guitar players, since the harmonic locations seem to lend themselves so well to traditional open-tuned slide techniques. Anxious to try the idea on a real guitar, I submitted specifications for a 12-string OMC Cutaway to the Martin Custom Shop and enlisted David Nichols to inlay a special fingerboard crowned with an ivory wishbone. It took nearly two decades, but gradually the pattern began to command attention, though no doubt not for the intended reasons.

Another of my favorite projects was the Baby Dreadnought. My comrade John Arndt and I had reduced all of the full size Dreadnought dimensions, including the inlays, to 7/8 size. As a first prototype, I commissioned a fancy 7-42 Sunburst with an inlaid pickguard and my signature in pearl at the last fret. That guitar was my pride and joy, but after several years and much prodding, I agreed to sell the guitar to a collector. I regretted this and soon was horrified to learn that he had resold the guitar for a substantial profit. Fortunately, karma



Custom Martin 7-42 "dick boak" Sunburst, Circa 1984
(Courtesy of the Scott Chinery Collection)



*Limited Edition Martin "MC²" Double Cutaway, 1988
Only 22 of these odd Boak-designed models were made.*

guided the little jewel into the instrument collection of the legendary Scott Chinery. When I visited him at his New Jersey estate, I was so honored to have my Signature Baby D in the company of such significant guitars.

While making up a right-handed M-sized cutaway kit one day at Woodworker's Dream, I discovered that the non-cutaway side was cracked, rendering the cutaway side mismatched and useless. I set it aside on the shelf. Several months later, I was working on a left-handed cutaway kit and the same crack occurred on the non-cutaway side. This coincidence left me with two opposing cutaway sides. As I stood holding those sides, it struck me. What a bold and elegant idea a double cutaway guitar would be! I trimmed a dovetail block and glued the sides into an odd body shape. "M" for the prefix or size, "C" for the cutaway... no, make that two cutaways C² –MC²– Einsteinian and brilliant!

Completing the body in an M mold, I rushed over to the main plant to show the idea around, but no one really appreciated the elegance of the idea the way I did. A few weeks later, the sales staff called me into a high level pow-wow and I was put on the spot to explain and justify my double cutaway. Mustering my unbridled passion, I managed to convince the skeptical group to proceed with plans for a limited edition model. Without me to cheer the project on, the reluctant prototype was shipped off to the trade show where a meager 22 orders were taken. Like the awkward Edsel, my MC² was deemed a failure. Nonetheless, I cling to the contention that these odd ducks are exceptionally cool. Try to locate one of those 22 guitars, you'll have a hard time prying them away from similarly afflicted guitar enthusiasts. That's the paradox of success and failure. Succeed, make many and the market will rescind in saturation. Fail, make very few and you've got yourself a winner – a rare beast – one worth fighting for!

While archiving Martin's drawer full of old bracing patterns, I discovered an obsolete design for a 000-12-fret model that was stamped "Merle Haggard Model." I didn't know much about these old guitars at the time, but with my curiosity piqued, I sought out and played several vintage examples. I was soon convinced that these 000 12-fret models possessed optimal tone. I had saved some unique Brazilian rosewood for a special project and attempted to place an order for a historically accurate 000-42 replica through the Custom Shop. The patterns had changed, however, and my order was declined. Fortunately for me, Eric Schoenberg was collaborating with Martin at the time. He agreed to orchestrate a Martin/Schoenberg Custom order for me with several handmade components. The finished guitar, complete with bar frets, is as good as any instrument can ever be.



*Martin/Schoenberg Custom 12-fret 000-42 1993
Adirondack Spruce, Brazilian Rosewood*