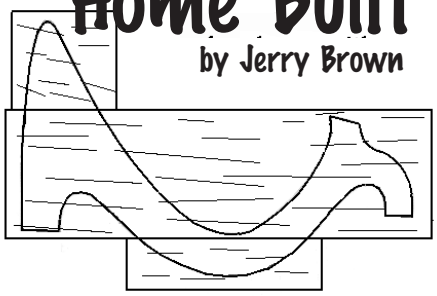
Home Built Harps

by Jerry Brown



This feature is intended to celebrate and encourage the craft of harp-making by home hobbyists around the world. The goal is to publicize the excellent, and sometimes surprising, results of one of these adventurous woodworkers in each issue of the Journal. We will focus on amateur builders, those building harps as a hobby rather than as a business, sharing some of their interesting experiences, woodworking tips, customizing ideas, etc. for the benefit and encouragement of other amateur builders.

Dr. Charles Story's GRECIAN HARP - Part One

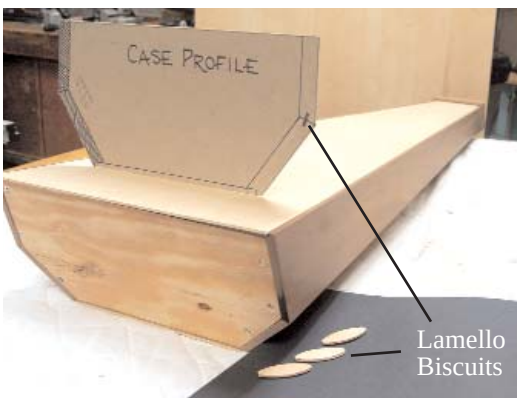
This is a two-part feature because of the amount of interesting details to look at in Chuck Story's workmanship. Chuck is a retired professor from the College of Applied Science and Technology at East Tennessee State University where he taught industrial design and engineering graphics. He became interested in harps after seeing the ancient Trinity College Harp in Dublin, Ireland.

After some research on harp plans, he built his version of the Musicmaker's Limerick lap harp as his first project. Then he called me (Jerry Brown) last winter looking for a plan he could use for making a lever harp with a round column, in the style of a concert harp. I recommended our Regency plan because that design puts the pillar out in front of the soundchamber, resting on a rather large platform that is similar to a pedal harp.

Chuck ordered our plan and proceeded to make some very interesting modifications resulting in what he calls his "Grecian Harp" (right). This harp is the subject of our double-feature article, showing how Chuck proceeded with the design adaptation and construction.

Chuck's first challenge was to convert our square-back plan to a stave-back design. He drew up his profile on stiff paper, choosing to use butt joints on the angled miters with Lamello "biscuits" to reinforce the glue seams.

Chuck Story stands with his Limerick Lap Harp (left) and Grecian Harp (right). He also made the upholstered stool.



Bottom view of harp case showing profile

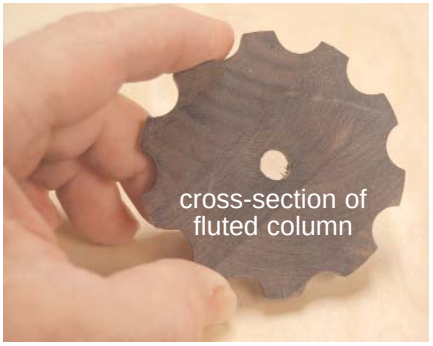
The 1/4" thick plywood back panel is set into a rabbetted ledge on each angled stave, as shown on the case profile drawing. You can see that he screwed a heavy plywood base to the bottom of the case, leaving a nice flat surface for bolting the case to a sturdy platform.

Back view of harp case

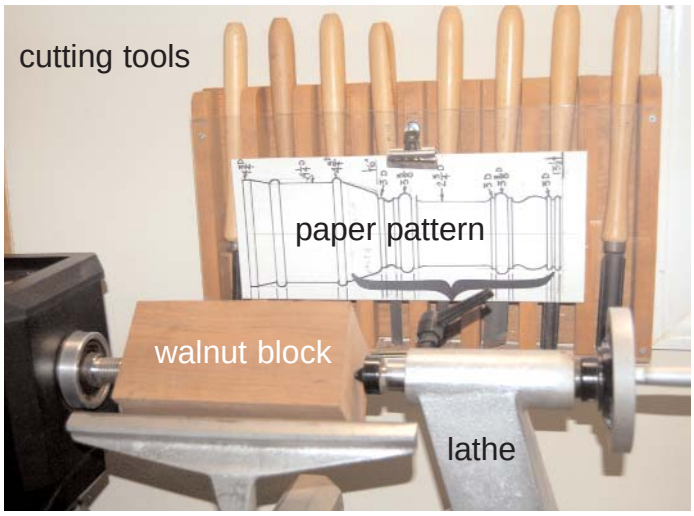
Round column of Grecian Harp

The real showpiece of Chuck's harp is the fluted Grecian column, and this is what gives the harp its name. He turned this tall post in three parts, bolting the sections together to make the five-foot-long column. Building in sections like this allowed him to make a pillar that is longer than the bed of his lathe.

Each section began as a rectangular stack of walnut boards glued together to form a solid block about 5" square. He drew a full size template and positioned the pattern by the lathe, directly in front of his workpiece so he could copy the profile onto the wood block. Notice the measurements indicating the exact dimensions of each feature of the design.



Chuck also made the fluted portion of the column from a stack of walnut boards glued into a solid block. He drew the pattern of the cross-section and then used a shaper to cut the rounded flutes. The challenge is to guide the round column accurately along the shaper cutter for cutting straight flutes with even spacing. Chuck was able to use equipment from the college for this tricky job.



The solid walnut block is clamped in the lathe with the actual size paper pattern behind.

Another attractive feature of this harp is the curly maple veneer that Chuck glued to the soundboard. He used our recommended Aircraft Birch laminate for the front panel, but he covered it with a beautiful thin sheet of veneer for added decoration.

The photo shows him edge-gluing the book-matched pieces of veneer down the center line. He used a vacuum bag clamping system to press and glue the veneer to the soundboard panel.

Be sure to read Part Two of this feature in the next issue of the Folk Harp Journal. We'll show some of the extra decorative details Chuck added to this beautiful harp. You can contact Chuck Story by email at *spacetruck@earthlink.net*.

Chuck Story glues bookmatched veneer sheets of curly maple together down the centerline of the soundboard.

Jerry Brown is owner and founder of Musicmaker's Kits, Inc., in Minnesota, and author of *Folk Harp Design and Construction*, a 150-page manual on harp making. An admitted kit-monger, plywood soundboard pusher, and incurable do-it-yourselfer, he corresponds regularly with hobbyists who build their own musical instruments.