

Home Built Harps

By
Jerry Brown

This feature, written by Jerry Brown, 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. He will focus on amateur builders, those building harps as a hobby rather than as a business, sharing some of their interesting experiences, successful woodworking tips, customizing ideas, etc. for the benefit and encouragement of other amateur builders.

Arthur Germani is a woodworking hobbyist from Baddeck, Nova Scotia, who ordered his first harp blueprint from Musicmaker's in 2001. After building a couple of harps from our plans, he purchased the book, "Folk Harp Design and Construction" so as to gain confidence in making design alterations on his own. His latest creation is a variation of the Musicmaker's Regency design, which I think is notable for its innovations.

"This has proven a success," he reports. "The neck and pillar are made up of three layers. I took great care to secure very well dried wood for these parts. The center layer is 75% Baltic Birch, 1 inch thick, edged with maple so you don't see stripes around the outside. Then I added walnut, 3/8" thick, to the outer faces. The whole neck is bonded together with 'Cold Cure' epoxy resin glue (available from Lee Valley Tools)."



Customized neck with maple shield at front and dowel at back



Arthur Germani's modified Regency Harp, made with maple and walnut

Notice the decorative details on the upper section of this harp. Mr. Germani used a horizontal maple dowel for the joint between the neck and body, similar to the system Musicmaker's uses for Gothic style harps. The neck rests entirely on the dowel, making no other contact with the body of the harp. This joint is not glued, but is held together by string tension, allowing the neck to rotate slightly as the harp matures. I also like the short "scallop" at the top of the body, just below the dowel. This detail reduces the width of the box to match the width of the neck at the point where they meet.

Mr. Germani altered our design at the front of the neck to create a point which is mirrored by a pointed "crest" above the top octave strings. His maple overlay at the neck/pillar joint is another attractive detail, shaped like a shield. This would be a good place for additional decoration, such as an inlaid coin that displays the year the harp was built.

Another variation from our blueprint is shown at the bottom of the harp. We call for quite a thick bottom deck (1-1/2") to withstand the 1,200 pounds of string pressure pushing the pillar down against that base. Mr. Germani used thinner material for the main layer of the deck, and he added a reinforcement piece just under the center portion where the string tension is directed. You can see this detail on the underside of the base.



Bottom deck of harp is single thickness walnut



Underside of harp showing reinforcement piece

Notice the grain direction of this base piece too. It is very important to orient the grain to run from front to back of the body. Otherwise the base board may bend under the pressure of the pillar out in front of the box.

The feet of the harp are also different from our blueprint, and I like the delicate appearance. I have posted a color version of this article on the Musicmaker's website , www.musikit.com, for those who would like to get the full impact of Mr. Germani's good photos.



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.

If you know of an amateur harp maker who should be featured in this series, please contact Jerry Brown, of Musicmaker's Kits, Inc. (800) 432-5487, jerryb@musikit.com. Yes, he says he is even willing to feature people who build from "other people's" kits and plans!