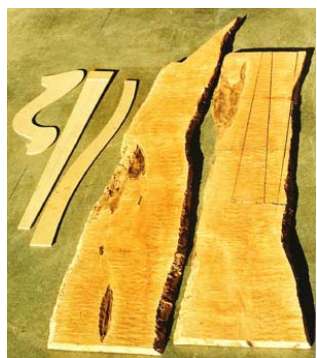


Home Built Harps

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 these adventurous woodworkers in each issue of the Journal. We will focus on amateur builders, those build harps as a hobby rather than as a business. We will share some of their experiences, woodworking tips, customizing ideas, etc. for the benefit and encouragement of other amateur builders.

Kees van der Leek is of Dutch birth, and he emigrated to Canada from South Africa in 1967. He lives on Vancouver Island in British Columbia where he is a retired vocational instructor. "My interest in musical instruments began in 1995 when I was introduced to the Bowed Psaltery and Hammered Dulcimer," he explains. Since then he has made a hobby out building Bowed Psalteries, making 34 of them so far. Other Instruments to his credit are an Irish Harp, Classical Guitar, Hammered Dulcimer, and a four octave Concert Marimba. He admits, "I am no musician, but play several instruments by ear, in a fashion." He belongs to the Oceanside Community Arts Council, and the Coombs branch Old-time Fiddlers Association in British Columbia.

Just before Christmas last year, Kees purchased a blueprint for a 34-string Regency harp from me at Musicmakers, and by February, he was already sending me photos of one of the most beautiful instruments I've ever seen.



Broadleaf Maple boards

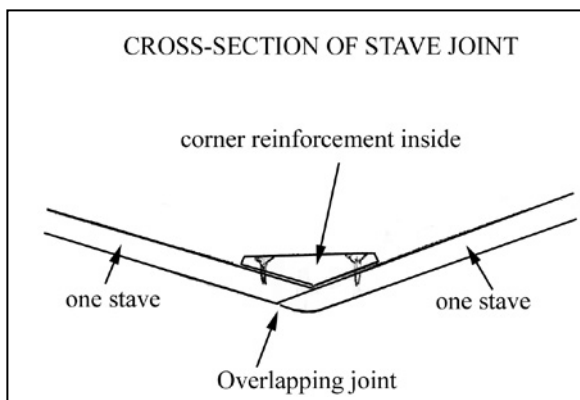
He had found a spectacular plank of Western Broadleaf "Curly" Maple that came from a local tree on Vancouver Island. "I just happened to be at the supplier when the cut tree came in," he says. I guess timing is everything!



Curly Maple harp built by Kees van der Leek

If you know of an amateur harp maker who should be featured in this series, please contact Jerry Brown by phone (800) 432-5487 or email jerryb@musikkit.com.

Kees followed the blueprint for the neck and pillar, but on the soundchamber he stepped into deep waters by making a staved back, a considerably more difficult task than our square box construction. “The staved back is of my own design, as I have not seen how others do it. The system seems to have sufficient strength, though it is a far more involved process -- certainly not everyone's cup of tea.”



Notice how he lapped the joints of the staves instead of making traditional mitered corners. “Cutting the tapered boards for each stave is done with a simple jig on the table-saw, but getting accurate miter angles along each edge of the stave requires very careful setup,” he explains. “You need to cut uniform angles along an absolutely straight edge.”

Another interesting detail on this harp is the hidden connectors that hold the neck and pillar joint

together. Kees cut a shallow depression across the joint and installed a stainless steel bar. Then he covered the hardware with a decorative wood appliqué. There is a large wood tenon inside the joint too.



What caught my eye, however, was the rich color of finish he had applied to the Curly Maple. We use clear lacquer at Musicmakers, but Kees' finish had a rich combination of red and gold colors in the grain that was truly striking, so I asked him what he used to get that color. “WATCO Clear Gloss Brushing Lacquer, as is, out of the can, no stain added,” was his reply. I'm going to have a look for that product myself. I wish this magazine could show off the dazzling finish!

“The harp has a beautiful deep rich tone,” he reported to me in February. “I am really happy with the results.” A few weeks later, he wrote that he had already sold the harp at an art show. Congratulations on a spectacular instrument!

You can see a color version of this article at www.musikit.com by clicking on “Musicmaker's Library”. Kees can be reached by email at k.luthier@shaw.ca. He also displays his work on the web at www.canadianluthier.ca



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.