

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Cory has been a professional writer and publisher for 35 years, and has been building kit acoustic guitars for four years and has played guitar since age 11. After completing ten kits, he is beginning to design and build his own line of Triple-O and "Small Jumbo" 12- and 13-fret guitars.

Besides building kit guitars, Bill's other passion is playing them, songwriting, freelance writing and publishing, and hiking in Grand Canyon. His freelance articles have been published in *Rangefinder*, *PhotoLab Management*, *Westways*, *Four-Wheeler*, *Acoustic Guitar* and *Woodcraft* magazines. This is his second book, the first being *Maybe You Should Write and Publish a Magazine!*

Bill's current independent project is to complete the writing of a comprehensive construction manual for kit acoustic guitars that are configured similarly to those from C.F. Martin & Co. It will soon be available on www.KitGuitarManuals.com and through Bill's other websites: www.KitGuitarBuilder.com and www.KitGuitarForum.com.

Bill lives in Colorado Springs where he's the dad in a family of four. Plus a cat.

COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUILDING KIT ACOUSTIC GUITARS

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Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my loving wife and family for their encouragement, and to the members of the Kit Guitar Forum for their encouragement, information, support, and photos of their excellent guitars.

To Order A Copy Of This Book

Go to this web address:
www.KitGuitarManuals.com

Single copies are US \$29.95
(plus \$5. Priority Mail Shipping in USA)
or
(plus US \$12 Global Priority Mail outside USA)

Multiple copies (more than three) may be purchased at a discount

This book is also available through Lulu.com, Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble.com, and by special order through your favorite real world bookstore.

However, receive a discount when you purchase through this site (www.KitGuitarManuals.com).





Start to finish, in only about 150 steps. (Some of the highlights shown above.)

Building A Kit Guitar

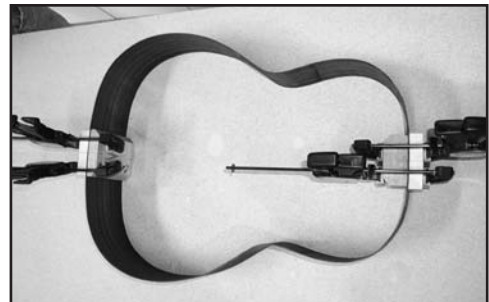


*My friend, Carl,
works on a brace for
his Stewmac 000.*

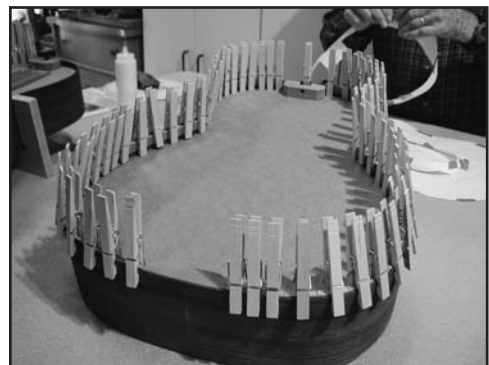
*It's real woodwork-
ing; don't let anybody
tell you different.*

A quality guitar kit costs \$300 – \$600, plus more for tools to build it. Big investment. It leads to a further investment of time. Emotions get involved, too. Those who build chairs and cabinets might become *somewhat* attached to their projects, but building a musical instrument is vastly different: If you are a musician, it promises joy *far* beyond that of a quality piece of furniture. And, as the building proceeds, anticipation builds, to be rewarded with the first few strums of your favorite chords.

An acoustic guitar kit doesn't create a "toy guitar," by any means. It creates a real musical instrument that can last decades and easily rival the sound and appearance of many factory guitars found in music stores. Its quality will vary, naturally, depending on the builder's skill, talent, and understanding of the intricacies of the guitar. But there are many guitarists — some quite accomplished — happily playing and performing on guitars they've built themselves, from kits. There's no reason why a kit, with the right materials and quality of build, can't become your personal "Holy Grail" guitar.



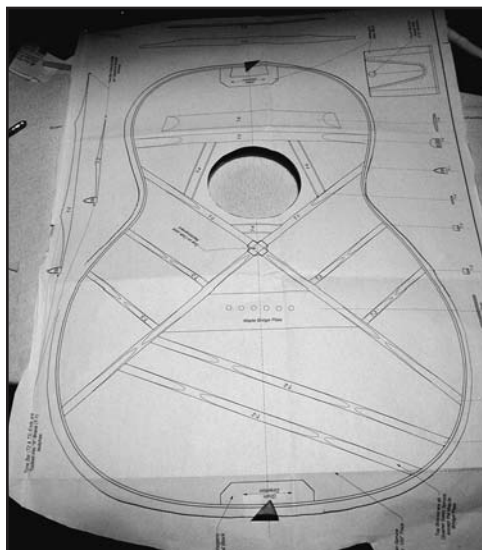
*First step with a Stewmac kit is to dry fit,
then glue, the rim. Dry fit shown.*



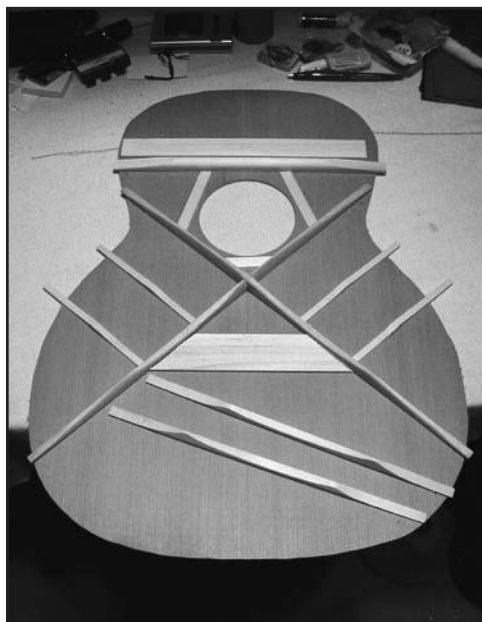
*High-tech clamping of the kerfed lining. The
pro's use this method, too!*



A borrowed drill press and wheel cutter.



Above, the plan...below, before gluing, the result.



WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I operate a website named KitGuitarForum.com. The forum has given me great insight into the questions asked by potential kit builders: Most of them are repeated in Chapter 1: “FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions.” All of them are questions I asked when I started my first kit guitar.

You’ll see that many of your own questions — with answers — appear in the FAQs. There may be some you haven’t yet thought of, but eventually would. The rest of the book amplifies those questions and answers and applies them to specific guitar kits.

By the way, this book is about guitar kits, specifically. It is not about building from scratch, though that is mentioned from time to time. (And, building from kits might lead to scratch building for many readers.) It’s about the kits: How to choose one, what you can anticipate in quality of materials and documentation, how difficult the project might be, and how you can expect the finished guitar to look, sound, and play. But, to repeat: It’s about kits, and kits, only.

WHY I’M THE GUY WRITING IT

This book could certainly have been written by an accomplished professional luthier who has built hundreds of guitars from scratch. Me, I’ve built ten at this point, all from kits. I’ve played guitar since I was 11, but that’s not a qualifier for this project.

At this point in my guitar-building, I could build a guitar from scratch. I could do it only because I’ve built those ten kits. However, I *like* kits! Call me crazy, but I now know the ins and outs of kits from every major kit supplier, and some minor ones. I’ve built more than one from most major manufacturers.

None of the professional luthiers I know, or with whom I’ve corresponded, build from kits, or want to. I don’t know of any who care about kits much: It’s just not their thing. By the way, I am *not* saying I know more about any aspect of luthery than *any* professional luthier.

Yet, I presume to think I’m qualified to write this book. Why? It’s because I have studied and built kit guitars for

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several years, and I know what the beginning kit builder needs to know.

The pro knows all of the tricks and understands the entire craft of guitar building. If he or she built a kit, the instructions wouldn't even be used. Ask him how something should be done, and you'd get an explanation based *not* on the kit instructions, but on his specific way of doing things, using professional tools and techniques perfected over years or decades of building. Furthermore, the pro doesn't take kits seriously or know much about them; and, there's no reason he should! He spends much more than an entire kit costs on the wood for one of his guitars' back and sides. Why would he know much or care anything about kits?

If you haven't yet built a guitar, the pro's explanations might be almost useless to you, for four reasons: 1) You don't have the pro's tools; 2) You don't have the pro's experience; 3) You don't yet have the pro's skill, and, 4) The pro doesn't know what you *don't* know!

But, wouldn't it be great if you could get explanations from an experienced builder who has built the same or a similar kit to yours ... a person who has encountered and overcome incomplete documentation (written by experienced luthiers) ... a person who can tell you what problems *your* chosen kit will present to the first-time builder, and how you can prevent or solve them.

I believe I can fulfill those requirements. I've built more than one kit from each of the major makers. Though there are clearly various ways of doing the same things, I don't yet have my own habitual ways of doing things. I still pay strict attention to what the specific kit instructions tell me to do. That's good, for two reasons: 1) Because that's what you will be doing; and, 2) because I'm "testing" the instructions for accuracy and clarity (a test they sometimes fail).

Finally, the reason why I'm the guy to write this book is practical and basic: Though I know a lot more now than I did when I started several years ago, I haven't yet forgotten all those things I *didn't* know when I started out. For clarity and completeness of explanations, that's got to be a good thing.



An enjoyable task: Carving braces.



*One way of clamping the top for gluing.
Other ways are faster.*



Internal mold removed ... back goes on next.



The opening is cleared for the neck tenon. Note the too-deep channel for purfling: One step toward learning the rule: "Test On Scrap!"



First mistake (routed channel too deep) and the "fix." Best I could do. Mistakes are part of the process; reading and thinking will prevent some, but not all.



The fretboard: A separate process.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT KITS?

A guitar kit, whether it's your first or your tenth, is still a learning experience. Building a kit, you encounter many of the problems and must master procedures done by all luthiers. It's an inexpensive way of learning about guitars, certainly.

I am amazed at how great the guitars sound. (You can hear some of mine: See "My Websites" in the Appendix.) The guitars I've built have good intonation, tone and volume. They are equal to some of the major makers' mid-range guitars I've owned. Their playability is excellent. (Honestly, the last few are lots nicer than the first one.)

The biggest benefit of kits is this: You are able to make them "your way," with nut width, string spread, action, finish, appearance, etc., all built the way you particularly want them. And, it doesn't break the bank to do it.

Kits can provide an introduction to woodworking. They did for me, at age 56. I knew almost nothing about woodworking before buying and building my first kit. Everything I've learned about woodworking has been learned from building guitar kits. (It's been great fun.)

They save us time and provide a head start. Most kits arrive with the back and top thickened and joined, and sides bent. Those two procedures alone save a lot of practice time, material, and money, and keep us from needing to buy and learn to use a thousand bucks worth of machinery along with the space needed for them and the maintenance of them. Not a bad deal, in my book.

Like me, you might not have all the room, resources or time needed to learn how to produce guitars from raw wood; that takes a workshop, extensive machinery and years. I don't have it, and don't want to buy it, learn to use it, or maintain it. Maybe someday, but not yet. And time? Never enough of that!

Quality materials are available: One kit provider — Luthiers Mercantile International, Inc. (LMII.com) — offers completely customized kits. We don't have to settle for the good, but non-premium, wood that comes in the standard kit box. We can use First Grade Honduran Rosewood and

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AAA Port Orford Cedar if we want to. We'll pay extra for it, but we can get it. And, if we want, LMI will join and thickness the back and bend the sides for a nominal fee. (You can also get customized kits from independent luthiers who supply kits: All of these are listed in the book.)

Quick reward: Working part time, you can get a kit body together in two or three weeks, the neck done in one more week, the finish done in another month, and easily be playing the guitar ten weeks after the box lands on your front porch. (The first kit might take longer: My first took several months, but life sometimes happens, right?)

They teach us. After building kits, if I now want to build a guitar from scratch, I know what needs to be done, in what order, and what I'll need in order to do it.

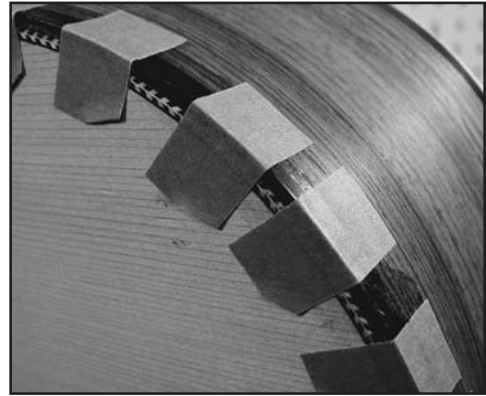
We get practice and experience in fine woodworking skills as they apply to guitarmaking, and we continue to improve.

Fulfillment: I personally get plenty from building a kit and playing it. It's a custom guitar, actually, for which I would pay about four times more if I tried to buy it in a store — if I could find it at all! And I know it all intimately because I created it. There are more reasons, in my opinion, but that's got to be enough!

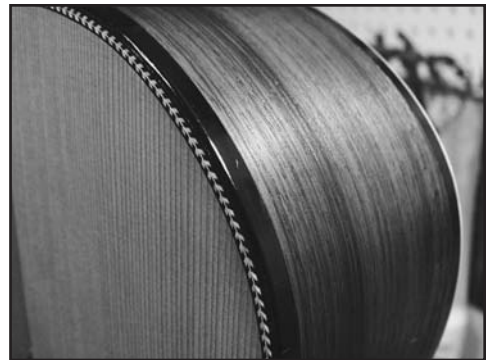
WHAT YOU'LL LEARN FROM THIS BOOK

You could learn everything in this book by scouring the internet, but it would take a really long time. You'd probably miss some essentials.

- By reading this book, you will learn which kits are best for you to start with.
- You will learn which tools are really needed, and which ones can be replaced by cheaper or home-made substitutes.
- You will learn about finishing: Why and why not to use certain types. Which ones are easier to use and which are possibly beyond your capabilities or facilities. Which are good and bad, health-wise. I'll even tell you what I've come up with, but the complete and varied procedures of finishing are best left for other books by professional builders. Those books are also listed herein.



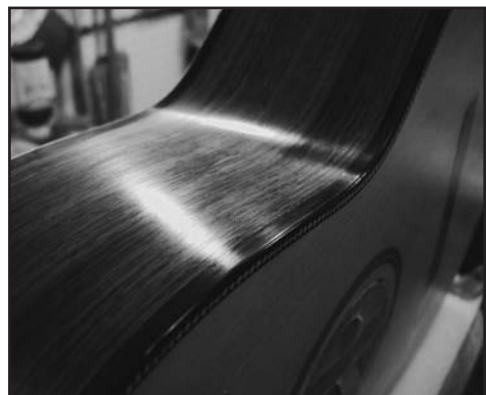
Taping of glued binding and purfling.



Tape removed, cleaned up some.



An oil-based pore filler on rosewood sides.



After the filler excess removed; looks okay.



The finish is looking okay on the back.



The top took time, even without pore filling.



Eventually, the finish was done.

- You will learn in this one little book everything you need to know to make your decisions about buying and building a guitar kit.

KITS AND THE MYSTIQUE OF LUTHERY

You might have a romantic notion of the art and craft of luthery, of old Spanish craftsmen working with *cuchillos* (special knives) and hand tools ... of modern artisans creating miraculously beautiful instruments from raw wood. I have such a picture in my own mind.

To some, building from a kit takes away from those pictures. To me, it doesn't. On one level, I know that I am not anywhere near that fabled and skilled stratum of experts. But on another level, I can relate to them. Once I discard the packing materials, and I feel the wonderful texture of the wood, smell the shavings, wince from the splinters, and admire the work of ages of growth that creates such beautiful natural material, I am right there with all of the builders of past and present. The wood becomes *my* wood. Its shape and result are what I put into it—for, in reality, what I do to this collection of pieces will determine whether it is good—or bad—in the end. It becomes my instrument, though someone else designed it.

You will experience it, too. Even though this is a kit, from a box, you will make it your own. You'll take great pride in your work. The guitar is a special instrument, anyway: We hold it close, move with it, touch it lightly or forcefully, and coax from it musical tones that have an effect far beyond the mere physical creation of sound. Playing an instrument you have built yourself has extra magic.

MISTAKES? AS OL' BLUE EYES SANG

... I've made a few ...

Who hasn't? You will too. Hopefully, none of them will be fatal to your guitar. None of mine have been, and none of them have seemed nearly as huge after completing the guitar as they did at the time I made them.

I've refinished a top four times before being happy with it, or because I screwed it up three times. I've sanded through the side of one guitar *twice*, yet it's one of the

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instruments I most enjoy playing, and I hardly notice the damaged spots anymore. I've routed a binding channel 50% too deep and had to figure out how to cover the error acceptably. I've glued a top on wrong, gotten it completely clamped before I realized it, and had to hurriedly, but carefully, dismantle the whole mess. I've cracked a top on which I spent big money and time doing a really nice green abalone rosette. I've made other, smaller mistakes — lots of them. You will make mistakes, too. I'm telling you some of mine just so you'll know I've "been there," and I can relate to all those speed bumps on the road to finishing the first kit. As one professional luthier told me, half of learning this craft is learning how to fix your mistakes so they have no impact. Another guy told me, "It ain't a mistake 'less you can't fix it!"

THAT'S THE INTRO ...

Good luck with this venture!

If you have questions along the way, get on the internet and ask them at www.KitGuitarForum.com. You can also email me personally from most any of the pages in the website: www.KitGuitarBuilder.com or www.KitGuitarManuals.com. I'd enjoy hearing from you!

Bill Cory

Colorado Springs, CO



Ready to glue the neck to the body.



Well-clamped, it will cure overnight.



My First: The completed Triple-O from Stewart-MacDonald. A Western Red Cedar top from LMI replaced the stock Sitka Spruce top from Stewmac.