



American Legend model 7-string

American Archtop Guitars

by Dale Unger

My deep appreciation for the construction of the 7-string guitar arose from working with Robert Benedetto in the early 90's. One of the perks of this job was being able to sit in Bob's living room and listen to some of today's greatest 7-string players. Stellar instrumentalists like Bucky Pizzarelli, Jimmy Bruno and Howard Alden would come to the Benedetto home to pick up their prized new guitars and I would have the privilege of listening to them play their instruments for the first time.

This experience led me to envision the possibilities of a market for a reasonably priced 7-string guitar. For this enterprise to be successful and to interest players in taking the giant step of playing a guitar with one more string, I knew the guitars had to be reasonably priced.

I then decided to take a leap of faith myself and started my own company- American Archtop Guitars. I began designing and constructing laminated models in 1995. The new laminate I was using had a great sound and was in the price range that made it affordable for players to try their hands at the 7-string. I built two 7-string guitars for the Long Island Guitar Show in 1995 and sold both, receiving orders for several more.

Today, a large majority of my custom orders are for 7-string instruments. Working alone, I build each one by hand, producing a limited number of instruments each year. Over the years, I have built 7-string guitars in an array of types and sizes with 14 - 17" lower bouts, 2- 3 3/8" body depth, and 2 - 2 3/8" nut widths. I've built several oval-hole guitars and f-hole designs with floating pickups and built-in pickups, and laminated or solid carved tops and backs with beautiful wood. For the Long Island and Philadelphia Guitar Shows I always try to bring unique, one-of-a-kind guitars. I am presently building one of my clients his fifth 7-string guitar. Each of his five guitars has a different design.



American Dream model with Violin finish



American Collector Series

I am also working on a few exciting new projects. Over a year ago, Chris Martin IV and I started collaborating on a design for an archtop guitar for C. F. Martin & Co. The new guitars are produced at the Martin factory and feature both the Martin and the American Archtop Logo on the headstock. Working directly with Martin's R& D and manufacturing department has been a wonderful experience. The new CF1 and CF2 are now available at dealers worldwide. Eric Clapton and Joe Beck are owners of a new C.F. Martin/American Archtop Guitar and are giving it great reviews. I am currently in the process of designing a few more archtops for the C. F. Martin Company. Several under construction now feature a 16-inch lower bout, and there will also be a model with a solid carved top and back.

One of my other passions is teaching. Each year I offer several workshops on the subject of archtop construction at the Nazareth Guitar Institute in Nazareth, PA. Students actually construct a guitar during the seven-day, hands-on workshops, then "graduate" not only with the requisite skills to begin a luthiery career but also with their own high quality hand-crafted instrument. Classes are small with individual instruction, or students have the option of a private weeklong class. A flattop guitar building class, taught by Martin's Danny Brown, is also offered at the Nazareth Guitar Institute.

I am also teaching a design class for Northampton Community College which the Martin Company also sponsors. Students construct a three-dimensional full-size model using their own unique design ideas. The class begins with a tour of the Martin facility to see how the company builds instruments. Then the students head back to the college's art design studio to create an original three-dimensional model. Prizes are awarded and all enjoy daily lunches at the elegant Hampton Winds Restaurant. A panel including C. F. Martin IV judges the student designs and the winner is given a Martin X-Series guitar. All students receive a Backpacker travel guitar. For more information regarding luthiery classes, call-toll free: 1 (877) 543-0998.



American Collector Series

My latest exciting project is with Bob Miles of Miles of Music. Bob and I started our own production company under the name of MU Productions. Our basic concept is to film some of the greatest guitar players sharing their experiences in the music industry along with performance tips. Our first project consists of Bucky Pizzarelli instructing my son Tyler Unger and will be distributed by Mel Bay Publications.

Even with these varied pursuits, my overriding passion is still the 18 - 20 custom American Archtop guitars I build each year.

For more information please feel free to contact me at:

www.americanarchtop.com
dale@americanarchtop.com

or call me at (570) 992-4956.