



First Build: A student's perspective.

By Mike Nash, contributing editor

The goal of this column will be to enlighten anyone interested in knowing what they can expect for their first build, and to introduce the “layperson” to the world of woodworking and more specifically, the art of lutherie.

I’ll take you through the steps of this first build a bit at a time. For this first article, we’ll stick with a little overview, and treat it as an introduction (“Hi! My name is Mike, nice to meet you”)

My journey to learn the art of lutherie started when my wonderful wife decided to look online for a guitar building course. After years of babbling on to her about all the different things that make guitars look and sound the way they do, we suddenly found ourselves watching a YouTube video of a master luthier. That’s when she turned to me and said, “You know Mike, you could be a great guitar builder too!”

I was very pleased to find out that there was a school that taught lutherie in the Denver metro area and I wasted no time enrolling. They offered courses in classical as well as steel-string acoustic guitar construction.

For the electric guitar class, it is probably best to just buy the recommended kit. The kit includes all the basic wood, hardware, and an instructional video. Just be ready to be set back between \$350 to \$400. Apparently there’s a run on alder wood for these kits every

enrollment period, so you’ll get whatever wood they give you. I was pleasantly surprised to find that my body blank was not alder, but a gorgeous three piece swamp ash instead. Another student had a one piece mahogany body in his kit. I find that body blanks that are made from two or more joined pieces are commonly painted opaque colors, so mine was more desirable both for it’s species, and for the option of allowing the wood to show through.

I was surprised at the different levels of expertise each student had. Some of my fellow students had previously taken this course one or more times before. One student was building FIVE guitars during the course, while another wanted to try two, but settled for just one based on his time constraints. Some stuck to the specs of the kit, while most, including myself, added a wide variety of personal touches that challenged those specs. I should also mention that this degree of creative license was one of the strong points of appeal of this class for me.

During the process of building the guitar I had a few minor difficulties that I think of as...

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For example: My wife is originally from California and she really wanted some redwood on this guitar. So we purchased a redwood burl drop-top, and a complimentary faceplate for the headstock.

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While I did a great job getting the faceplate onto the headstock, I ended up drilling a 2-½ inch long tapered trench in the middle of it for the truss rod access. So now I know to drill the access hole before gluing the faceplate.

Yet another time, I had drilled the hole for the output jack and afterward I put the back of the guitar body face down on the router table to round over the edges, and forgot about that output jack hole. I caught it quickly, but a little damage had been done. Now I’m hoping that some black wood filler will hide it after I stain the swamp ash black.

So that’s a few “quick-hits” from my first-build experience so far. Next time we’ll begin looking at a few basic tools and their alternatives. I’ll get into some descriptions of the steps we took in school, beginning with the truss rod. By the time this series is over, you should have a thorough knowledge of what to expect for your first build, and hopefully, I will have peaked your interest into the world of woodworking and lutherie.

I hope you have enjoyed some of the pictures of my build. You can see the entire project’s photo spread on Facebook. Just search for...

The Alien Guitar Factory



Mike Nash recently rediscovered an interest from his youth about how electric guitars were made and decided to become a student of lutherie at Red Rocks Community College.

*For more information about future projects and availability, you can drop Mike a line at:
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– Editor

