

The Fundamentals:

By Mike Nash, contributing writer

During my time learning the art and craft of precision woodworking for guitar making, I've been taught several things that help keep everything on-track. In almost every area of woodworking, there are some principles that help to remove human error. These principles will reduce the likelihood that you'll make "fancy firewood" out of your workpiece and keep you safe.

Principle #1 - "Bigger is better"



Everyone in the industry has experienced having to throw away what was to become a new masterpiece because they removed too much material. Cut the piece oversized first, and then fine-tune it to the desired line, dimension, or shape afterward.

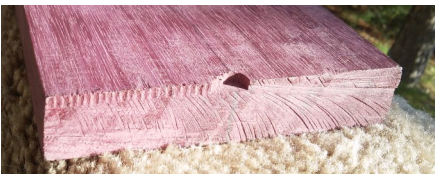
For example, if you wanted to cut a clean-straight line with a bandsaw, you would try to stay close to your line and then use some other method of adjustment, like chiseling or sanding to your final dimension. It's a method that also requires patience, which is a subject that needs to have its own wing in the library! I'll touch more on that later.

Principle #2 - "Practice makes perfect"

I also found a lot of value using "practice pieces". Never experiment with any new method or tool on your workpiece. First, to work the bugs out on anything you are feeling sketchy about, find a piece of scrap to work on. In this way, you get used to the quirks and jerks of the power tools as you power them on, introduce the piece, and find safe practices.



Most spinning tools rotate the same direction; table saws, if the blade is dull, can push back and lift your piece as you push forward.



It's also a great way to check your settings for accuracy. Router depth, for example, can be determined by using a piece of scrap to double-check your

own measurements before introducing your workpiece. For truss rods, this method is a must. Be patient (there's that word again) with your learning.

Principle #3 - "Patience is a virtue"

Patience - highly underrated stuff. It seems a subject that we grasp easily, because it means you remain calm in all aspects of your demeanor. But try being a raw newbie with a hand planer or even the most basic sanding, and it becomes classically absent. To me, patience means that you allow the wood to dictate your speed and rhythm. When you first start out sanding, you quickly get the sensation that you are doing a whole bunch of work, and have made no significant progress.

There are no real shortcuts! Your options are either power-tools to try easing the major shaping tasks or learning the in-and-outs of hand sanding. The latter involves a lot of experimentation (and research) with varying grits, using the longest and most complete strokes possible, using blocks and/or dowels for flatness or curved sanding; also, headphones for the tediousness. Patience with yourself changes a lot in woodworking and in life.

Not to get all "Zen" here, but there's something to be said for experience. If you don't have any, there's no reason to be frustrated during the growing pains. You're going to mess-up some wood. If you can at least leave out the "lecture" on your very first attempt at anything you do, it makes the entire learning process way easier.

So, with these guidelines in place, any woodworking experience can be that much more rewarding. The sooner you implement principles of this nature, the more rewarding your involvement with woodworking will be in any industry.

- Mike

Mike Nash rediscovered an interest from his youth in how electric guitars were made and decided to become a student of lutherie at Red Rocks Community College. He now builds custom guitars under the name Alien Guitar Factory based in Castle Rock, Colorado.



For more information about Mike's current projects and available guitars, drop him a line at: alienguitarfactory@gmail.com or visit: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Alien-Guitar-Factory/598699676907870>

— Editor.