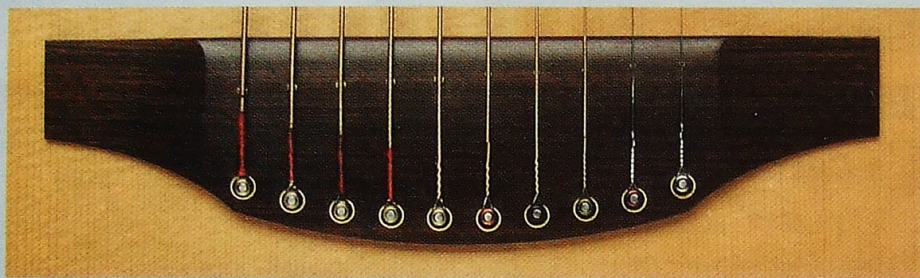


Jeffrey R. Elliott Ten-String

by Teja Gerken



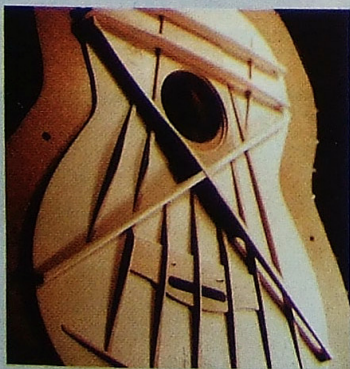
Portland, Oregon, luthier Jeffrey R. Elliott (www.elliottguitars.com) is one of the world's most respected builders of classical guitars. Sharing a shop with his partner, luthier Cyndy Burton, Elliott meticulously crafts six to eight guitars each year for clients including Julian Bream, Ralph Towner, and Earl Klugh.

Elliott isn't known as much for his steel-string guitars, even though he has built quite a few during nearly four decades as a guitarmaker. Built in 1990, this ten-string steel-string was designed for Benjamin Hoff, a guitarist whose repertoire includes music originally written for ten-course Renaissance lute. Determining that the lowest two strings wouldn't need to be fretted, Elliott chose to let them "float" next to the neck—which could be narrower as a result. He also increased the scale length for these strings to 683 mm. and 684.5 mm. by including a separate nut. (Remaining strings are based on a 650 mm. scale, but compensation is progressively longer for each string.) The guitar's three lowest strings are equipped with Schaller D-Tuner banjo tuners, which can instantly change a string's pitch by a half step or whole step, making it easier to use the bass strings in different keys.

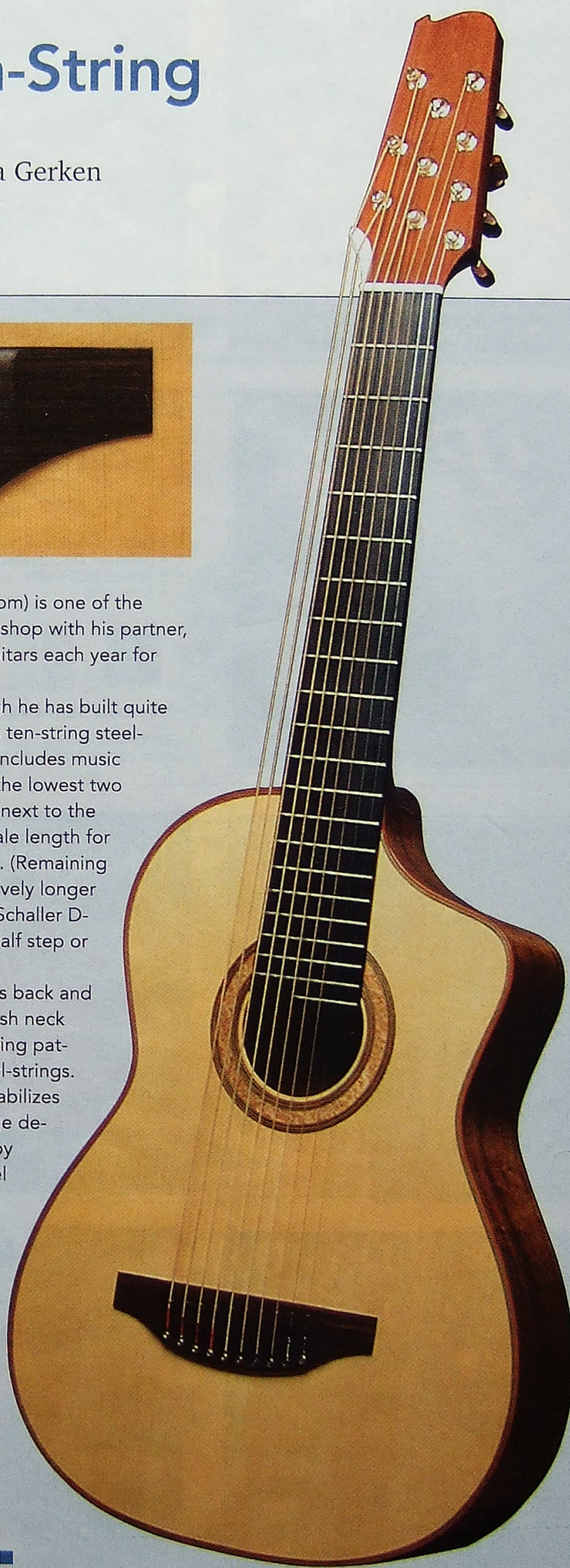
Elliott chose Engelmann spruce for the guitar's top and koa for its back and sides. Many of the ten-string's fundamental design elements—Spanish neck joint with compound cutaway, pinless bridge, mix of X- and fan-bracing patterns, and French-polish finish—are also found on Elliott's other steel-strings.

"The Spanish heel style provides a light, but very strong joint and stabilizes the neck/body relationship," he says. In Elliott's unique pinless bridge design, the strings are secured by sliding the ball ends over steel posts behind the saddle. The guitar's bracing combines steel-string and classical elements, essentially superimposing an X-bracing pattern over a strategically placed fan arrangement.

Elliott has long advocated French polishing: "It's not only beautiful, but I believe it has the most appropriate effect on the sound by bringing out the best of a guitar's fullness, roundness, and tonal complexity." ■



Elliott's hybrid X- and fan-bracing pattern. Top: The luthier's unique pinless bridge design includes individual saddles.



JEFFREY ELLIOTT (BRACING), MIKE DOOLIN (OTHERS)