

The DeGive Dulcimer

Daniel J Betsill, luthier

Entry for Less is More 2010 - simplicity leads to sustainability,
Connexion Gallery



Project Statement.

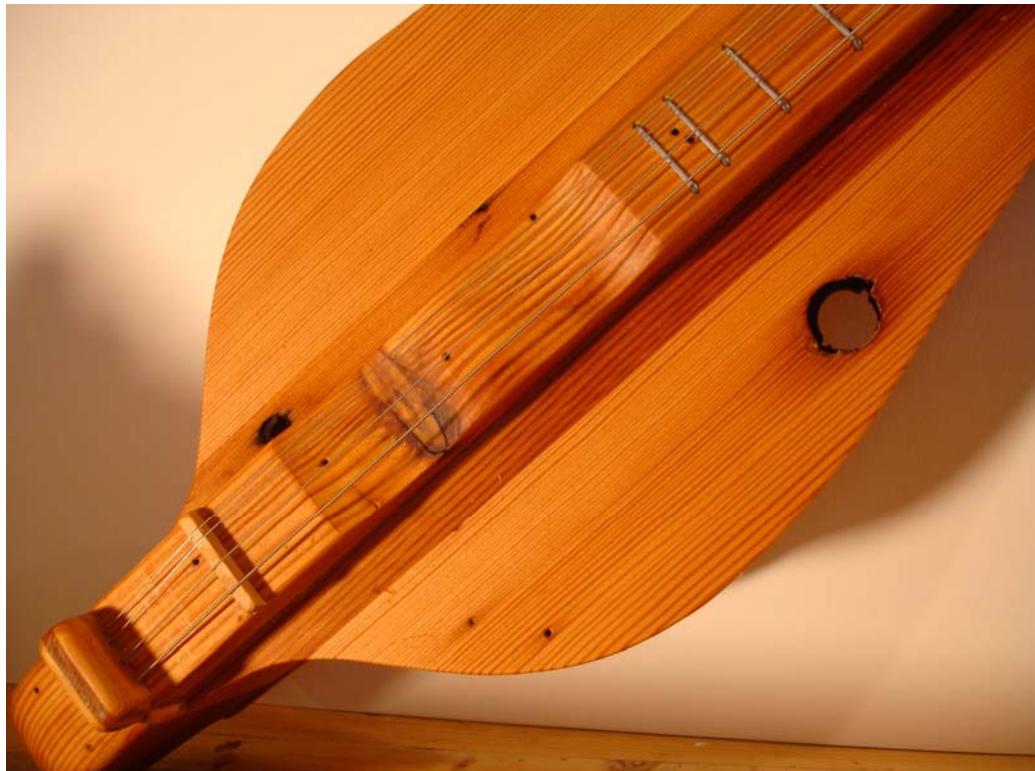
Lutherie is the craft of stringed instrument making, which I have pursued for years as a sideline to my profession in residential architecture. These two disciplines have many common requirements: application of scale, proportion and geometry, structural considerations, and now, material.

Construction waste is well known to be one of the largest contributors to landfill worldwide. The production of musical instruments has through the centuries used indiscriminately some of the most precious materials: ivory, tortoise shell and pearl for inlay, ebony, rosewood and other exotic woods often constituting entire instruments.

While taking part earlier this year in the renovation of an old Ansley Park home, my attention was drawn to the fine pine framing which was scheduled for demolition. It was dense "old growth" wood with considerably straight grain. The prospect of making an instrument from it immediately came to me and I salvaged the most promising pieces.

What resulted is a piece that at the same time is useful and creative, it is recycling, preservation, and quite literally living history. The entire instrument is made from a single 8 foot long, 2x4 stud which was divided up to result in minimal wastage. The story of the house is told through the marks left on the wood, showing decades of renovations and modernization. Thoughtless hammer-blows pepper the back. A single conduit hole, inflicted decades after the house was first built, shows up repeatedly as soundholes and through the headstock: The grain twisting around the spiral bit as it ate through the wood. Plaster lath tacks leave their mark across the fingerboard. The holes left by nails are present throughout, showing the distortion of the grain and the stain of rust. The frets themselves are made from hammered-out electrical staples.

I named this project after the DeGive family, the first family to inhabit the house, from 1911 to the end of the 1950's. I chose to make a lap dulcimer out of it because, besides being a simple instrument that is more likely to be successful made entirely out of pine, it is an Appalachian instrument that at the time period the house was built was just coming to the consciousness of the urban public. As I built, and as the renovation of the house was taking place, I learned of the previous owners of the house and their importance in Atlanta history. Beyond the simple act of reuse, I found the project taught me a great deal about the different ways we can preserve, and how to learn from the past. My future instruments will benefit.







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Lap Dulcimer; pine, steel staples and strings

Overall length: 34"

Value: \$1,200

Some images of the process: from Framing to Dulcimer. See more details on my website at <http://betsillworkshop.com/DeGive Dulcimer>



