

A DISCLAIMER BEFORE WE GET STARTED! About the photos, (poor as they are), each shows many points. I have used a couple of them more than once throughout the text. Jumping around on a digital reader can be tricky, so, to make it as easy as possible I have just inserted the same picture as needed. I merely took the photos so I would later remember how I had done something. I never thought I would write an article about building the harp. I am not a good enough digital editor to block out the background so if you ever meet my wife do not tell her you saw these pictures, the garage was a mess the few days I took these pictures.

So, Here Goes

I am not a huge fan of slap-stick comedy, however, I would gladly and patiently sit through an entire Marx Brother's movie just to watch and hear Harpo Marx play his beautiful harp. After his two minute concert, without a care to see another frame of the movie, I can easily shut it off and be content with the loss of the rest of the movie. Though I do not presently play the instrument, its beautiful sound has always drawn me in and to watch a harpist play, well, I find it hypnotic.

I cannot admit to liking the sound of Celtic harps, though, or the music either, but true classical pieces played on a harp will slip me somewhere else with ease. I play the piano, organ, keyboards and guitar, so you see I have the keyboard understanding of musical theory and, as well, because of the guitar, I can pluck, too.

"Why build a harp," you ask. Well, I had some seven-quarter (1-3/4" thick) rough cut ash boards left over from another project. I had ornately worked, stained and finished ash counter-type tops for two large built-in cabinets in my living-room and dining-room. That was during a major remodeling of our house in Gloucester, Massachusetts, which ended up going too far, costing too much and taking almost a year to complete. Admittedly, I also took on the harp for giggles, at first, to see if I could do it.

How did I start? I remember sketching a lot and thinking and daydreaming and finally I started to lay-out a profile of the "Neck" on the masonite covered workbench in my garage.

Even today, after I have already built one, I cannot say I know very much about harps, in general. Nevertheless, for those uninitiated, I suppose I should explain my understanding of the individual parts of a harp before going too far. The "Neck" is the top fancy curved piece with all the holes where the tuning pins and stand-offs are secured. The "Pillar" is the vertical board supporting the front of the "Neck". The "Sound-Box" of the instrument is like the body of a guitar. The "Pedestal" or base, from my way of thinking, should only have three legs. I will explain later about that.

I made every piece of my harp, except the tuning pins and the strings. I did buy those two items. For "Tuning Pins" I decided on nickel-plated "Nippon Denro Piano Tuning Pins". I found them for sale brand new on-line at Vanda King's Piano Showcase. I was surprised to find that they were not very costly. There is a whole story behind the strings that I will get into toward the end.

As I stated before, I first started by sketching, crude sketches, of course. At some point in my life I came to understand that I could see in my head, clearly and precisely, what something I am going to build will look like before I start building it. For some reason once I have an understanding of the object I can see or imagine proportions to dimensions where others cannot.

I did make a few mistakes along the way and sometimes I was not sure how I was going to fabricate something before I started to actually build it. In the following photo you can get a feel for the heft of the material I used.