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Subject: Any advice on working with exotics?

Posted by [gonefishin](#) on Mon, 22 Dec 2003 19:33:26 GMT

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Hi All! Any advice on working with exotic woods? Such as cocobola and ebony? I want to build myself a new chassis for a Foreplay...and have been thinking of incorporating both cocobola (for the main chassis) and ebony for the footers...or feeters...or whatever they are. thanks! enjoy the music!

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Subject: Re: You've entered the no carving zone !

Posted by [Bill Martinelli](#) on Mon, 22 Dec 2003 19:58:13 GMT

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I like the super hard and difficult woods as long as they don't need to be carved or require a lot of hand work. They "machine" very nicely with sharp tools and carbide is just about a must! Some of these difficult woods are getting close to how aluminum works. So with your woodworking tool things have to be sharp, sturdy and make light passes. Lots of the exotics are very oily, like coco bolo. You'll want to wipe it down with lacquer thinner or alcohol before making any glue joints. For this application I would also suggest enduring the misery and use a polyurethane glue. All the problems are worth the time and trouble when the wood looks good in the end.

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Subject: Re: You've entered the no carving zone !

Posted by [gonefishin](#) on Mon, 22 Dec 2003 20:27:33 GMT

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Thanks for the comments (could you guys work on a reply with quote feature?) These things are definitely hard...I think I've used some steel that was softer than the Ebony...sheesh. One of my wonders about these woods. How do they router? I could imagine that the bits have to be kept sharp...but are there any other concerns? I have noticed that these woods (especially cocobola) are extremely oily. Thanks for the tip on gluing. Is there any concern to using this oily wood on the top plate of a tubed preamp or tube amp? I wouldn't imagine the heat from the preamp tubes being much of a concern. But, could the heat from a power amp have adverse effects on the oily wood? perhaps drying it out...or...whatever??? Also...some of these woods are sooo darn purty, you'd be a fool to do anything to the finish. But...with that said. Are there enough oils in the wood to act as a natural protectant...or do these woods need to have some sort of finish applied...not to beautify...or to add an effect...but to protect the wood??? oh so many questions?????? thanks!

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Subject: Re: You've entered the no carving zone !  
Posted by [Bill Martinelli](#) on Mon, 22 Dec 2003 21:12:56 GMT  
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Hi Dan, Yep, tons of feature that need work. I have a difficult enough time with veneer let alone C++. The features are not up to me to build in but they are being worked on. No experience with an oily wood in a hot area. I don't imagine it will be a fire hazard and after you finish the wood it will be pretty much sealed. The natural oils of the wood will eventually dry out, but this shouldn't present too much trouble. As with all natural things anything can happen. The wood could last an eternity just as it is, or the ends could dry out and check. The long time tradition to help the wood to last an eternity is to use a finish that will seal it from the environment. That's why better furniture has at least a few sealer coats of finish on the inside that will never be seen. A router won't be a problem. A variable speed router set to a slower setting might be helpful. If the wood is really hard and or knarly, you have to make a few passes to get your cut. If you make a pass or two with a router, I would leave yourself a very small amount that you can make one last pass, as a kiss pass. This lets you glide the piece through the router, (or the router through the piece) with very little force yet maintain even pressure and speed of feed. Some of the exotics have some very nasty dust when worked and a mask is important. Some people are allergic to exotic woods. Coco bola can be one of them. Never heard of a problem with ebony. Well, other than if your blade is not sharp your going to be in prime competition for a smoke show and starting a fire with out a match, along with the boy scouts

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Subject: Re: A few more pesos  
Posted by [Bill Epstein](#) on Tue, 23 Dec 2003 00:01:12 GMT  
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As an ex-Floridian, a lot of Purpleheart, Bubinga, and Brazilian Rosa Pedrosa has dulled my router. I would recommend against slow settings which will leave burn marks hard to get out. Light passes at high speed better. You can always move a little slower across tough spots. Sometimes, especially into end grain no more than 1/8" at a time. Tropicals are the exception to my rule of always using white PVA, I like yellow after a rub with lacquer thinner as BillM says. Resorcinol, hard to find but worth the effort (outdoor sign makers use it) is a great glue for these woods. Hate Polyurethane and won't use it even here. I've used Tung oil on them with good results and of course lacquer is A-1. For small jobs like Foreplay bases, lacquer in aerosol cans is great. Behlen is okay but Deft is much better. Follow BillM's way to spray except you need to lightly wet sand with 3M 400 grit wet'n'dry between coats. Use a HARD cork or cork covered wood block so everything stays flat. Just get out the dust 'nibs'. A coat is slightly overlapping passes horizontal and then vertical. Light coats each time. Build 3 light coats an hour apart and then sand. Then a heavier coat and sand. Then another. Sand Another. Wait 3 years then wet sand with wool lube and 0000 wool or 600 grit paper. Get crazy. Rub out that with Meguiars #2. Then Meguiars Gold wax. Pearly!

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Subject: and they come thru again!  
Posted by [gonefishin](#) on Tue, 23 Dec 2003 00:40:01 GMT  
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Thanks Bill & Bill! Just the sort of advice i was hoping for! I'm sure I'll have more questions as time goes on...I always do ;)  
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Subject: Re: Any advice on working with exotics? Just say "No"  
Posted by [TC](#) on Fri, 26 Dec 2003 15:16:50 GMT  
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Just say "no". Ebony has left the planet! Making clarinet end bells used to require 5 blanks to get one right (without cracks). Now 250 blanks are spun to find ONE that won't blow up. Over cutting has left the specie undesirable for any use but sustaining itself as a specie. "ebonize" maple or other hard wood.TC

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Subject: Re: Excellent point  
Posted by [BillEpstein](#) on Sun, 28 Dec 2003 01:14:46 GMT  
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Veneer and plantation grown trees are the answer to the problem. But it's a big problem. The rain Forest gets cleared so land can be farmed and the big trees of Mahogany and such are too valuable to stand in an economy where annual incomes are measured in hundreds of dollars. There are many acceptable substitutes like the ebonized maple you mention. Also tagua nut instead of ivory for inlays. And the careful use of fillers and dyes makes plantation mahogany look like old growth cuban. It only makes sense that all work with Cocobolo, Wenge, Ebony, etc has to be veneer over MDF or birch plywood. And there are alternatives in quarter sawn oak and dyed quilted maple and Walnut which are easily renewable. Too bad about the Clarinets. Maybe it's a good thing public school arts programs have gone down the tubes. Fewer bad teenage clarinetists with braces!

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Subject: Re: Any advice on working with exotics?  
Posted by [hurdy\\_gurdyman](#) on Sun, 04 Jan 2004 16:33:55 GMT  
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Enough cannot be said about using proper dust mask at all times when sanding some types of

wood. A few years ago I was building a mountain dulcimer as a Christmas rush project. Much of the instrument was made of mahogany. I was sanding a lot, but sometimes removed my mask because my cold workshop was causing my glasses to fog up with the mask on. On a Friday I started to get a swelling in my left upper leg. By Sunday I was one sick puppy. I went to the hospital Monday. My whole body was so swollen I couldn't lay down and had to be propped up in bed. I came down with Pnemonia that same day. I spent three days in a sitting position, propped up, gasping for every breath, sometimes not fully coherent. I almost died that week. On the fourth day, I got better and was allowed to go home in my wife's care. It was weeks before I could keep up just walking with her in a department store. A lesson for all to remember. Sawdust, especially certain more exotic woods, is nothing to trifle with. Wear that mask!Dave

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