

## WOOD SAMPLE ATTRIBUTES

### Appearance

Look at examples 1-15 and evaluate them on the following criteria. Make a note of the number of the sample that you feel represents a good looking top. Be prepared to explain why,

- 1) Grain Contrast Is there a clear definition between the light and dark stripes of grain? This contrast is an indication of how strong these internal structural elements are in the wood.
- 2) Grain Width How wide are the light sections of grain? Wood gets its strength from the dark stripes in the grain, so wood with higher numbers of grain stripes will be stronger. A traditional preference in this area would be to have tight narrow grain in the center of the soundboard (this would be the edge of the individual plate) with grain gradually thickening towards the outside edges.
- 3) Straightness Is the grain straight from one end to the other. Straight grain will be stronger and look more traditional.
- 4) Figure Are there shimmery areas of the grain that reflect light differently? This figure is usually associated with wood that is very accurately quarter sawn and indicates a stronger top. Some people feel that this figure detracts from appearance while others value this feature
- 5) Flaws Are there knots or pitch pockets in the grain? Can you work around these areas with your shape? If the flaws are not in the way, they really don't matter

### Stiffness

Look at examples 16 through 22 and gently flex the wood to evaluate stiffness. Notice the differences between the samples. Remember, gently... it will break if you are too heavy handed. Make a note of a "stiff" sample and a "floppy" one.

- 1) Cross Grain How stiff is the wood when flexed along the narrow dimension of the plate? This is the weak part of the wood so be careful not to break it. Wood that is too floppy might be "dead" although this is not always true.
- 2) With Grain How stiff is the wood, when flexed along the long dimension. Stiff wood along this dimension will be stronger and brighter.

## **Tone**

This is the fun part. Look at examples 23 through 32 and perform the three tests listed below. Try to notice the differences between the samples. Pick a sample that you would use to build a guitar.

1) Fingertip Test Gently run your fingertips across the wood while holding it in your other hand. This is a totally subjective evaluation, but you can "hear" the wood as your fingers hiss across the surface. Gently brush your fingernails across the wood as well. Wood that will, make bright sounding taps will almost resonate with this test.

### 2) Tap Tones

a. Frequency Hold the wood between your thumb and index finger at the edge approximately a third of the way along the long dimension. You may have to pinch it a bit each way to find the node that will allow the plate to resonate. Is the tone a dull thud? Does it resonate but at a low tone? Does it resonate with a high tone? You must remember that these tones will change somewhat as the wood is thinned, but generally you want that wood with the high clear tone.

b. Sustain Holding the wood in the same manner, tap it and evaluate how long the tone lasts. The longer the note, the less internal damping the wood has and thus, the brighter tap it will make.