

MH-16-05-FN Summary
Chris Pantazelos, luthier

We have known about Chris Pantazelos since first meeting him at Unique Strings in Belmont. He apprenticed to National Heritage Fellow Peter Kyvelos there for many years before opening his own shop, Spartan Instruments in Lowell in 2015.

Since we hadn't been to his shop before, I arranged a field visit in mid-March. Chris will demonstrate musical instrument in the folk craft area of the Lowell Folk Festival this summer. He will share a tent with Puerto Rican cuatro and guitar maker, William Cumpiano.

Prior to visiting Chris at his shop, I spoke with him on the telephone (3/17/16). I asked about the woods he uses in building instruments. "It depends on the instrument. Guitars you use spruce for the sound board and rosewood or mahogany for the side and back. The back of the bouzouki is made of walnut staves. On the oud, you use two alternating staves – a combination of walnut and mahogany or walnut and maple. Medium density wood, like a fruitwood. Sometimes we use mulberry. It's similar to walnut, but yellowish and oxidizes to almost a chocolate brown.

March 29, 2016

Adam Schutzman, who had asked if he could shadow me doing some fieldwork, met me in the parking lot by Spartan Instruments around 10:15 am. We walked up the exterior stairway to the shop's door and were greeted by Chris Pantazelos. The shop appeared cluttered, with little free surfaces save for a workbench and a plastic table. Instruments in line for repair were hanging from little nooselike ropes around the periphery of the shop. Chris had some black and white framed photographs of his family and older relatives. A large map of Greece was taped to the wall.

A musician with many years of experience working with audio-visual archives and folkloric materials, Adam was right at home as we walked into Chris' shop. So I put him to work. Adam wore headphones and recorded the interview using our Tascam recorder and the Shure mic.

Chris currently had several building projects underway, including a large acoustic bass guitar. He recently finished a highly ornamented jazz guitar. More of his income comes from repairs than commissions.