



## A GUIDED TOUR OF A LUTHIER'S WALLS, WORK SURFACES, GIZMOS AND GADGETS

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**MY WORKSHOP IS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MUNICH**, not far from a beautiful green area with four kilometres of trees, a river and lots of wild animals. I like to be surrounded by nature – hence all the plants in my workshop – and to work in a quiet area rather than the centre of town. I don't listen to music while I'm working either, as I like to be able to concentrate on each activity separately. I think if a piece of music is something you can have on in the background it's not worth listening to.

I am lucky to have quite a lot of space here, almost 200 square metres in total. As well as this workshop, I have a separate acoustics room for modal analysis, a 'chemical room' where I varnish instruments and carry out research on refining wood properties, a machine room, a small room for musicians to try out instruments, a kitchen and an office. At the moment it's just me and my assistant, Gabriel Bauer, working here, but in a few years I hope there will be more of us.

My time is divided between making and acoustics research. Generally I'll spend two or three days making and then one day in the acoustics lab. But if I've almost finished making an instrument, I run between the workbench and the lab doing measurements to find out where the resonance of the instrument is, making adjustments and then measuring it again.

Above the desk in the corner is a drawing of the instrument I made for my final Master's exam in lutherie. As part of the exam you have to draw your instrument perfectly in black ink. On the window on the left I have stuck a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's famous *Vitruvian Man* drawing. Da Vinci is a great example to me, because of the fascinating combination of art and science that characterises his work.

On the workbench on the right are three finished cellos and two that I'm still working on. The violas on the blue trolley are clients' instruments waiting for tonal adjustments. When instruments are finished I store them in the tall cupboards with the glass doors. I am happy if I have one or two of them in there at a time. Most of my instruments are made to order so they don't tend to hang around for very long after they're finished.

I make most of my own tools. Those hanging from the ceiling are for various tasks: for carving scrolls and arching, and for inserting the neck. I made the wooden handles myself and the metal sections were commissioned from a tool maker. I told him exactly what I needed, so they are very personal; you couldn't buy them anywhere.

I also suspend my bridges from the ceiling because it's good for them to get plenty of light: it helps improve the sound as well as the visual appearance. Light accelerates the ageing process, increasing the ratio of stiffness to density in the wood.

I need the microphone to make recordings, both of musicians when they come to try instruments and of my own playing. I keep mostly Romantic pieces in the studio to play when I'm trying out instruments. I keep a tonal database of the sound of everything I make. Some time ago a musician came in with his Stradivari and just by chance I had another one in the workshop, so we made recordings of both of them followed by one of my latest instrument.

Just out of the shot there is also a 'personal corner' in my workshop, with a table, more plants and some of my favourite inspirational books. Most are Christian and Jewish theology books. This is where I go if I need a break: I'll interrupt my work with a cup of espresso and just read.

**Interview by Catherine Payne**



MARTIN SCHLESKE