

The Charis SJ: A Fingerstyle Legacy in Wood and Wire

Introduction: A Guitar Born of Obsession

In the world of boutique acoustic guitars, few names evoke the reverence and admiration that Charis Acoustic does. Founded by master luthier Bill Wise in Bay City, Michigan, Charis Acoustic is more than a guitar brand—it's a philosophy, a spiritual journey, and a testament to the art of overdoing things for the sake of excellence. At the heart of this journey lies the Charis SJ, a Small Jumbo guitar that has become synonymous with fingerstyle perfection.

Wise's own words—"Love for Fingerstyle guitar and my tendency to obsess on overdoing"—capture the essence of the SJ. It's a guitar born from relentless refinement, shaped by years of experimentation, and elevated by a deep spiritual commitment to craftsmanship.

Chapter 1: The Vision Behind Charis Acoustic

Bill Wise didn't set out to build guitars for the masses. His mission was personal and spiritual: to create instruments that reflect divine creativity and

human devotion. Each Charis SJ is a reflection of this ethos—a guitar that doesn't just sound beautiful but feels sacred.

Wise's workshop is a place of quiet intensity. Every piece of wood is selected with care, every curve shaped with intention. The SJ model, in particular, embodies this philosophy. It's designed for players who seek nuance, responsiveness, and a voice that speaks with clarity and warmth.

Chapter 2: Anatomy of the SJ

The Charis SJ is a study in ergonomic design and tonal balance. Its dimensions are meticulously crafted:

- Upper Bout Width: 11.375"
- Waist Width: 9.375"
- Lower Bout Width: 15.25"
- Body Length: 19.5"
- Body Depths:
 - Standard: 4.375" at end block, 3.875" at heel

- Mid-Depth: 3.875" / 3.375"
- Thin Body: 3.375" / 2.875"
- Scale Lengths: 24.9" (13 frets to body) or 25.6" (14 frets)
- Nut Widths: 1.75" and 1.8125"
- String Spacing at Saddle: 2.25" and 2.3125"
- Fingerboard Radius: 16" standard

These specifications aren't arbitrary—they're the result of years of feedback from players and Wise's own obsessive pursuit of perfection.

Chapter 3: Tonewoods That Sing

Charis SJ guitars are built from premium tonewoods, each chosen for its sonic and aesthetic qualities:

- Top Woods: Adirondack spruce or Carpathian spruce for dynamic range and clarity
- Back and Sides: Indian rosewood, African blackwood, or Brazilian rosewood for depth and sustain

- Fingerboards: Ebony or Brazilian rosewood for smooth playability
- Bindings and Purfling: Koa bindings and abalone purfling for visual elegance

The five-piece necks—often combining rosewood, maple, and bubinga—offer both stability and beauty. These materials aren't just decorative; they shape the SJ's voice, giving it a rich, balanced tone that responds to the lightest touch.

Chapter 4: Designed for Fingerstyle

Fingerstyle guitar is a demanding art form. It requires separation between notes, responsiveness to dynamics, and a voice that can whisper or roar. The SJ was built with these needs in mind.

Its wide nut and string spacing provide room for intricate fingerwork. The body shape enhances projection while maintaining warmth. Whether played with bare fingers or a thumbpick, the SJ delivers clarity, sustain, and emotional depth.

Chapter 5: The Charis “Air”

One standout variant is the Charis “Air”—a lightweight, thin-bodied SJ designed for comfort without sacrificing tone. It’s ideal for players who want a responsive instrument that won’t weigh them down during long sessions.

Despite its reduced mass, the Air retains the tonal richness of the standard SJ. It’s a testament to Wise’s ability to innovate without compromise.

Chapter 6: Customization and Craftsmanship

Charis SJ guitars are not mass-produced. Each is hand-built, often with extensive customization:

- Cutaways for upper fret access
- Unique inlays like “doves in flight”
- Internal pickups for stage use
- Custom cases from Cedar Creek

This level of personalization means no two Charis SJs are alike. They are reflections of their owners, shaped by their musical needs and aesthetic tastes.

Chapter 7: A Spiritual Undertone

Wise's mission goes beyond craftsmanship. He views guitar building as a spiritual act, a way to reflect divine creativity through human hands. This philosophy permeates every Charis SJ, making it more than wood and wire—it's a conduit for emotion, worship, and connection.

Chapter 8: In the Hands of Artists

Charis SJ guitars have found homes with discerning musicians who value tone, playability, and beauty. From studio professionals to worship leaders, the SJ has become a trusted companion, capable of expressing the subtlest musical ideas.

Chapter 9: The Boutique Legacy

Though boutique in scale, Charis Acoustic has built a legacy of excellence. The SJ model stands as a testament to what happens when obsession meets inspiration. It's a guitar that rewards nuance,

invites exploration, and encourages
fingerstyle playing

Nothing

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