

# RON SOYDEN Custom Snare Drums

By Bob Cianci



Ron Soyden, a Connecticut-based woodworker, is one of the latest of a new breed of boutique drum builders now offering custom-made snare drums to discriminating drummers. Although not a drummer by trade (he's learning now), Ron did extensive research and worked with drummer friends to develop and perfect his own theories and ideas about drum making, and as you will read, he has some very definite ideas about how drums should be made. Ron also makes wooden miniatures, antique reproduction parts, vases and bowls, all of which, along with his snare drums, are viewable on his website, [www.artistryinwoodminis.com](http://www.artistryinwoodminis.com). Anyone interested in one of Ron's snares can contact him though his website.

**Classic Drummer:** Tell our readers a little about yourself and your background in woodworking.

**RS:** I got into woodworking in my first year of high school. I lived in Lowell, MA and attended Lowell Trade High School. As an adult, I worked for a few custom furniture manufacturers and an architectural woodworking company. Making snare drums has become my main interest. I have a website, [www.artistryinwoodminis.com](http://www.artistryinwoodminis.com), where you can see my drums and other work I've done.

**CD:** Why did you decide to get into drum making? Are you a drummer?

**RS:** I have a few friends who are drummers. One of them asked if I could make him a wooden snare drum. I told him I'd give it a try and went online to see how some of the larger drum companies made their drums and out of what materials. With my woodworking experience, I figured I could do a pretty good job and wanted to do my best for a friend. I made two for him and three more, which I put into a local music

store, Caruso Music, in New London, CT. One sold within a few weeks to a drummer from Russia whose band was in the States for a short time playing in Niantic, CT. It just blossomed from there.

**CD:** You mentioned that you make your own shells. Can you take us through the manufacturing process step by step?

**RS:** For my friend's snare, I took some quarter sawn maple boards and re-sawed them into plies just under 1/8th of an inch. I planed the pieces to 1/16th of an inch and made a mold to form the plies around. The plies are glued on one at a time and the shell is trued up after each ply. I used seven plies of maple and applied a wood veneer to finish it off. After removing the shell from the mold, it's attached to another fixture to hold it on my lathe so I can trim the edges, true it up and dimension it. I made a third fixture to hold the shell for sanding and applying the finish. Holes are drilled on horizontal boring machine.

Polyurethane was used as a finish for my first few drums but I'm now using a pre-catalyzed lacquer. I use as many coats as it takes to fill the grain of the wood sanding between coats. After the final coat the shell is wet sanded and buffed back to a high gloss using PPG automotive compounds and glazes.

**CD:** Do you have any proprietary features on your drums? Do you plan to implement solid shells anytime soon?

**RS:** I've made a few snares using Sitka Spruce for the shells. I don't know of any others doing that but that doesn't mean there aren't any; I just don't know of any.

Sitka Spruce has become a tried and true gold standard for acoustic guitars and soundboards for harps, so why not drums? The drums I make using Sitka Spruce have a sound of their own, much like acoustic guitars made from the same wood. As such, Sitka drums are just as much, if not more resonant, than solid. From my experience in working with wood, I can safely say that a lami-

nated shell is a lot more stable than a single piece. Don't take that the wrong way; I'm not saying a steam bent or solid wood shell isn't a good thing. I'm just saying I believe a laminated shell is more stable.

**CD:** There are a lot of boutique "drum assemblers" out there using generic shells, hardware and finishes. Outside of the fact that you build your own shells, how do you differ from them?

**RS:** Structural stability - these drums are built to last! My Sitka Spruce shells are pretty unique. I make my own plies and they're thicker than most I've seen. My shells are extremely rigid and will hold their shape regardless of how tight you tension your heads. I use quarter-sawn lumber, which makes a stiffer and more stable ply. Given the thickness of my shells, there is no need for reinforcing rings. I offer many wood veneers for a finish, or it can be painted.

**CD:** How are you marketing your drums at this point?

**RS:** I've run some print ads and also ads in the local Yellow Pages. I've exhibited

at a couple of drum shows as well -The Connecticut Vintage and Custom Drum Show in Newington, CT and the New England International Drum Show in Manchester, NH. Word of mouth is my best marketing tool.

**CD:** Where do you see yourself in the next five years? What are your goals for the company and what kind of feedback have you gotten from your customers?

**RS:** I'm just taking it slow right now. I love making snare drums and I get a lot of pleasure just knowing people like them. I've had a lot of positive feedback from customers and others who have seen and heard them. I've been asked if I have plans to make complete kits. For now it's snares only.

**CD:** Have any well-known drummers tried your snares yet?

**RS:** Johnny "Bee" Badanjek is the only well-known drummer using one of snares at the moment. He has a 5-1/2 X

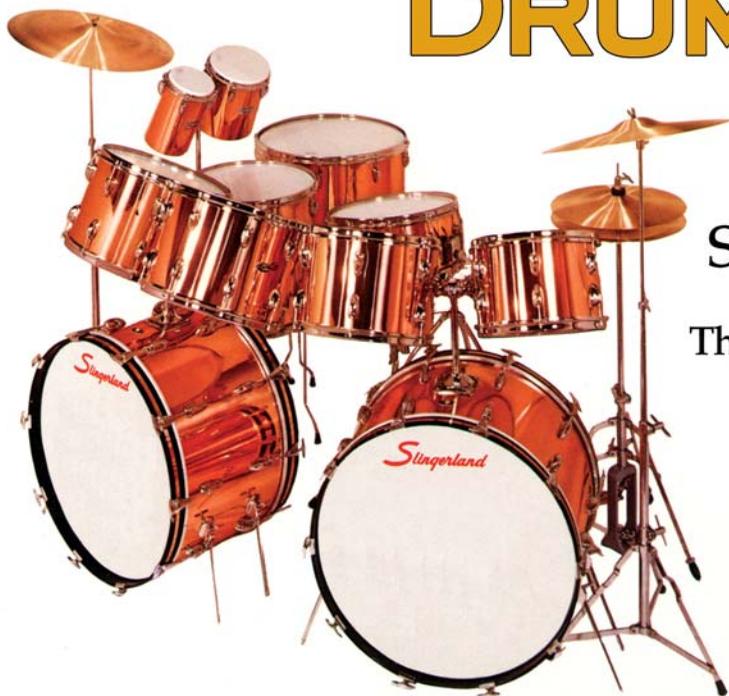


6 1/2" Sitka Spruce shell with Brazillian Rosewood veneer

14 with a maple shell. I let him give it a "road test" and in Bee's words, "I can tell you, after playing one of Ron's snares it's like drivin' a Corvette at a hundred miles an hour. Just lay your sticks on it and watch the sparks fly. Ron, I think you're on to something because that's one of the best-sounding snare drums I've heard in a long time."

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Newark, DE  
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