



Observations

from
the
shop

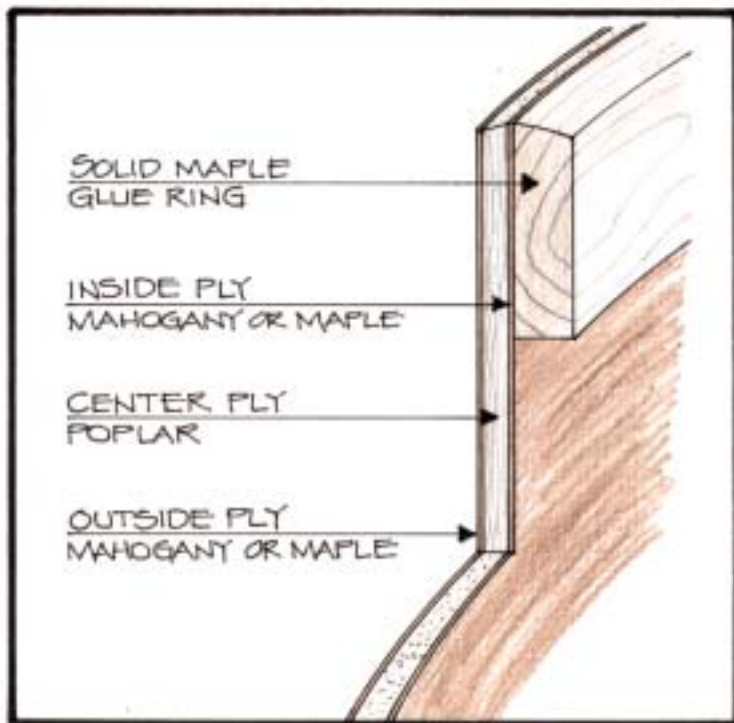
by Jack Lawton

Being in the drum restoration business, I have a daily opportunity to work on drum shells of all different makes and sizes. The one type of shell that I see most often is the LUDWIG 3-ply shell. The original Ludwig 3-ply shell consisted of one poplar panel sandwiched between two thinner panels of African Mahogany. These panels were cross-laminated for strength and durability, then reinforced with solid maple “glue rings” for additional strength and stability. The shells were light in weight, with a thickness of about 1/4”, and were very durable. In a 1920’s publicity stunt, Ludwig salesman, Davey Davidson, dropped three shells from an open cock-pit bi-plane from 500 feet to a cornfield below. The shells landed safely without breaking or cracking! Ludwig

then advertised their drum shells of AERO-KRAFT construction. This basic method of shell construction was used for over



half a century. The common features of these shells were the use of poplar for the center ply and solid maple for the glue rings. They used maple for the outside ply if the drum was to have a lacquer finish, since maple was less porous than mahogany and had a much smoother surface for lacquer. The lacquered finishes were either clear over maple (or mahogany), opaque solid colors or duco lacquers. The term “duco” referred to a two color, or DUO COLOR pattern, such as the blue-silver-blue, red-white-red, or black-gold-black finish. On a drum shell with a wrapped finish, such as pearls and sparkles, the outside ply was mahogany, since it was a more porous wood for the glue to bond with. That is one reason why it is often difficult to remove a wrapped finish from a Ludwig shell. Another reason is that the pearl and sparkle wraps were glued and applied to the wood while the panels were still flat. Then they would pass under pressure, through a series of heated rollers to bend the panels into a cylindrical shape. When the shell was sized, and the seam glued and clamped, there would be wood overlapping the pearl or sparkle wrap at the seam.



The inside panels on these shells will either be mahogany or maple. The African Mahogany was fairly common through the late 1950’s. In the early 1960’s they started using maple for the interior. At first, the maple was raw, unfinished wood. Sometime around 1962, they began

using a white finish sprayed on the inside, called "RESACOTE", which was to provide "exceptional tone resonance and response for the wood shell drum". I've already had to strip the interiors of many shells that previous owners painted in anything from black to fluorescent orange, and have found most of the interiors to be maple. The RESACOTE finish was used until sometime in early 1968, when they switched to the "clear maple" interior. I have seen a few from that era with a "clear mahogany" interior, but the vast majority seem to be maple. "Clear maple" interiors were standard until 1972, when they changed to the "LUD-COTE" grey-speckled interior. The LUD-COTE interior was used until the mid 1970's, when the



company replaced the 3-ply shell with the new 6-ply die mold constructed shell. At that time, they went back again to the clear maple interior for their Classic 6-ply, Super Classic 4-ply and Rocker 4-ply shells, and a brownish speckled LUD-COTE finish for the Rocker II interiors.

Over the years, I've seen only a few exceptions to the information in this article, such as a pearl wrap over a maple outer ply, a factory duco lacquer over a Sky Blue Pearl wrap, a factory White Marine Pearl wrap over a factory lacquer finish, a 9 x 13 shell with an inside ply of thin grey plastic, and even a 10" tom shell with no inside ply over the poplar! These exceptions are extremely rare, and in my opinion, the Ludwig 3-ply drum shells were some of the finest shells ever made. It's no wonder that these drums are sought after by collectors around the world.

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