

# Two years to finish her first violin —

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The night class was taught by Phil Davis, an experienced violin maker, dealer and restorer. To Yankovich's surprise, Davis handed her the plans to make a Stradivari violin, one of the most reputable names in violin making.

It took Yankovich two years to finish the violin, but when she finally got to hear a musician play her instrument, she says, "I just thought it was the coolest thing in the universe, and I knew I had found my true calling."

Once Yankovich started making violins, she couldn't stop.

Recognizing her natural born talent, Davis hired her as his assistant. Yankovich worked with Davis doing violin repairs for five years until she was accepted into the highly prestigious Newark School of Violin Making in Nottinghamshire, England.

After completing the three-year course at the top of her class, she returned to Toronto, worked for another year in a violin repair shop and then made the decision to move to Huntsville, where she now spends a majority of her time making high quality classical violins.

Yankovich sells her instruments to serious students, emerging professionals and amateur fiddlers. The farthest afield one of her violins has been sold was to a talented musician in Singapore.

She is currently working on her 16th violin and takes pride in basing her work on the Stradivari, Guarneris and Amati lines, inspired by a family of violin makers in Cremona, Italy, in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Her most recent instruments have been handcrafted from her favourite "golden period" Stradivari models, dating from 1704 to 1715.

"I gain a lot of my inspiration from looking at instruments at museums and delving into the history," says Yankovich, who has plaster casts of an original Stradivarius, which she uses to analyze her arching patterns.

In 2003, she made a point of visiting Cromona, Italy, the birthplace of violin making, where she had a chance to buy some of the finest pieces of wood.

The wood used for Stradivari violins includes spruce for the harmonic top, willow for the internal parts and flamed maple for the back, strip and neck.

Some of the tools Yankovich uses to make her violins include custom-made finger planes, a block plane, a low angle jointing



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plane, knives, some of which she has made herself, and a selection of gauges and chisels.

"It is so much fun to be able to take a piece of wood, which really looks like firewood, and figure out, with all the tools, how to create such a beautiful contoured shape," says Yankovich. "It is very intricate work and takes a lot of time to master. You really have to teach your eye what to look for."

Not only does violin making take a lot of experience and fine craftsmanship, it also requires an extremely well-trained ear.

"Every piece of wood has different note patterns and frequencies. You really have to be familiar with the density of the wood and know how to properly tune it," explains Yankovich.

To achieve the clarity of sound she wants, Yankovich uses what it is known as tap tuning, where she continuously taps around the outside of the violin to hear the areas where she needs to further plane down the wood.

"It's a way of getting as much response and clarity out of a piece of wood as possible. I always feel like a scientist; it is so exciting," she says. "Every time is different and every violin is an original."

Proving just how talented Yankovich is, Trevor Dick, a popular electric and acoustic violinist from Guelph, writes on his website that after gathering a number of instruments, Yankovich's 2004 Stradivarius-modelled violin was chosen as



**INTRICATE DETAIL: Yankovich uses a small carving tool to form a piece of wood into a violin scroll. (Photos by Marcia Downham)**

one of the top two best-sounding instruments.

Two of his students played nearly 30 different violins while blindfolded. The blindfold test is a final selection process where the students only focus on the sound and feel of the instrument and not the look or the name.

Dick writes that Yankovich's violin was definitely one of the "clear winners."

It takes Yankovich approximately 250 hours to complete one of her finely handcrafted violins. Each instrument is worth \$3,000 to \$5,000, but as she is still considered new to the business, she admits those prices are a relatively low wage for a violin maker.

"Antonio Stradivari made over 1,000 instruments in his lifetime. You have to be doing it a long time before you can really get the recognition that is deserved," she says, adding her goal is to make and sell as many violins as possible, so that one day she may get the chance to have her instruments played by some of the world's top violinists and fiddlers.

For orders or enquiries, Yankovich can be reached at 784-0290 or at [christinayankovichdesigns@gmail.com](mailto:christinayankovichdesigns@gmail.com).

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**PROOF IS IN THE PLAYING: Violin maker Christina Yankovich plays and tunes every one of her instruments to make sure she gets the clearest sound.**