Several species of walnut (*Juglans spp*) are sold as Peruvian walnut. These include *Juglans peruviana*, *J. australis*, *J. neotropica*, and *J. olandiana*. You may also see it marketed as “tropical walnut” or “Nogal” (Spanish for “walnut”). The wood tends to be darker and with a somewhat coarser grain than its more temperate cousins such as black and claro walnut.

**Where the wood comes from**
The name Peruvian walnut is a bit misleading, as the source trees are spread throughout Central America and the northern part of South America. As tropical trees go, these are modest in size—30 to 60 feet tall, and 2-3 feet in diameter. As of this writing, none of the species are on the CITES list, though *Juglans neotropica* is listed on the IUCN Red List as being endangered, with a population that has declined significantly over the past three generations.

**History in woodworking**
While you won’t find a lot of antique furniture in the U.S. made of Peruvian walnut, the wood has been used extensively in Central and South America for furniture and cabinetry. It also makes excellent interior trim, though it is on the soft side for high traffic flooring. It is gaining popularity stateside for those seeking the rich color of walnut without the color variations and knots typical of the domestic species. The wood is also valued for its shock resistance, so it makes excellent gun stocks, provided you can find thick enough pieces.

**Favored flavor.** This southern cousin of the walnut family is well regarded for its rich, dark-chocolate coloring.
When I first cut into Peruvian walnut, I knew I was going to enjoy working with it. (I used the wood for both the bowed psaltery on page 35 and the vase shown here.) Having used black walnut extensively throughout my woodworking career, I immediately recognized the same sharp smell, but found that the grain is a little coarser than on black walnut and more splinter-prone. My initial impression of the boards I had was that they were very uniform in appearance and color. However, the more I worked with them, the more I came to appreciate the subtle variation in color and grain pattern. The streaking mentioned earlier was very prominent in several of the boards, but it didn’t appear until I cut into their interior when tapering the pieces for the vase. Ultimately, I realized that an inspection of the end grain can provide clues to what I might find inside.

The pieces I resawed for the back of the psaltery stayed remarkably flat, even when set aside to “relax” for a couple of days. Joinery, sanding, and finishing all went well. I used spray lacquer on the psaltery more for its tonal qualities than for appearance. I prefer the wiping varnish I used for the vase for how it brings out the color in the wood.

**Selecting the best stock**
The boards that make it into the United States tend to be straight grained with minimal knots. The wood is tricky to dry properly, especially thicker stock, so most is cut at 4/4. On the plus side, wide boards (12”+) are frequently available. While the wood is quite dark, the heartwood can contain lighter streaks that can make grain matching a challenge (see photo above right). Expect to pay $12-$15/board foot.

**Working and finishing**
Like its domestic cousin black walnut, Peruvian walnut is a joy to work with both hand and power tools. Its straight grain makes for clean machining once you determine which way the grain is running. The wood accepts glue readily, and finishes well with both water- and oil-based stains and topcoats. It also holds mechanical fasteners well, but be sure to predrill pilot holes for screws.

**Peruvian Walnut Working Notes**

*Hue clues.* While quite dark, there is still a lot of color variation from board to board. The end grain provides a clue to colors potentially hidden beneath the surface.

---

**Peruvian Walnut Uses**
- Furniture
- Cabinetry
- Interior millwork
- Turnings
- Musical instruments

Photos: Ken Burton
go to woodcraftmagazine.com and click SUBSCRIBE

-or-

Complete the form below and mail in an envelope addressed to:

WOODCRAFT MAGAZINE
PO BOX 7020
PARKERSBURG WV 26102-9916

☐ Payment Enclosed
Name ____________________________________________
Address ____________________________________________
City ____________________________________________ State Zip ______________
Country ____________________________________________
E-mail ____________________________________________

Send in now to get 2 Years for $29.99!

or go to woodcraftmagazine.com and click SUBSCRIBE

By providing my e-mail address, I am indicating I’d like to receive information about my subscription and other offers from Woodcraft Magazine via e-mail.

Outside of the U.S and Canada add $30 for postage.
Foreign orders must be prepaid. Payment in U.S. Funds only.