Chord Construction Workshop
Part 4
By Rick Stone

Introduction:
Up to now our examples have used familiar drop-2 and drop-3 type voicings and avoided those which would cause uncomfortable stretches on the guitar. But if you've been following along and doing the assignments, you should now be ready for some of the more "challenging" voicings.
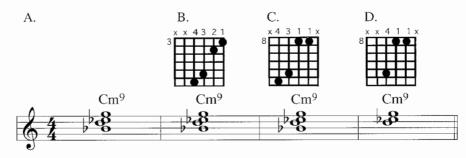
4-Way Close Voicings:
For pianists, this is usually the easiest way to voice a chord. You simply play the notes in the order they are spelled in the chord (either from the bottom up or the top down). Unfortunately, as we distribute these notes across the strings of the guitar, it often results in chords that are difficult if not impossible to play.

Take the minor 9th chord in Example 1a. A favorite among jazz pianists, it's a simple 3rd inversion minor 7th with the 9th replacing the root. The outside interval of the voicing is only a 6th, making it easily playable by the left hand on the piano. The minor 2nd interval between the 9th and 3rd of the chord, gives this voicing a pleasing "buzz" which, softened by the consonance of the major 3rd above it, is very characteristic of the Bill Evans' sound.

But on the guitar these notes cause an uncomfortable stretch (Example 1b). Playing it on the middle set of strings makes it somewhat easier (Example 1c), but it's still probably not a chord you will want to play in a fast passage that has to "swing." Luckily, we can often obtain the desired effect by simply omitting a note from the voicing as in Example 1d.
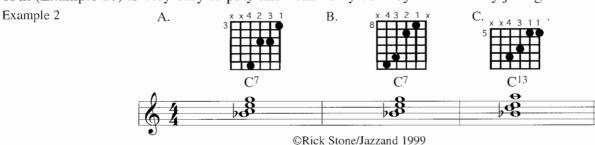
Example 1

Other "Tension" Notes:
You may remember from Part 3 of this series, that when tension notes are added to 4-note voicings, they usually replace a chord tone directly below them in the scale. For example, the 9th replaces the Root, the 11th replaces the 3rd and the 13th replaces the 5th.

Sometimes this can work in our favor, putting notes into a more "playable" configuration. For example, the third inversion C7 chord in Example 2a is virtually impossible to play on the first 4 strings, and only slightly better on strings 2-5 (Example 2b). Yet the C13 created by replacing the Root with the 9th and the 5th with the 13th (Example 2c) is very easy to play and commonly used by almost every jazz guitarist.

Example 2

Review of the Rules:

1. Lower any note of a diminished 7th chord to create a dominant 7th. Four dominants can be created from each diminished and the lowered note becomes the new Root.

2. Fifteen different four-note chords can be created by chromatically altering the dominant 7th.
   Therefore to create a:

Maj 7	raise the 7th
min 7	lower the 3rd
o7	lower the 3rd, 5th and 7th
min 7(b5)	lower the 3rd and 5th
6	lower the 7th
min 6	lower the 3rd and 7th
min (Ma7)	lower the 3rd and raise the 7th
o (Maj7)	lower the 3rd and 5th and raise the 7th
7 (sus4)	raise the 3rd
7 (b5)	lower the 5th
7 (#5)	raise the 5th
Maj 7(b5)	raise the 7th and lower the 5th
Maj 7(#5)	raise the 7th and the 5th
min 7(#5)	lower the 3rd and raise the 5th

3. Upper tension notes can usually replace an existing note in the voicing.

   9   replaces the Root (also applies to b9 and #9).

   13   replaces the 5th (also applies to b13).

   11   replaces the 3rd, acting as a "sus4" on 7th chords, min7 and especially min7(b5).
   or
   11   replaces the 5th on minor chords. (Natural 11th isn't found on Major chords.)

   #11   replaces the 5th of 7th and Maj7 chords. A notable exception occurs in chords where the 5th is being replaced by the 13th. In this situation, the #11 usually replaces the 3rd. (#11 is not used on minor chords).

The Joy of Discovery:

Now it's your turn. Armed with the chord construction knowledge that you've accumulated from these workshops, you have the tools to create virtually *any* voicing on the guitar. Try applying the rules to the close-voiced diminished chords in Example 3. Don't let the fact that many of these voicings aren't playable throw you. As you manipulate the notes you'll find many great sounding, playable voicings and others that become useful as 3-note "cluster" voicings through the omission of a note. You'll find the process a lot easier if you start by *writing* them out rather than playing them.

Example 3

G♯dim⁷   D♯dim⁷   Bdim⁷