Method 1 — How to Build

By James Hober

This chapter is about how to build a chord using Ted Greene's V-System Method 1. That is, how do you go from knowing the four notes in the chord to figuring out where to put them on the guitar fingerboard so that you wind up with a V-1, a V-2, etc.?

Make sure you have already read and understood *Method 1 — How to Recognize.* In fact, if you really understand *Method 1 — How to Recognize*, you can probably figure out how to build. Nevertheless, I'm going to walk you through it here step by step.

In what situation would you build your own V-System chord? You might be creating a solo guitar arrangement or you might be improvising with chords. In either case, you will likely have a specific melody note in the soprano that you are looking to harmonize. Ted, particularly in his later years, strongly emphasized the soprano as a point of focus.

Alternatively, you may be seeking a voicing with a specific tone in the bass, if, for example, you are playing an accompaniment role. If that's the case, substitute "bass" for every instance of "soprano" that you see in the recipe below. But generally, as Ted said to a student, "Melody is more primal than bass."

Yet another possibility is that you have **both** a soprano and bass in mind. In that case, you're better off simply finding good places for your inner voice tones and not worrying about the chord's voicing group. If you like, you can **recognize** the voicing group after you've built the chord.

Method 1 Build-a-Chord Recipe and Example

1. "Pick a chord, any chord." Like Dm7/11, for example. Make sure you know the formula. In this case, it's 1, b3, 5, b7, 11, which are the notes D, F, A, C, G.

2. Select four different chord tones. In other words, if the chord formula has more than four tones, decide which chord tone(s) to omit. In our example, we'll leave out the fifth.

3. Create a Chord Tone Path with the four tones, by putting them in ascending order. Our Chord Tone Path will be 1 → b3 → ④ → b7. Remember to treat 9 as 2, 11 as 4, and 13 as 6.

4. What's the melody note? That is, which chord tone will go in the soprano? We'll select the note G, which is the 11, also known as the 4. Now you see why I put a circle around it in the Chord Tone Path.

5. Choose a voicing group, keeping in mind how it characteristically spreads the voices. Let's pick V-12, which tends to fall *naturally* on strings 6-3-2-1.

6. Look up the voicing group in Ted's Master Formula Table. For V-12, it tells us to use a V-3 Chronological Voice Formula and then lower the bass by an octave. Which of the four possible V-3 Chronological Voice Formulas should we select? Notice, in the Chord Tone Path, that the melody note with the circle around it (the 4) is the **third** steppingstone. So we choose the Chronological Voice Formula that has "S" as the **third** letter. That way we'll be putting the melody note in the soprano.

The Master Formula Table

V-1 BTAS, SBTA, ASBT, TASB
V-2 TABS, STAB, BSTA, ABST
V-3 ABTS, SABT, TSAB, **BTSA**
V-4 STBA, ASTB, BAST, TBAS
V-5 BATS, SBAT, TSBA, ATSB
V-6 (V-1 with B an octave lower)
V-7 (V-2 with B an octave lower)
V-8 TBSA, ATBS, SATB, BSAT
V-9 (V-2 with S an octave higher)
V-10 (V-2 with both B and T an octave lower, or A and S an octave higher)
V-11 (V-4 with S an octave higher)
V-12 **(V-3 with B an octave lower)**
V-13 (V-1 with both B and T an octave lower, or A and S an octave higher)
V-14 (V-1 with S an octave higher)

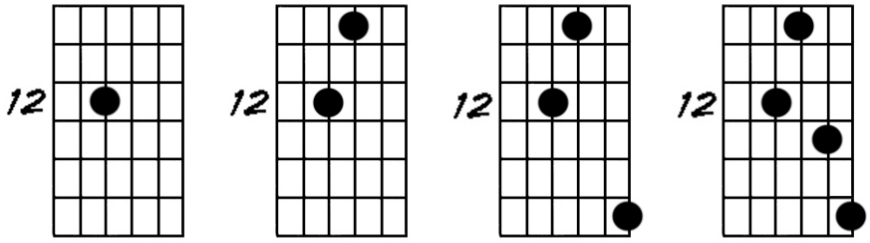
The Chronological Voice Formula we need is **BTSA**.

7. Here's what we have gathered:

Chord Tone Path:	1 →	b3 →	④ →	b7
Notes:	D	F	G	C
Chronological Voice Formula:	**B**	**T**	**S**	**A**

We'll try to place the notes on the top four strings so that afterward we'll be able to drop the bass down an octave easily.

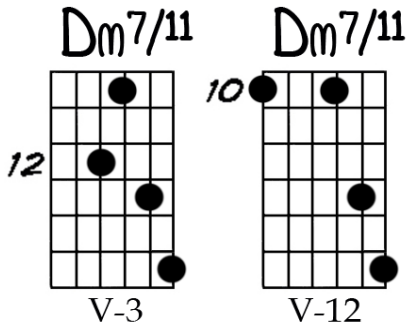
8. Grab your guitar and "paint" the notes onto the fingerboard:



D	add F	add G	add C
(the root)	(the b3rd)	(the 4th)	(the b7)
in the	in the	in the	in the
Bass	**T**enor	**S**oprano	**A**lto

Important: We "paint" or place the notes into the voices in the order of the Chronological Voice Formula. That's why we placed them in the order BTSA.

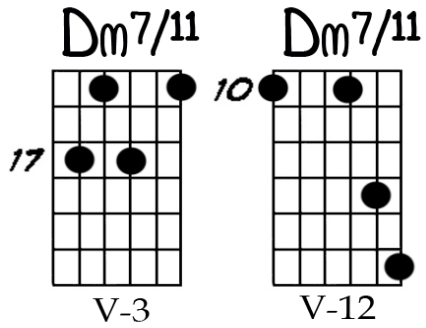
9. Shift octaves if the Master Formula Table says it's necessary. In our case, we need to drop the bass down an octave to convert the preliminary V-3 into our intended V-12.



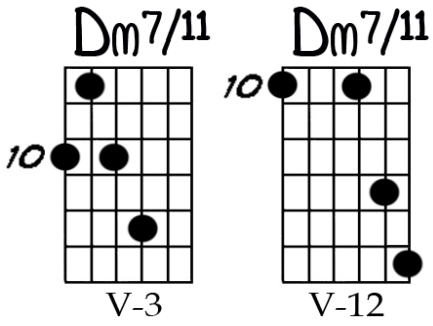
We're done. We have built a V-12 Dm7/11 with the 11 (G) in the soprano.

Additional Considerations

If you don't have the foresight to place the preliminary chord on a string set that makes the octave shifting possible, you'll have to move notes to other strings as you're doing the octave shift. For example, if we had placed the V-3 as below, we would have had to drop the bass down an octave **and** move the F and the C over a string to get a reachable V-12.



Another possibility is with the preliminary V-3 as below. In this case, instead of moving the bass **down** an octave, we can move the tenor, alto, and soprano **up** an octave.



When you're finished building, see if your chord is on a natural string set for its voicing group. If not, you may have found a reasonable string set for this particular chord, even though it's not one of the natural string sets for the voicing group as a whole. But if you are using a string set that is substantially different than a natural string set, you may have made a mistake and arrived at a chord in a different voicing group than the one you intended.

Finally, consider whether the chord sounds good, both in isolation and in context. Ted would use the V-System and other approaches to generate possibilities systematically. But then he would sift out those voicings that didn't sound good to him. Now it's up to you to exercise your taste. Extensions (9, 11, 13) tend to sound better in the upper voices. Chords, such as V-3s, where the lower three voices are bunched together and the soprano is separated off a bit, tend to sound better in higher registers (up the neck). Of course, these are just general rules. Ultimately it's up to your ears and taste.

Recap — Building, Using Method 1, in a Nutshell

Create a Chord Tone Path by putting your four distinct chord tones in ascending order, remembering to treat 9 as 2, 11 as 4, and 13 as 6.

Mark the melody tone in the Chord Tone Path.

Look up the voicing group in Ted's Master Formula Table.

Select the Chronological Voice Formula that has "S" in the same position as your marked melody tone steppingstone.

While holding your guitar, "paint" the Chord Tone Path onto the fingerboard, by placing chord tones into the voices in the order specified by the Chronological Voice Formula.

If the Master Formula Table says it's necessary, shift the appropriate voice(s) up or down an octave.

Double check that the strings you used were the same or close to a natural string set for the voicing group.

Listen to the chord and decide if it sounds good to you. Then use the chord in a musical situation.

—James