Jazz Concepts For Acoustic Guitar

Block Chords



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A Little Jazz?

This ebook is not necessarily for jazz guitar players. In fact, it's more for acoustic guitarists who would like to inject a little jazz into their playing. Not even necessarily jazz per se, but jazz concepts that can be applied to a variety of styles and genres of music.

Personally I love jazz, but that's beside the point. There are so many things you can grab from this style to really enhance and increase the scope of your acoustic guitar playing, without actually playing any jazz.

Having said this, there aren't too many "non jazz" guitar players out there, that I've met, that wouldn't appreciate being able to play a little jazz on the side.

A big part of jazz is chord playing, and in this ebook we are going to focus on building your chord vocabulary, meaning increase the amount of chords you can use in your own playing, whatever the style may be.

There is a huge difference between knowing a lot of chords, and being able to actually use the chords you know.

Keep this in mind as you work through this ebook, as there is absolutely no point in learning a whole bunch of chords if you can't actually use any of them in your own guitar playing.

We are going be putting the microscope on a series of chords that I like to call "block chords". These chords were my first real venture away from open and bar chords. They totally changed the way I went about playing chords on my guitar when I first studied them many years ago.

For some background on block chords check out this article before continuing.

What Are Block Chords?

I don't believe the term "block chords" is an official name, but it is what I have heard the chords we will look at today referred to as before, and it has stuck with me.

Block chords, at least the type we will be learning, are a series of chords that fall on the top four strings of the guitar. They run up and down the length of the fretboard, and appear in both root position as well as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversions.

We are going to be focusing on 3 specific types of block chords in this ebook:

Major 7th
Dominant 7th
Minor 7th

Chords And Inversions

Before we continue, a brief word on root position chords and inversions if you are confused about these at all.

Chords come from scales.

The formula for a major 7th chord, for example, is:

1 3 5 7

There are 7 notes in a scale, and the numbers above refer to the specific notes we pull out of the scale to create our major 7th chord:

1 2 **3** 4 **5** 6 **7**

When we say a chord is in root position, we are saying the root note, that is the "1" of the chord, is the lowest note:

1 3 5 7

When we refer to a chord being in 1st inversion, we are saying that the chord has the 3rd as it's lowest note:

3 5 7 1

When we refer to a chord being in 2nd inversion, we are saying that the chord has the 5th as it's lowest note:

5 7 1 3

And finally, when we refer to a chord being in 3rd inversion, we are saying that the chord has the 7th as it's lowest note:

7 1 3 5

The above is a somewhat simplified explanation of chords and inversions, but is all you need for now.

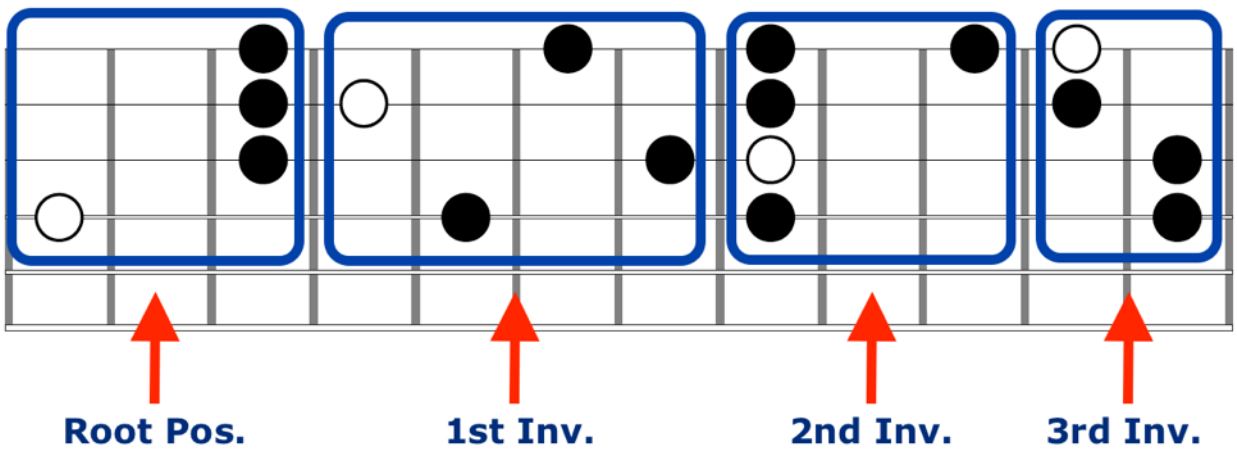
I want to get you focused more on visualising these chords up and down the fretboard, as well as creating great sounding music with them.

The good news is you don't need to understand the ins and outs of these block chords to do this.

The 3 Main Block Chord Types And How They Fit On The Fretboard

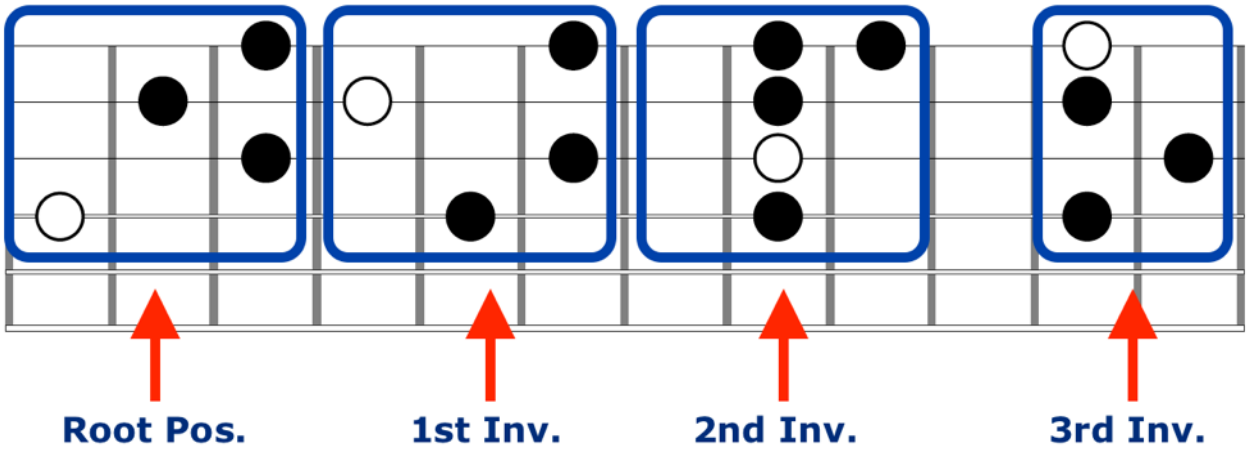
Major 7th

Here are the four major 7th block chord forms as they appear on the fretboard from root position to 3rd inversion:



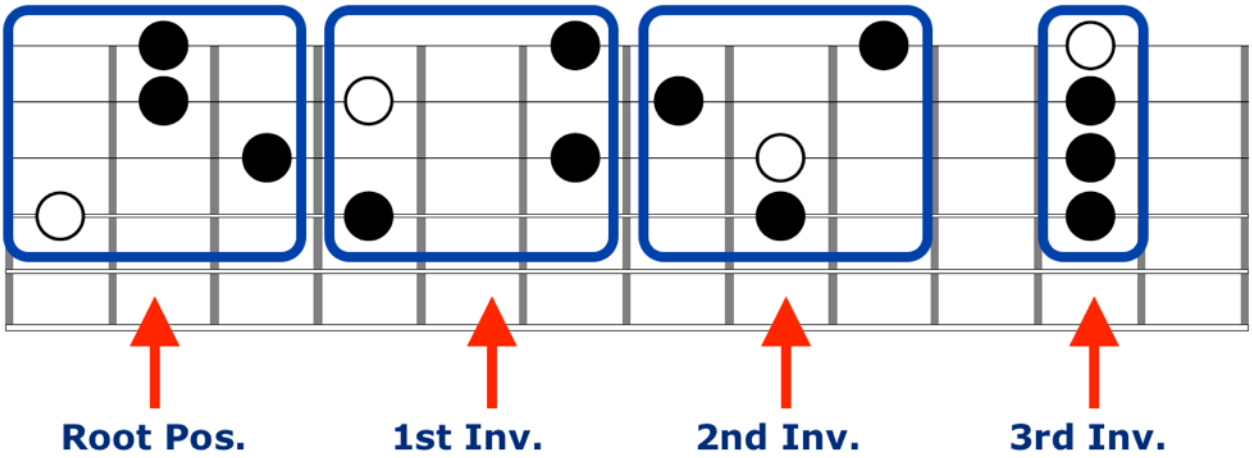
Dominant 7th

Here are the four dominant 7th block chord forms as they appear on the fretboard from root position to 3rd inversion:



Minor 7th

Here are the four minor 7th block chord forms as they appear on the fretboard from root position to 3rd inversion:



We will be using a combination of these block chord shapes throughout the examples presented in this ebook. I have highlighted the root note in each chord as this can be a great reference point for finding the particular block chord you are after.

Start to familiarise yourself with these shapes, and how they fit on the fretboard, focusing too on how each root note relates to the chord shape it is part of.

Block Chord Application 1 - Blues

Background

You will play much blues throughout your guitar playing life, even if you don't consider yourself to be a blues guitarist, so it's always good to have a variety of ways you can approach playing this style. Block chords are a great option for playing through a 12 bar blues.

Before we get to that point however, let's see how we can approach learning the positions for the dominant 7th block chord, as this is the chord type that will feature throughout a blues.

The number one mistake guitar players make when attempting to learn new chords, is to learn them as isolated shapes, never really relating them to anything.

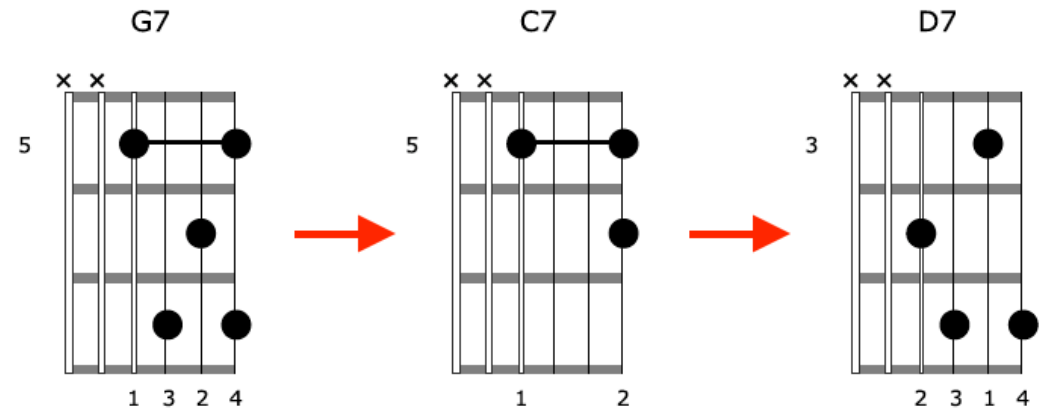
This is why many chords you may have learned in the past, have never really stuck. You seem to always be having to remember what they are, and where they are on the fretboard. Of course, when in the act of playing music, there is no time for this.

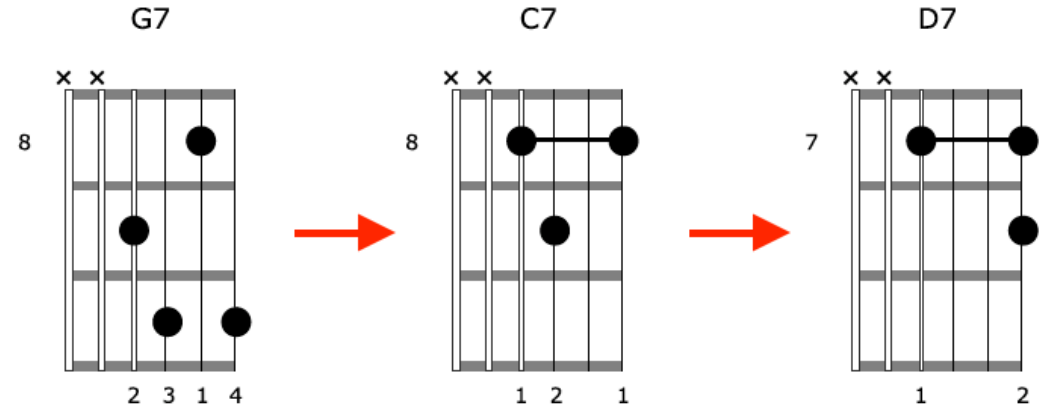
Organising Dominant Block Chords On The Fretboard

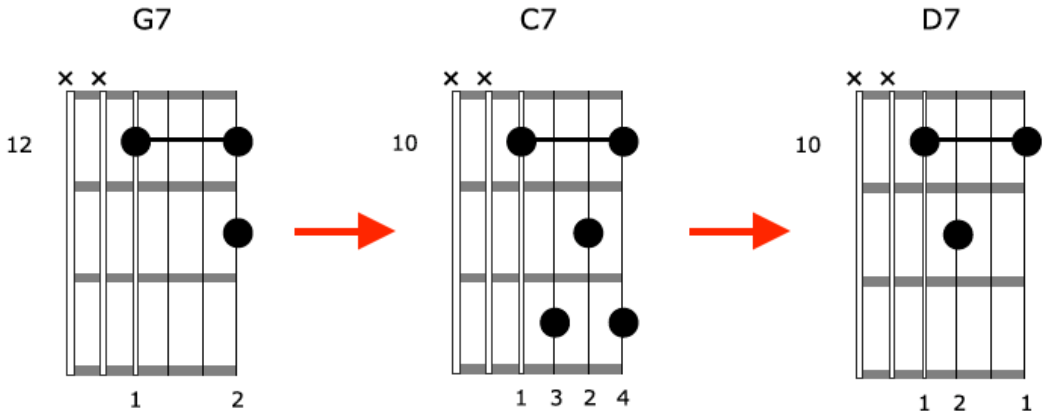
There is a key underlying relationship between each of the major, minor, and dominant block chords you should know, and is revealed in this article. Be sure to check this out, if you haven't already, as it will help greatly in getting these chords into your playing as well as understanding what is to follow in this ebook.

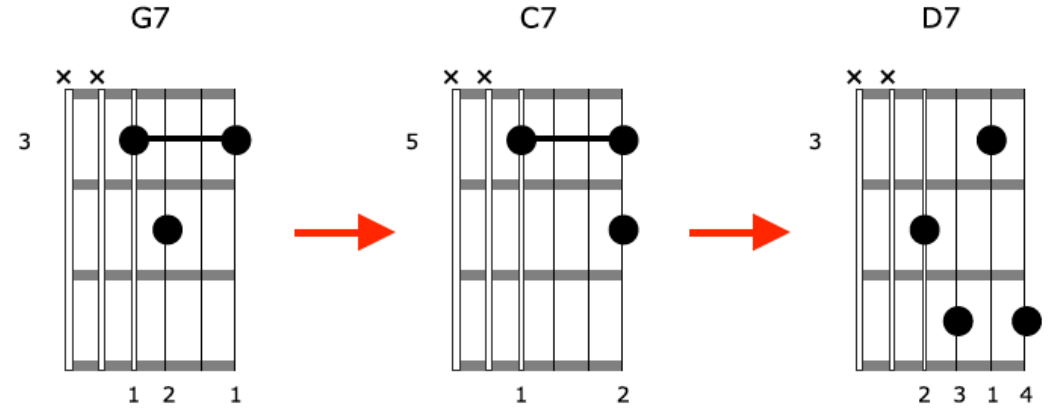
Furthermore, there is a way of organising dominant block chords on your guitar so that you will always have one nearby, no matter where you are on the fretboard. This will be particularly handy when using them to play through a blues.

Check out the chart on the following page:


G7
C7
D7
5
5
3
1 3 2 4
1 2
2 3 1 4


G7
C7
D7
8
8
7
2 3 1 4
1 2 1
1 2


G7
C7
D7
12
10
10
1 2
1 3 2 4
1 2 1


G7
C7
D7
3
5
3
1 2 1
1 2
2 3 1 4

In the chart above, you have each G7 dominant block chord, from root position through to 3rd inversion, running vertically down the left hand column.

Simply follow the arrows to the right of each shape to see where the closest C7 and D7 chords are in proximity to the G7, and which block chord shapes you'll need to form to play them.

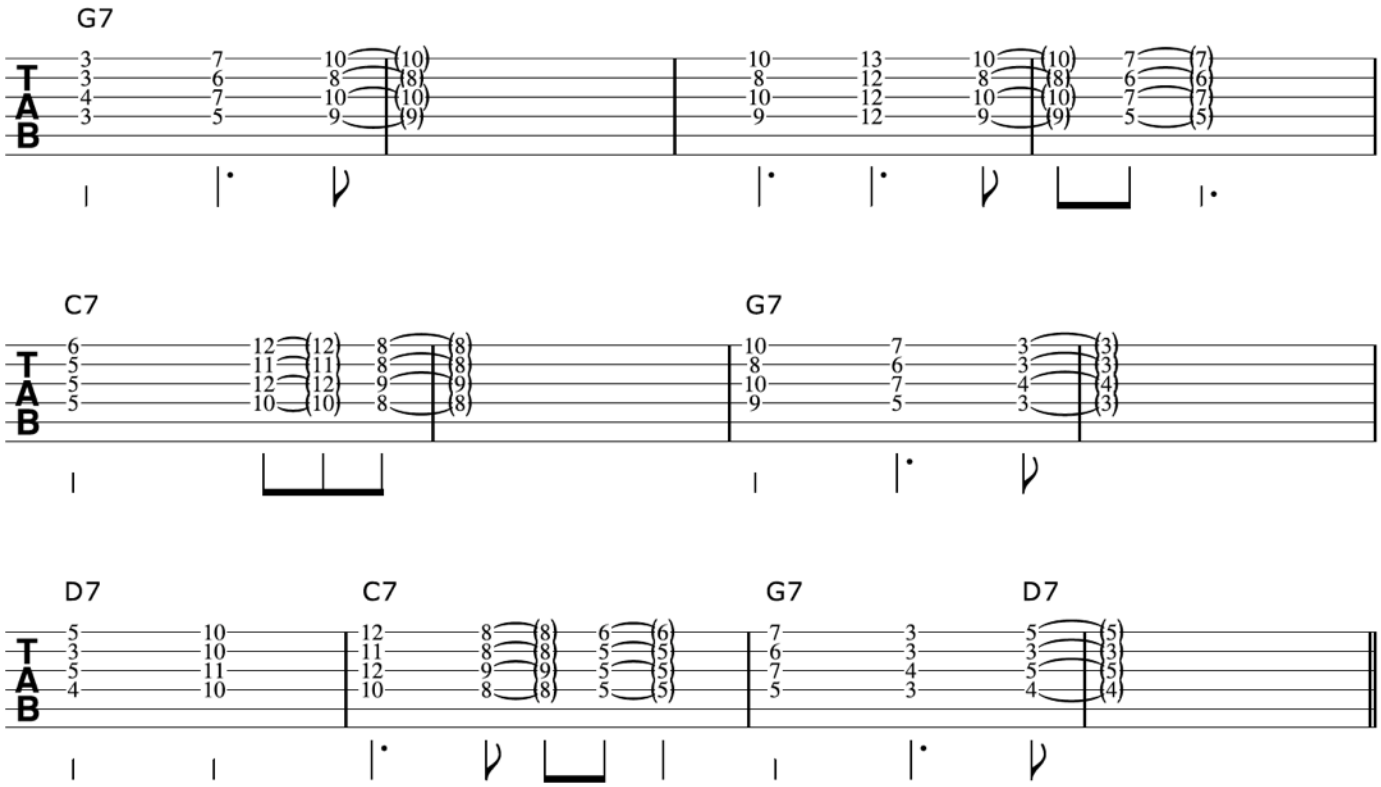
Why C7 and D7?

Because these two chords along with the G7 are what make up a blues in G, which is the key of the blues we are about to play.

The shapes relate the same no matter what key you are in, so learn them in their groupings above and you will always have a dominant chord close by wherever you are on the fretboard when playing a blues.

<u>Blues Example</u>

Below is a chorus of a blues in G with extensive use of our block chord shapes:



Hear It

Hopefully by listening to and playing the example above, you realise the value in the dominant block chord chart I first presented to you.

There are two things I want you to pay particular attention to when playing this example:

1. I am frequently changing between block chord forms, even though the chord in the progression at the time does not change. This is one of the great uses of a block chord. It creates it's own little melody if you like, when moving from one position to another while the chord of the progression remains the same.

2. When the chord of the progression does change (eg. G7 to C7), I switch to the closest dominant chord in proximity to where I currently am on the fretboard. There is no rule stating that you must do this, however it's a great way to learn where the block chords are in relation to each other, just as our chord chart earlier was highlighting.

Block Chord Application 2 - Neighbour Chords

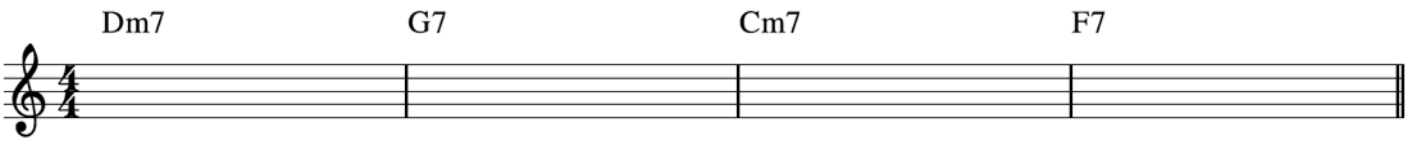
Background

A very cool approach to using block chords in your guitar playing, and a way to add a touch of sophistication and smoothness, is to approach your shape from a half step above or below.

I like to call these neighbouring chords. It's really simple to do, yet will make what you play sound so much more advanced and sophisticated.

The Progression

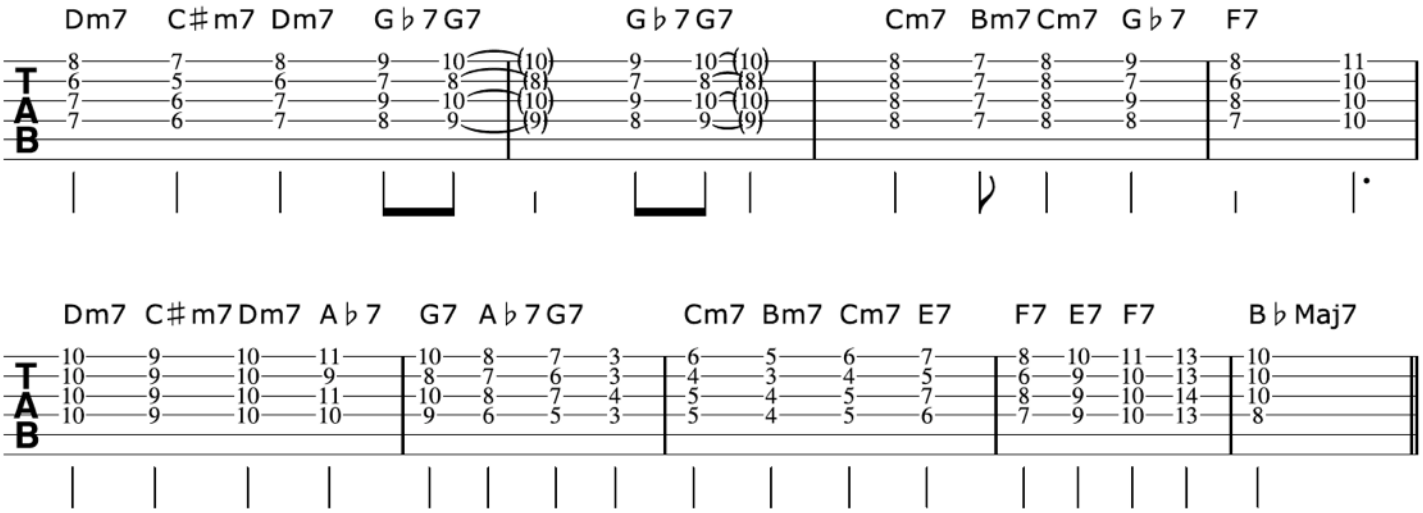
The following progression is what I will be using to demonstrate the neighbour block chord approach:



The reason for presenting the progression to you first is so you can see it's simplicity. Once neighbour chords are added, it can look quite different. I want you to see it for what it is first.

Neighbour Chord Example

Here is the same progression, only now with neighbour chords added:



Hear It

One look at the example above may have you running the other way. But don't be fooled, it's not nearly as complicated as it may appear.

Upon closer inspection, you should see that it's in fact the same progression I first presented to you (ie. Dm7 G7 |Cm7 F7).

What makes it look more complicated are the added neighbour chords. However, these are just the block chord shapes you are going to be playing for the Dm7, G7, Cm7, or F7 chords, a half step, or one fret, above or below that chord.

For example, in the first bar I am playing a Dm7 with a 2nd inversion block chord, followed by a G7 with a 1st inversion shape.

Included in this bar is the exact same minor shape I'm using for the Dm7, a half step below, which makes it a C#m7, and the same

dominant shape I'm using for the G7, also a half step below, making it a Gb7.

The rest of the example follows suit, only that sometimes I opt to play the neighbour chord that is a half step, or one fret above the chord, rather than below.

The result is a really cool, sophisticated, and smooth sounding chord progression. This approach becomes really easy to do the better you have your block chord shapes visualised on the fretboard. So be sure to spend time doing this.

Block Chord Application 3 - Altered Dominant Block Chords

Background

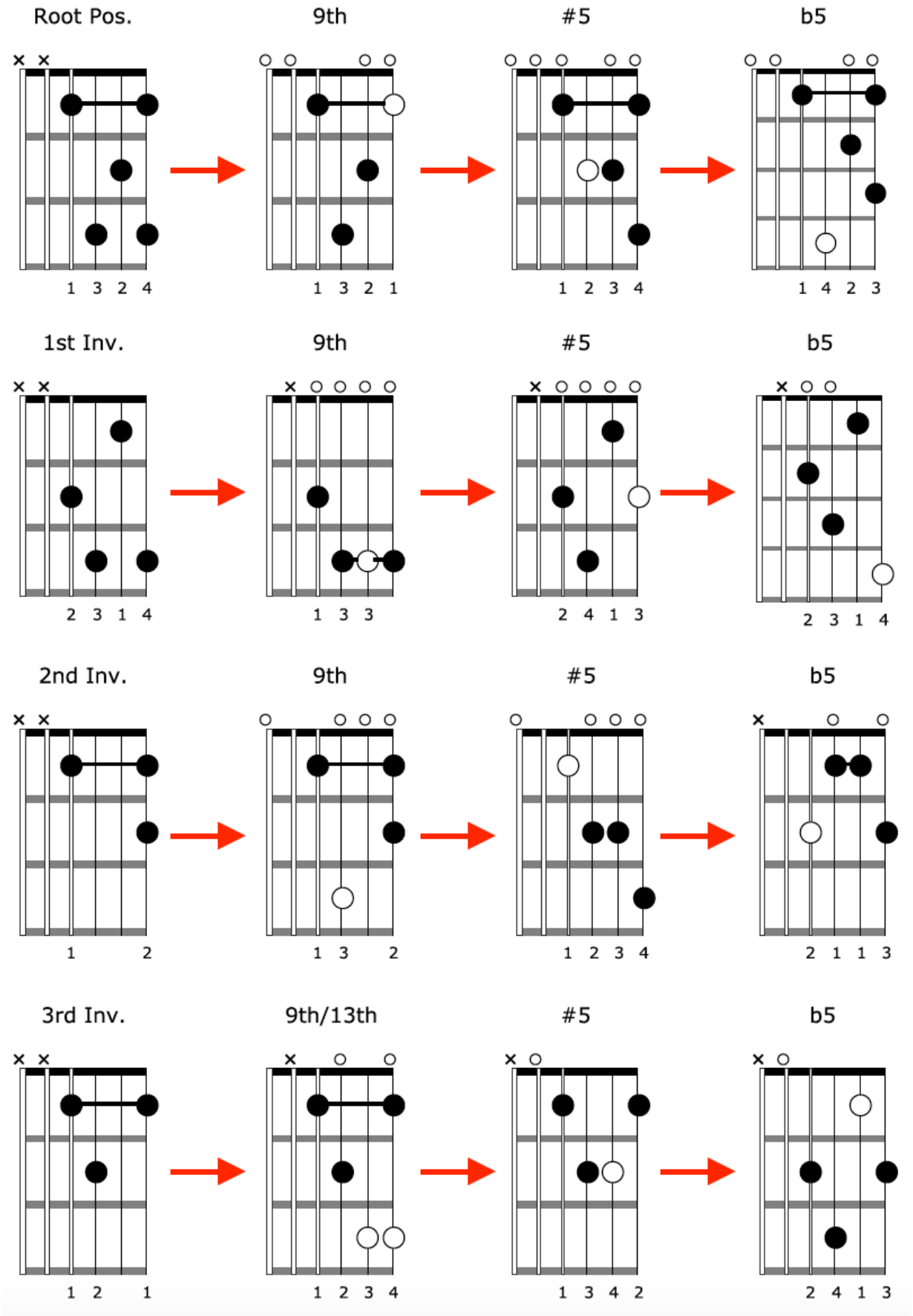
Learning block chords such as the ones presented in this ebook, creates a great foundation for learning more chords. Quite often, all you need to do with these shapes is change just one note to create a new chord, or a variation of that chord.

This is one really easy and simple way to multiply the chords you know on your guitar. It's one of the key relationships to tap into regarding chord shapes, as oppose to trying to memorise them in isolation.

When you see that one chord compared to another is a matter of a note or two difference, you'll find it so much easier to memorise and visualise that shape on the fretboard.

Altered Dominant Chord Chart

For example, let's take a look at the chord chart on the following page:


Root Pos.
9th
#5
b5
1 3 2 4
1 3 2 1
1 2 3 4
1 4 2 3
1st Inv.
9th
#5
b5
2 3 1 4
1 3 3
2 4 1 3
2 3 1 4
2nd Inv.
9th
#5
b5
1 2
1 3 2
1 2 3 4
2 1 1 3
3rd Inv.
9th/13th
#5
b5
1 2 1
1 2 3 4
1 3 4 2
2 4 1 3

Running down the left hand side column are the root through to 3rd inversion dominant chord forms we have been using so far. To the left of each chord form are variations of it.

Notice there is only one note difference between each variation and the original dominant form. I have highlighted the new note in each shape so you can clearly see what has changed.

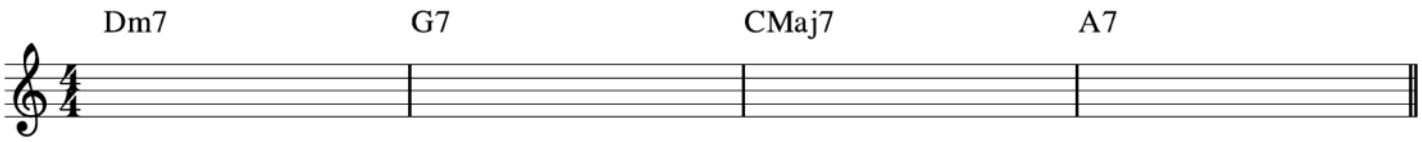
By simply changing one note we can create 3 different variations of our dominant chord. The 9th chords are considered to be an extension of the dominant 7th, while the Sharp five (#5) and flat five (b5) are altered versions.

There are many more variations we could come up with using just these shapes, not to mention our other block chord forms. This is one way to go about getting chord shapes down on your guitar so you can easily visualise them to use in your playing.

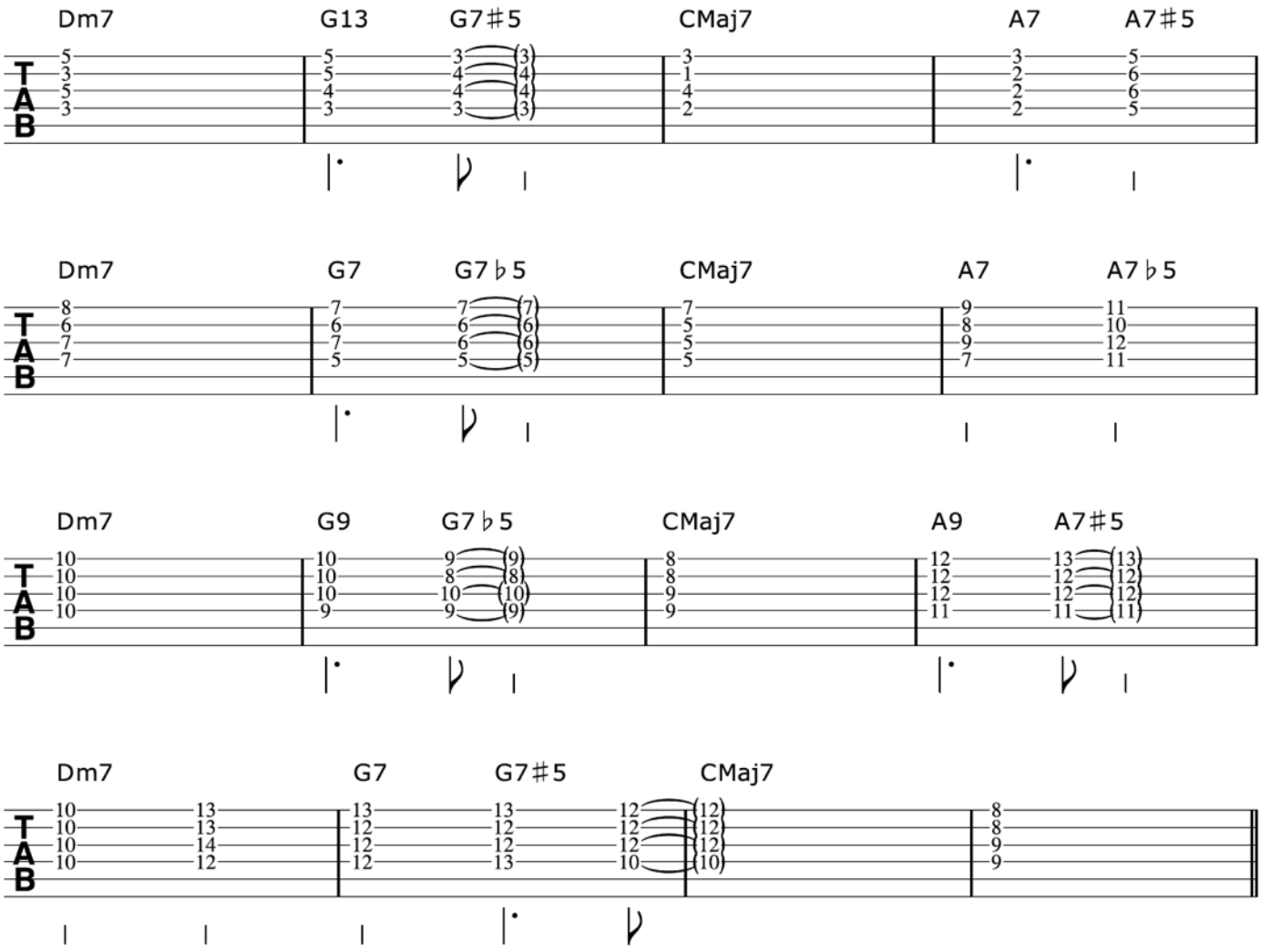
Altered Dominant Chord Example

However, simply having a whole lot of chords under your fingers doesn't mean you know how to use them to create music, so let's do that using some of the chord forms from the chart above.

The following is a II V I VI chord progression in the key of C:



And following is an arrangement I have created using our block chord forms over this progression:



[Hear It]

In the example above, I am using a variety of the 9th and altered shapes over the G7 and A7 chords.

Listen to how effective it sounds when the altered chords are used. In isolation these chords may sound off to your ear, however when used above they work great because they resolve into the C major 7th and D minor 7th chords.

Getting the main block chord forms down on the fretboard will give you the foundation to create many, many more chords. So have fun with them!

Discover how to create your own unplugged versions of songs on acoustic guitar

About The Author

Simon Candy

Musician & Guitar Instructor



Simon is a professional musician and guitar instructor based in Melbourne Australia. He specializes in acoustic guitar playing, drawing from his studies over the past 25 years in jazz, rock, blues and fingerstyle guitar.

Simon has been teaching the guitar for over 20 years. He has taught at some of Australia's most prestigious schools including Xavier College and Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak.

Simon has also conducted masterclasses on various acoustic guitar topics in Chicago, USA.

He is the owner and founder of Simon Candy School Of Guitar and is in constant demand, currently teaching 80+ students a week to reach their guitar playing goals in the best ways possible.

Simon has performed in many bands over the years from rock to jazz and most things in between. In addition to this Simon also plays solo acoustic guitar. His influences include Chet Atkins, Lenny Breau, Danny Gatton, Tommy Emmanuel, and Joe Pass just to name a few. A lot of these influences can be heard in the solo acoustic arrangements that he creates as well as in his own music.

Amongst other things, Simon is currently working on both an acoustic album of arrangements as well as an original solo acoustic album. He has studied jazz and popular music at Box Hill Institute and is a graduate of the Tom Hess Music Careers Mentoring Program and Elite Guitar Teachers Inner Circle.

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