

How Does Doc Do It?

Although primarily an acoustic blues guitar player, I'm fascinated by all great finger picking stylists.

Doc Watson's 'Deep River Blues' stands out as a classic example of so-called 'Travis picking' and deserves a closer look.

Doc's rendition is much slower than we originally perceive, but is full of subtleties and complexities. Like all great guitarists, he lays down a basic pattern and chord structure before gradually adding variations throughout the piece.

Often, we find guitar instructors delivering an approximation of his sound, which is understandable, as it's difficult to reproduce. Unfortunately, some tend to over simplify what's going on, and therefore devalue his incredible style.

Some other teachers may use two or more picking fingers in an attempt to encapsulate Doc's picking pattern, which tends to over complicate the process. In fact, Doc uses just one thumb and his index finger to create that beautiful, relaxed and flowing sound.

In the embedded video below I attempt to unravel and demonstrate a little of Doc's technique, also suggesting ways in which we can approximate his sound, without reducing the appeal of this great song. Whatever path we take to [learn how to play blues guitar](#), legendary figures like Doc Watson show us how it should be done.