

Jazz Harmony-Building Chords

There are two approaches to thinking about chord construction which are essential. We can build a chord from it's root, adding the upper notes relating to the interval from the root (rather than the key)

Vertical Harmony:

(maj7th)

Maj ^{3rd}	Cmaj	C ⁶	C ^Δ	Min ^{3rd}	Cm	Cm ⁶	Cm ⁷
1,3	1,3,5	1,3,5,6	1,3,5,7	1,b3	1,b3,5	1,b3,5,6	1,b3,5,b7

We must also think of how the chord relates to the key in which we are in at the time:

Horizontal Harmony:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
maj7th	min7th	min7th	maj7th	dom7th	min7th	half-dim	

Here we are in the key of C major-each diatonic chord is naturally major, minor, dominant, or half diminished. There is also a diminished chord which does not occur naturally in the diatonic scale but is used frequently (fig 3.)

Fig 3

C^o (dim)

Jazz musicians like to colour these basic chords by extended them further:

Fig 4. Major chord extension

Maj ^{3rd}	Cmaj	C ⁶	C ^Δ	C ^{Δ9}	C ^Δ (#11)	C ^{Δ13} (#11)

Notice that in Fig 4 there is an F# used instead of a natural F (which would naturally occur in the key of C). This is largely due to taste as a natural F would not have the clarity here so we sharpen the 11th. All the upper extensions (9th and above) can be raised or lowered depending on the particular effect required.

Fig 5. Minor chord extensions

Min ^{3rd}	Cm	Cm ⁶	Cm ⁷	Cm ⁹	Cm ¹¹	Cm ¹³

While most chords can be played without extensions, the Dominant 7th chord always tends to have at least a 9th added

Fig 6. Dominant chord extensions

C ⁷	C ⁹	C ⁷ (b9)	C ⁷ (#9)	C ⁹ (#11)	C ¹³

Voicing Chords

These chords now need to be positioned on the keyboard (or arranged) so as to make the most effective use of the notes-this is known as "voicing":
Fig 7.

Fig 7 shows five chords in C major: C⁹, C⁷(#9), C¹³, C⁷(#9b9b13), and C⁷(#11). The notation is presented in two staves (treble and bass clef). The chords are represented by groups of notes on the staff lines, with some notes in parentheses in the bass clef to indicate specific voicings.

Major voicings

Fig 8.

Fig 8 shows five major chords in C major: C^Δ, C^{Δ9}, C^{6/9}, C^{Δ9}, and C^Δ(#11). The notation is presented in two staves (treble and bass clef). The chords are represented by groups of notes on the staff lines, with some notes in parentheses in the bass clef to indicate specific voicings.

Minor voicings

Fig 9.

Fig 9 shows five minor chords in C minor: C^{m7}, C^{m9}, C^{m6/9}, C^{m11}, and C^{m13}. The notation is presented in two staves (treble and bass clef). The chords are represented by groups of notes on the staff lines, with some notes in parentheses in the bass clef to indicate specific voicings.