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Letters

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More Than Guitars

I am so proud of your work in Cameroon, stewardship of the forest, and care for people's lives there. Honestly, I am not a huge Taylor guitar fan, but reading your most recent *Wood&Steel* articles in Volume 91 [summer 2018] has me rethinking the purchase of a Taylor. I'm considering this in support of your ethics and morality in business, and the quality of your R&D with V-Class bracing, armrests, wood pairings and other innovations. But what really compels me is the shining kindness I see in your company: a quality sadly declining in business and culture. While the overall voice of Taylor guitars has not been my favorite in my 40 years of playing, the time has come to try out some of your new models.

Thinking about ebony, I absolutely welcome fingerboards, head plates and bridges with striation, coloration and character beyond the traditional pure black. Bravo for reframing this perception in the market. I will buy an ebony slide, and would suggest that the smaller scraps be used to produce bridge/end pins and, more specifically, replacement tuner buttons across a wide range of machine brands and models. Quality ebony buttons would be welcome in the market. Finally, I always need a place to keep my finger-picks, capos, flatpicks, etc. How about small ebony pick box?

Rich Sternadori

Golden Girl

I spent many years in the audience of my living room as my husband and son played guitars. The only time I ever

picked up a guitar was to dust it off. When my 60th birthday rolled around, I suddenly had the desire to play, and these two men helped teach and support me. My first guitar was a Taylor Big Baby, which could easily have been renamed Little Lady, as it fit my petite stature and was lightweight and not overwhelming. Five years later, I have advanced to the Grand Auditorium and joined the family band, which is a Grand feeling!

With the help of my family and the Taylor family, my "golden years" have become "golden ears," as with every strum, I hear and strike gold. With my encouragement, my brother, who is 63, just bought his first guitar, a Taylor 700 Series, and has begun a familiar golden journey. I encourage anyone, regardless of age, that any time is the right time to buy your first guitar and begin to strum for gold.

**Sue Bracewell
Huntsville, TX**

Happy Return

My 2009 414ce was my first real acoustic guitar. I bought it with money my grandparents left me when they passed away. Before my son was born, I used to play it on my [pregnant] girlfriend's belly when she worried after she didn't feel him move around for a while. I'd pull out the guitar, sit behind her with the guitar on her belly, strum some chords, and he'd liven right up. Shortly after my son was born, my company was having financial issues, so I needed to sell the guitar to help pay the bills. The guitar had great sentimental value to us, so it was very difficult to part with, but we had to. I posted it on Craigslist, and it didn't take long before someone wanted to buy it. We met him at [a restaurant] to do the deal. He pulled up in a new Cadillac with his 7-year-old daughter in tow. He was buying it for her, as she wanted to be the next Taylor Swift. Craigslist being what it is, the guy saw that we had a new baby and were desperate for the money, so of course he made me an insultingly low offer. But we needed the money, so we took it.

Fast-forward two years. My company landed some new contracts, and we were doing much better. One Sunday

morning I was scouring old emails and I found the email of the guy who bought my guitar. I sent him a message asking if he would consider selling the guitar back to me. He promptly emailed me back agreeing to sell it for \$300 more than he paid me for it. Whatever. I jumped in my car and met him at the same restaurant where it all began. When I opened up the case, it looked as if it had never even been played. Not a scratch. The guitar is back with my family where it belongs and will stay.

Mark Thomas

Taylor G.A.S. Strikes Again

Please, Taylor, help me! After playing only electric for 30 years, I got my first Taylor in 2017: one beautiful [custom] Grand Concert. I had never played acoustic, or when I played one, I didn't like it because it's harder to play and I could not do my speedy moves!

But I liked the Taylor GC so much I had to buy it, and now I don't touch my electric guitars – I am totally hooked on acoustic playing. Even worse, I contracted G.A.S. (Guitar Acquisition Syndrome). I just bought my fourth Taylor – a nylon-string!

Please set up a G.A.S. Taylor program and help me get this under control. I am happy to stay at the European Taylor Centre in Amsterdam for my addiction. I don't care if you lock me in there or how long it takes!

Taylor G.A.S. gives me so much pleasure – a challenge to get better and better playing these guitars.

**Carlo Beusenberg
Netherlands**

Most Perfect

I still can't believe that my husband, Bill, bought the K22ce 12-Fret for me [at a Taylor Road Show]. It was such a perfect fit and the most beautiful guitar I've ever seen! I never imagined owning a stunningly beautiful koa guitar, but I love it! I had wanted to try the 12-fret but was really surprised at how much better it fit me. It's perfect!

I also want to thank Taylor District Sales Manager Billy Gill, as well as [product specialist] Wayne Johnson and everyone from Taylor and Bounty Music [in Maui, Hawaii]. I truly felt

everyone's sincere joy at my purchasing such a unique instrument. It was a fascinating and educating experience to hear all the differences that wood, shape/size, bracing, strings, etc. make when played by someone who is so experienced and skilled. It's crazy to hear Bill (definitely not a musician) talking about everything he learned. I never imagined him understanding my world and enjoying talking about all the differences in the guitars. I hope to attend many more Road Shows... although I'm not sure I'll buy another guitar, as koa has completed my collection in a most perfect way. Mahalo nui loa,

Karen Hanisch

Fine Design

I am blown away by all the innovations that Taylor Guitars represents in every issue of *Wood&Steel*. The proof is in the pudding that you guys are constantly constructing the latest and the greatest, while using some of the best resources known to man! Personally, I would love to be a part of a team that's willing to take risks in years of development processes that achieve new and efficient designs for such lovely-sounding instruments. Keep up the great work!

**Thomas Knapp
Notre Dame, IN**

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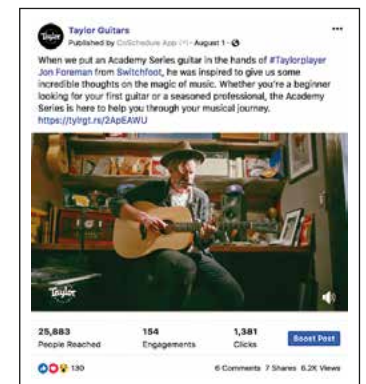
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Worth the Wait

Ed. Note: For this issue, Taylor co-founder and CEO Kurt Listug invited our Vice President of Sales, Keith Brawley, to share his perspective.

As part of our sales and marketing outreach, we routinely travel all over the world, visiting Taylor dealers and distributors to find out exactly what they need to grow their Taylor business, learning about their respective businesses, their challenges, and their market. These trips are always enlightening and educational, and we invariably come back from these journeys with a laundry list of things to do that will help our partners.

This year, no matter where we go, we hear the same thing: “We need more guitars!” This has been supercharged by Andy Powers’ patented new V-Class bracing innovation, but it’s also driven by record demand for the value-rich guitars made in our Tecate factory. While this demand is a gratifying, tangible endorsement of what we do every day, it can be a frustration for players, especially those trying to find the inspiration they feel when they locate the instrument of their dreams.

Understanding that it provides little to no comfort if *you’re* the one waiting for a guitar you’ve ordered, I can assure you that everyone at Taylor is acutely aware of the need for our production to increase to meet this demand. And, thankfully, we are having another record year at Taylor while remaining committed

to only allowing production to grow to the extent that we can meet the lofty quality standards we impose on ourselves.

I recently had the pleasure of helping a friend, Mark, choose a birthday present for his lovely wife, Melissa, who was thrilled beyond words to finally get the Taylor guitar of her dreams. She chose a PS14ce made with sets of our gorgeous but extremely limited remaining supply of Brazilian rosewood. She clearly has excellent taste! It was a spectacular instrument in every way, and Melissa was so appreciative that she encouraged Mark to get a new guitar, too. Seizing the opportunity, he chose a superb Builder’s Edition K14ce. Needless to say, it was a birthday celebration neither of them will forget!

The joy they felt with their new instruments is the fuel that propels this company every day. Whether a player is longing for a GS Mini Koa, a V-Class 314ce, or a custom guitar, we at Taylor are all energized by knowing how happy they’ll be when they get their new guitar home and play it...especially if they share that with people they care about.

I want to let our faithful Taylor guitar fans know that we are taking steps to increase production of all models of our guitars without compromising Taylor quality. That said, the guitars we make today are significantly more difficult to build than the guitars we made just five years ago. Virtually every model has

been redesigned and upgraded in that period. One of the things I’ve always loved best about Taylor is the spirit of constant improvement; that the best guitars we ever made were made yesterday, not decades ago. It’s one of the factors that inspires players to cultivate a Taylor collection. They are pretty much guaranteed that every time they feel moved to explore our latest offerings, they will discover an exciting new Taylor guitar to enjoy.

If you haven’t been to a guitar shop lately, you’ll want to get to a good one and play the latest crop of Taylor guitars, especially if you can spend a little time exploring what V-Class bracing has done to improve our most popular models. For an industry that has typically measured product development in glacial terms, this only happens once every 175 years or so!

I have the pleasure of noodling on V-Class guitars almost daily, on a wide variety of models, and, for me, there’s no going back. Experiencing the musicality and in-tuneness of the V-Class instruments has changed my expectations of an acoustic guitar and created a sense of anticipation as I face the reality that I need to upgrade my modest guitar collection.

Now, for my next big decision... should I list my “other” guitars all at once or one at a time?

— Keith Brawley, Vice President, Sales

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BobSpeak

Making Things Better

I've lived my life making things, starting as a young boy, on my own and with my dad. My mom sewed clothes. When our car or furniture needed upholstery, my mom and dad would buy fabric and do the job themselves, and they did a fine job, not an amateur job. As the years passed, I learned slowly but surely how to do nice work. And I'm not the only one. There are so many people alive who are not only creative but know how to bring their ideas to

quality and good designs. I recently got a new folding knife and compared it with the exact model that I bought from the same company in 1972. The old one wasn't nearly as well made as the new one. Still, the old one has been hard used and has lasted 46 years, but the build quality now is so much better. The goal in my opinion is to get better, rather than getting worse or only being able to keep the quality the same.

I am fortunate to live in an age

prove his concepts. Not only do these concepts work, but Andy packages them with beautiful woodworking and guitar building so the guitar becomes a pleasure to behold with all your senses.

After he's done with the design, we have to figure out how to make those designs in a factory setting. In fact, many of the designs we use at Taylor cannot be made using only hand tools because of the accuracy needed. Of course, Andy is always thinking of the "how" because we naturally like to push the envelope of what the factory can make. Sometimes the work needed is strictly handwork, and it's up to the people who do those jobs to push themselves to a higher level. Other times our capable tooling shop has to make either automated machines or very precise tools to make or assemble a complex part of the guitar. I love walking through our machine shop and admiring the tools that are currently being made. They're amazingly beautiful.

I'm happy that we have a culture at Taylor that doesn't allow our products to get cheaper and cheaper while cutting corners to make that possible. Usually we succeed in making our guitars harder to build, but then we offset that by being creative in how we do it. I'm happy we're not copying other guitars, but rather work on our own ideas, and I'm pleased that our ideas are viable and good. It's rewarding to see a new design, like our V-Class guitars, which started as an idea four

For me, the only thing as beautiful as a new guitar is the tooling we build to make that guitar.

life with their hands. It's easy to see the difference between the plumber or electrician who does a good job for you and one who does not. Some of this is natural talent, some is learned, and I think it requires a combination of both.

I hear a lot of people comment about the things they buy today saying, "They're just not as good as they used to be." But there are other things that are better than they used to be, like cars. The technology is astounding, the motors run trouble-free, and what you get for your money can often be exceptional. I see furniture now that is like that, or cookware, with very high

where manufacturing has super high potential to be of the highest quality for a smaller company. Yes, I'll admit that Taylor is a large *guitar* company, but when compared to companies that make cars, door knobs, computers or phones, we're very small. And yet modern manufacturing capabilities are available to us as a "smaller" company.

What makes all this capability more thrilling is that we have good designs to make. Andy is out ahead of the tooling room and the factory with many ideas of how to make the guitar better. He's brimming with ideas, and is able to make prototypes with his hands to

2018 Taylor Factory Tours & Vacation Dates

A free, guided tour of the factory is given every Monday through Friday at 1 p.m. (excluding holidays). No advance reservations are necessary. Simply check in at the reception desk in our Visitor Center, located in the lobby of our main building, before 1 p.m. We ask that large groups (more than 10) call us in advance at (619) 258-1207 or email us: privatetours@taylorguitars.com.

While not physically demanding, the tour does include a fair amount of walking. Due to its technical nature, the tour may not be suitable for small children. The tour lasts approximately one hour and 15 minutes and departs from the main building at 1980 Gillespie Way in El Cajon, California.

Please take note of the weekday exceptions below. For more information, including directions to the factory, please visit taylorguitars.com/contact.

We look forward to seeing you!



Factory Closures

Monday, October 15 (Taylor Guitars Anniversary)

November 22-23 (Thanksgiving Holiday)

Monday, December 24 through Friday, January 4
(Company Vacation)

or five years ago and developed into something we believed in and then led to a multi-year, multi-million-dollar list of projects required to bring them to market. For me, the only thing as beautiful as a new guitar is the tooling we build to make that guitar, which includes my colleagues here at Taylor who love to rise to the task. It's deeply satisfying to a person like me, who loves more than anything the act of making something. I'm lucky I chose guitars to make. The

satisfaction of the final guitar, in the hands of a player, and how we achieve being able to make it, are together quite a pleasure. I hope you have the chance to play a V-Class guitar and enjoy what it can do in your hands.

— Bob Taylor, President



FAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH SLIDE GUITAR

LEARNING JUST A FEW BASIC TECHNIQUES WILL OPEN UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF TONE TO EXPLORE

By Shawn Persinger

First things first: There is no one way (or correct way) to play slide guitar. Between materials – glass, steel, brass, ceramic and now Taylor's ebony – and instruments – acoustic, electric, resonator and lap steel guitars – slide mediums are abundant. Add to that the range of artistic approaches – Leo Kottke puts the slide on his pinky and plays with control and finesse; Joe Walsh wears his slide on his middle finger, performs with reckless precision, and gets a stunning electrified tone; CeDell Davis was known for playing with a butter knife lodged in his partially paralyzed right-hand; and Hound Dog Taylor, playing as sloppily as a Jackson Pollock paint brush, sported a brass slide on his penultimate pinky (he was born with six fingers on each hand!) – and newbies to slide are probably left thinking, Where do I start?

Right here, of course! In this article I'll share a few general guidelines to slide playing that will soon have you performing single-note licks and chordal phrases and (if you're so inclined) impart some techniques to refine your approach if you're interested in a more urbane tone.

Disclaimer: This lesson will deal specifically with playing slide in standard tuning, which is less common than playing in altered tunings. Why standard? Because it's arguably more practical for the slide "faker," not much more challenging than altered tunings, and applicable – in regard to technique – to any tuning.

Which Finger to Use?

As I mentioned, you have choices as to which finger you put your slide on. My personal opinion: If you're starting from scratch, use the pinky. This allows the other, unsheathed fingers to play chords, and unless you are dedicating yourself to single-note slide playing, this is highly practical. However, you should experiment with all your fingers and do what's best for you.

When considering your finger options, one additional detail to keep in mind is slide size. A slide that fits snugly on the pinky probably isn't going to fit on any other finger. Meanwhile, a relatively loose, larger slide will fall right off your littlest digit. Think of a slide fitting the way you would choose gloves or rings; it is best to physically try a variety of sizes before deciding on a final purchase.

Triads

Once you've picked out a slide (or two), get to work putting it to practical use. **Fig. 1** shows an easy way to play triads, which can be used for both single-note lines and chords, by laying the

slide straight across the strings, aligned with the fretwire – that is, directly above the fretwire. Other than playing over the fretwire, this is the same shape you would use to play fifth-string-root barre chords, as notated in the chord diagrams. When first starting out, play this shape without any sliding or vibrato – merely work toward a clean, properly intonated tone (more on intonation below). You'll also want to experiment with the amount of pressure you use to apply the slide to the strings – too little and it will buzz; too much and you'll rattle against the frets; just right and you'll sound like Elmore James. Once you're comfortable with this shape, you'll find that you can now play all 12 major chords simply by moving to different frets. Personally, I find the lower frets, such as the A notated here, the most difficult to play comfortably.

With **Fig. 1** under your control, it's time to move on to **Fig. 2**, which truly brings the slide to life. These subsequent three measures are the same triads as the previous three measures, except now you slide into the triads from a variety of different approach tones. For example, measure four approaches the F# from the E, which is a whole step below. Measure five approaches the B from C, a half step above. And measure six approaches the C# from a C natural, a half step below. But it's important to know that one could intuitively approach from any other note – even from a pitch not normally notated in Western music, a “quarter tone,” which is a pitch halfway between the usual notes of a chromatic scale. Exploiting quarter tones is one of the major stylistic elements of slide playing, as the slide facilitates them better than any other guitar technique, and it's utterly astonishing what a difference a quarter-tone approach can produce.

In addition to these approach tones, you'll also want to start adding vibrato to these phrases. That said, I have not notated any vibrato in this lesson. That's because, from this point forward, you can judiciously choose which notes you care to add vibrato to. To begin, I recommend emphasizing the last note of each measure. Still, the key word here is “judicious.” Just because you can easily add vibrato with the slide – simply move the slide back and forth (in the direction of the strings) relatively quickly – doesn't mean you should do it ad nauseam.

Intonation

As I alluded to earlier, it is crucial to pay attention to your intonation, i.e., the accuracy of your pitch. Using the fretwire as your guide is helpful, though you should double-check your accuracy by frequently alternating the same

phrase with the slide and then without. **Fig. 3** is a valuable exercise to do this with, as it is created from half steps (notoriously the hardest phrases to play without getting “pitchy”), provides you with several variations, and is a practical turnaround lick that you can use when playing a 12-bar blues.

The first measure of this phrase is probably the most common way it is performed, using all three notes from the triad at once. But it is just as effective played one note at a time or using a combination of two. Practice these slowly, at different frets, and with a (wink) judicious amount of vibrato. The last measure of **Fig. 3** will require you to fingerpick or hybrid pick, and is the most challenging of the phrases.

The Blues in Standard Tuning

Using a 12-bar blues to kick your slide playing into high gear is one of the most sensible places to start. This is demonstrated by **Fig. 4**, which is a 12-bar in the key of D that, for 12 relatively repetitive measures, possesses a wealth of information, technique and opportunity for variation.

Fig. 4 allows you to alternate (pretty much every other measure) between non-slide, fretted notes, and slide licks based out of our fifth-string barre-chord shapes. (To play this effectively requires you to wear your slide on the pinky or ring finger.) Once again, I have specifically notated the notes you can slide to and from in this example, as putting an arbitrary slide articulation leaves many students perplexed. Nevertheless, you should once again experiment with different degrees of slide articulation. And play close attention to the last two measures, as they provide you with the most complex phrase in this lesson, with a quick combination of fretted notes, single-notes with the slide, and a triad turnaround with the slide.

Damping

In my experience, almost every slide instructional book or video starts with the topic of damping – the muting of strings (in this context with both the left and right hands). While I do think this is important, I prefer to let students jump in and play. This is because so many of the incomparable blues guitarists from the 1950s and '60s were unconcerned with damping. You can watch vintage films of Bukka White, Mississippi Fred McDowell, and many others playing fantastic, authentic blues without a care for damping, yet sounding better than any technique-conscious pedant ever will. So, while damping has its place, I believe music is the priority. This is why I have left damping for the end of this article.

D

G

A

Fig. 1: Triads

Fig. 2: With sliding approaches

Fig. 3: Turnarounds, variations with an emphasis on intonation

Fig. 4

Watch video demonstrations of these exercises at Taylorguitars.com. Look for our Owners pulldown menu under More. You'll see a link to "Intro to Slide Guitar."

Damping is a technique that can clean up your sound in general by keeping strings you aren't playing from ringing sympathetically, which then allows the notes you are playing to resonate more. There are two basic forms of damping, one for each hand. For your fretting hand (for most players the left) you lightly lay one or more of your unsheathed fingers on the strings behind the slide. This basically looks as if you are playing guitar while wearing a mitten and can feel awkward and constraining at first, but trust me (for all my carping before), it does clean up your sound. For your picking hand, whether you are playing fingerstyle or with a pick, you gently lay the fingers you are not using to pick with on the strings you aren't playing. That's damping. It is

both easier and harder than it sounds, and may or may not benefit your playing. You should practice it anyway.

One Last Thought

I think it's worth mentioning that, as you move from slide novice to pro, you are most certainly going to bang your slide on the side of your guitar neck more often than you want. This is normal...for me, anyway. As you progress, you will do it less frequently. Using Taylor's new, lighter ebony slide will reduce the weight of the bang – much more so than a brass, steel or even glass slide would. And it's the sound of the bang, more than the actual impact, that will shock you. With that, I wish you well on your slide explorations. **W&S**

Shawn Persinger, a.k.a. Prester John, owns a Taylor 410, two 310s, a 214ce-N, an 8-string baritone, and a GS Mini Bass. His music has been described as a myriad of delightful musical paradoxes: complex but catchy; virtuosic yet affable; smart and whimsical. He currently plays in a "Laurel Canyon Sound" tribute band, playing slide guitar parts made famous by David Lindley, Lowell George, and many others. His book The 50 Greatest Guitar Books has been hailed as a monumental achievement by readers and critics. (www.GreatestGuitarBooks.com)

ANATOMY OF A

Song

**Veteran songwriters
Josquin Des Pres
and Michael Natter
deconstruct the
songwriting process**



Ed. Note: This article is the first of a three-part series that delves into the craft and business of music, ranging from songwriting to production to publishing. Like many hit songs, this series features a writing collaboration. Josquin Des Pres is a musician, songwriter, and music entrepreneur whose credits include co-writing numerous songs with Bernie Taupin (Elton John) and with songwriters Winston Sela, Michael Natter and several *American Idol* finalists. Des Pres has also composed songs and themes for over 40 television shows, produced more than 60 CDs for major and independent record labels, and written several books about the music industry.

Michael Natter is best known for his collaboration with Grammy-winning singer-songwriter (and Taylor artist) Jason Mraz. Their hit single, "I Won't Give Up," is one of four co-writes from Mraz's platinum-selling *Love is a Four Letter Word* album. Michael's wife, Nancy, joined Michael to co-write the title tracks on the debut albums for *X Factor* winners Alex & Sierra (*It's About Us*) and *American Idol* winner Nick Fradiani (*Hurricane*). The Natters teamed up again with Mraz on two cuts from his *Yes!* album.

In this first piece, Des Pres and Natter share a few songwriting tips based on their professional experience. In future articles, they'll explore the production process and explain the steps involved in song placement and publishing, with the underlying goal of demystifying these subjects.



Josquin Des Pres



Michael & Nancy Natter
Photo: Talitha Noel

It's All About the *Song*

Assuming that many readers of *Wood&Steel* are players, singers and/or songwriters who lean toward a more organic sound with their Taylor guitar and use it as their primary writing instrument, let's focus here on songs with lyrics. While there is no single formula for writing a hit song, there are many common threads. Here are a few.

Collaborations Are *Important*

Collaborations are critical in many activities in our lives. From our families and office environments to team sports and even the world's diverse societies, they all achieve significantly better results when the members all participate and cooperate. It's true that fine-art painters and sculptors almost exclusively work solo. Songwriting, historically, was a solo activity, but not anymore! Collaborative writing sessions very often yield results that would not be achieved by one person. They also allow one writer to "pass the ball" to a teammate when they are stuck, whether in concept or word.

Two or more writers have written many of the greatest songs of all time (e.g., John Lennon & Paul McCartney, Elton John & Bernie Taupin, Mick Jagger & Keith Richards, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Carole King & Gerry Goffin etc.). Therefore collaborations are heavily encouraged. Nowadays, most songwriting sessions involve a minimum of two or three writers with different skills. For example, it may include a top-liner – someone who writes a song over a pre-made beat – lyricist, track builder, programmer etc. Songwriting camps are a great way to connect with other songwriters who want to collaborate.

Conversation LEADS TO TITLES AND CONCEPTS

A song is a conversation between the writer/performer and the audience. Songwriters have a short amount of time to tell a story. A colloquial conversation between collaborators or an intrinsic inner search can lead to a concept, a title and some beginning lyrics, which can lead to a great song. These lyrics might inspire a melody that carries the words to the listeners' ears and soul.

Michael Natter: Here's an example of how a conversation can lead to song. My wife, Nancy, and I were scheduled to collaborate with a writer in LA. We had never met him before, so we had to find some common ground. We started talking about some people we might all know and hit upon a saxophone player who, at the time, was playing in Kelly Clarkson's stage band. Someone mentioned that Kelly was pregnant at the time. I mentioned to him that I can walk up to anyone with a newborn and say, "Did you notice a shift in the center of the universe?" To date, everyone has always understood what I meant! That's when Nancy said, "That's because they've realized it's not about them anymore." I turned to our co-writer and said, "That's the title!"

"It's Not About Me Anymore" was written in about two hours, with all of the lyrical content coming from our conversation. Song titles and concepts happen all the time in conversations. Listen, catch them if you can ... and then write!

Josquin Des Pres: My many collaborative experiences with Bernie Taupin have been very different. Typically there is no conversation to define what the song will be about. Just like with Elton John, Bernie writes the lyrics first. I love collaborating this way. I absorb the story until a melody comes to me and, luckily, with Bernie's brilliance, the words sing right off the paper. Then, all I need is a chord progression to complement and support the melody and lyrics. Writing with Bernie has been like writing a motion picture soundtrack. I also write melodies first and without the limitations of an instrument. If it stands on its own, then instrumental support will even make it better. "Mary Had a Little Lamb" doesn't need instruments or arrangements to remain one of the most popular nursery-rhyme melodies of all time.

SONGWRITING AS AN *Art*

Michael Natter: Songwriting is an art, in many ways just like other creative expressions such as fine art painting, sculpture and other design disciplines. What they all have in common is inspiration. Let's define inspiration as "the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative."

Every successful songwriter has their own approach to finding inspiration, recognizing when their muse is present. Some wait for that "feeling," or to hear a particular phrase or melody that excites them. That works for Neil Young. Some sit down and work at it until their muse arrives. That's the work ethic of Randy Newman.

Experiment! Try getting "lost" in an unfamiliar key or tuning until your muse comes to the rescue, to help you find your way. That's a technique used by one of our most prolific and successful songwriters, Jimmy Webb.

Have fun! Find your joy in the process. It will become part of your song. Most of us can tell if a song is written with inspiration...or drudgery.

SONGWRITING AS A *Business*

Josquin Des Pres: In the past two decades I have focused on composing "market-driven" music. This has allowed me to make a living writing songs. Market-driven music means that rather than writing anything that comes to me, I focus my efforts on requests from a particular artist or a brief that usually comes from music supervisor from a TV network or music library. I precisely target what they are looking for, ensuring a higher placement ratio.

Custom writing is not easy. It's best to work as a team, and once you have received that song request, a quick turnover is highly recommended if you want a chance at making the cut. Keep in mind, there's a pretty good chance that song request was sent to numerous other songwriters.



HIT SONG *Deconstruction*

Structure, formula, lyrics and melodic math are all essential elements that make a hit song. With melodic math, the melody is king, and good lyrics will support that melody. The melody draws you in, but good lyrics will keep you listening.

The lyrics have a beginning, a middle, an end, and an overall theme with emotional content directed at a broad base. In other words, most people can relate to it because they've felt that way themselves. (Or, in the case of story-songs, the story is engaging.)

There is a science to the typical pop hit song. It has an inherent structure that provides resolution to the ear. For instance, when the verse has gone on for just the perfect amount of time, the pre-chorus (optional) and then the chorus enters, and the listener will "feel" it coming. An even, repetitious and balanced amount of syllables within the chorus is most important. The chorus must come in within the first 45-50 seconds. Of course, some songs may start with the chorus.

While it's hard to explain what makes a song catchy scientifically, many documented techniques recur throughout catchy songs, such as repetition, hooks and alliteration. Most hit songs are reliant on math and science. This ranges from the frequencies of sound that determine pitch and harmony to the intervals between the notes of the melody, to the rhythm and cadence of the words that create a good sing-along. A unique combination of neuroscience and math can produce the elusive elixir for the perfect hit. Most hit songs are written with two to eight chords. Most lyrics are about conversational, everyday subjects. The melody is basic, catchy, nursery rhyme-like and circles around four to eight notes, whether in close or wide intervals, while the chords support that melody in various ways.

Whenever a song is a hit, it's easy to analyze it after the fact. While all these instances contain truth, they aren't sufficient to explain why some songs just catch the public's ear. Otherwise, it would be possible to write hit songs by formula, and anyone with some knowledge of the basics could be taught the ingredients and have repeated success. We all know it doesn't work this way.

So, to recap, remember, a great conversation often leads to a concept or title. From there, add focus, creativity, and time... sometimes hours, days or more. Don't be afraid to let your first draft steep for a while and then come back to it with fresh eyes and ears. Some songs are born in a few hours, while others are quite a bit more difficult to birth, but each one of them is a child of yours – it has your DNA, your perspective, your humor, and if you're lucky, a bucket of love! Feed them, encourage them, and then let them grow!

In the next article, we'll discuss the thought process that goes into choosing the groove and feel, instrumentation and vocalist, all with intended audience consideration, to bring your song to life. Remember, you could be only one great song away from a career!

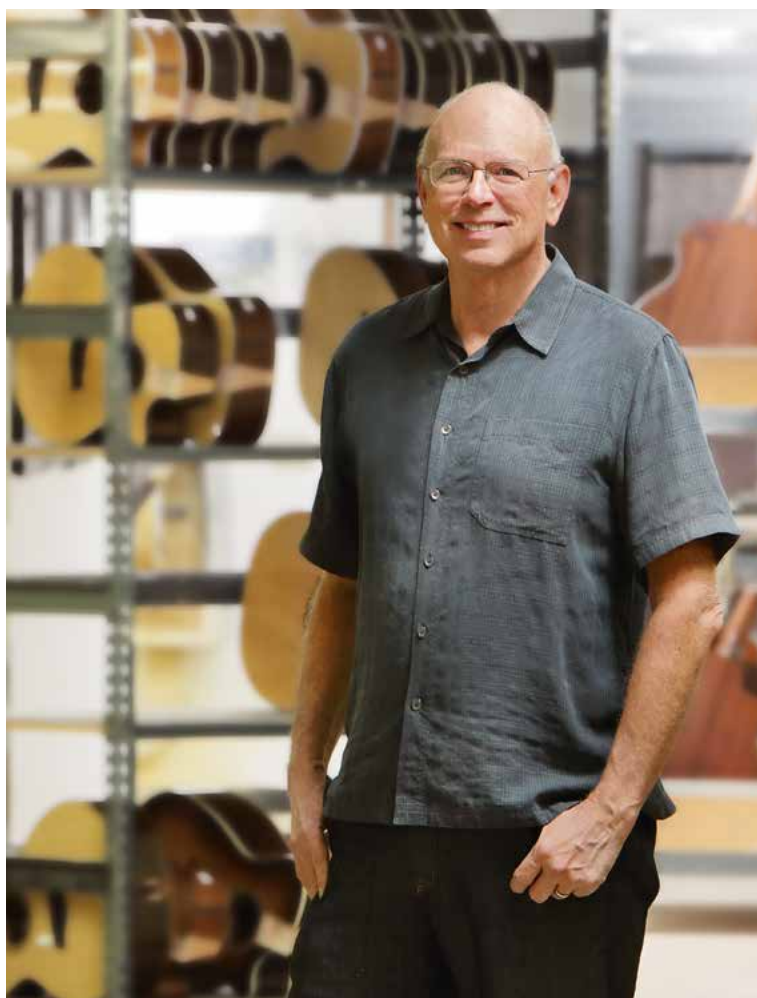
Ask Bob

3D printing, fret installation, bracing evolution and koa supply

Bob, have you or your team explored the use of 3D printing technology to produce any parts or for any aspects of Taylor's operation? If not, are there other emerging technologies that interest you from a manufacturing point of view?

Adrian V.

Yes, Adrian, we do use 3D printing at Taylor, when we want to hold and use a part that would require a lot of tooling costs in order to obtain it in a normal fashion. For instance, when designing the battery box for our Expression System electronics, all the plastic parts were designed in Solid Works (a CAD design software) and then printed. This way we could alter our designs, see the part in the real world, and even make advanced working prototypes and pre-production parts to aid in the design, until we finally committed to the expense of making molds to make the real part. In some cases, like when we make a machine or apparatus to make a part, we can print a complex part and use it as the final piece in the machine. So far, though, we don't make production pieces using 3D printing. We use it solely for testing, design and proving a concept.



Understandably, it seems like all the buzz at Taylor is divided between V-Class bracing and the Ebony Project. Along those lines, I have a few questions: Would V-Class bracing benefit an instrument like the T5z? If so, are there any plans to that end? In addition to the ebony guitar slides, which I am looking forward to, what about the possibility of ebony guitar picks?

John

John, you're correct in assessing the buzz, as both projects are highly interesting and of noble pursuit. Interestingly enough, the T5 is not braced with an X, but rather a pattern that is much more like the V-Class. Nearly all original thought comes from inspiration based on past achievements. Everything is a progression, or perhaps putting two and two together in a way that might not have been done before. It can be the result of deep, purposeful intention

or, in some cases, an accident. From the Caesar salad to the interferometry telescope, something came before it to inspire. The T5 has tone bars like arch-top guitars and violins. The V-Class is a brilliant adaptation of many discoveries, thoughts, readings and knowledge of past work, which Andy wove together, with great intention, into something that provides a wonderful new way to make a guitar. It took Andy to do it. He's the right person at the right time. So, too, with the Ebony Project. I'm not the only person who's planted a tree, gone to Africa, attempted to leave money behind to advance the less fortunate, or sought to stem the wasteful use of a precious resource. But I'll say that our work is surely the first time when it comes to ebony wood, and especially in the Congo Basin.

I had the same idea as you regarding picks but was disappointed to find that they break too easily. However, you can look forward to a beautiful wall-mounted guitar hanger using ebony. And we've started an entirely new company called Stella Falone Kitchen Woodcrafts, where we make beautiful culinary items using ebony. These products are all designed to bring to life those pieces of the tree that cannot be used for guitars. You'll hear more about this company over time.

I recently toured the Taylor factory (fascinating!), which gave me a new level of appreciation for all the detailed work that went into craft-

Back in the summer 2017 edition you told me [in this column] that ukuleles would be forthcoming in the Taylor line. So, I have to ask...when, already? Will there be conventional shapes, cutaways, acoustic/electric options? Every time I mention this to other ukulele players, they always ask, "When and how much?" You're embarrassing me out here, Bob. Time to get off the stick and make it known to one and all. Or just tell me and I'll tell everyone I know.

A hui hou,
Audrey Parks

Audrey, if you're embarrassed just think how I feel! I'm in hot water all the time for not making a ukulele. Imagine being in trouble for what you don't do, rather than what you do. What stands in the way is the massive tooling/factory building project it demands, and we have so many guitar projects to do first. The truth is that we haven't lifted a finger on the ukulele project. Maybe I'll be lucky and die and then someone else will have to take the heat! You should buy a Kanile'a ukulele from Joe and Kristen Souza. No kidding. They're spectacular, they reforest koa like we do, they're sweethearts, and they are dedicated to the finest quality. Joe, help me out buddy!

ing my 12-fret 322ce. With all the precision tools and machines your production team uses, why are the frets still pressed in manually one at a time with an arbor press? I would think there would be a way to at least semi-automate that process for greater efficiency. Is there some benefit to doing it by hand?

Wayne
Eureka, CA

Wayne, I'm always impressed by how well a human can do certain things – in fact, better and cheaper than a machine. Yes, a machine could be fashioned to do this job, but the person is well adapted to do a fine job. We use our eyes for location and proper seating of the frets, and for our ability to feel pressure differentials that are

expensive to reproduce mechanically. Our fixture to press the frets raises and lowers to the eye level of the crafts-person so they can see the bottom of the fret, whereas most frets are put in from a bird's-eye view and misses the important view, which is the bottom. A light is shined upon it in just the right way. Also, one reason we use ebony as a fretboard is that frets stop when they hit ebony, whereas with softer woods like rosewood or maple, it's easy to crush them into the wood. I will say that we've completed a new machine that is ready to deploy, which will help the crafter. We built a computerized laser scanner to check the results after the person presses the frets. Experience shows me that if a person knows the score of how they performed, they get freakishly good at doing the task. This

machine is smart and can also see how well the person is doing both with each fret and on average. So, if they're not fully trained, have a bad day, or develop a poor habit, the machine can send a notification to them, to their supervisor, or to anyone who should know so we can address it together. It could even lock the press so no more can be done. Your question is valid, and this is how we are using technology to improve that area, as everything we do is open to improvement. A machine to check the frets is simpler to make compared to a machine that both installs and checks them. Human made, inspected by technology: it's a great combination.

I might add that even without the laser scanner, our frets are so level that we don't file the tops of them as a normal procedure. One in a hundred might need personal attention, but our people do a great job. That said, we don't like the one in a hundred, and we feel we can do an even better job. We also feel that a person can become proficient with the aid of a non-human, dispassionate but accurate inspection of their work.

Like many, I'm pondering how you will expand V-Class bracing throughout the product line. You've got to be wary of giving the impression that V-Class "obsoletes" previous versions of a model. I'm wondering if V-Class bracing might be considered a "flavor," such that some models will be offered with both V- and X-bracing. And might there be some models or wood combinations where you consider X-bracing to remain the superior alternative?

Lamar Duffy
Mobile, AL

Lamar, we consider all these same questions. The answer is that time will tell, and currently our plan is to put V-Class on all El Cajon models (300 Series and up) unless and until we find a model in which we don't prefer V-Class over X. We're certainly not giving the impression that X-braced guitars are now obsolete or devalued; this is something that players are considering on their own, worried about their own guitar's value rather than the advancement of guitars. That's understandable, but their (and your) guitar is the same guitar it was when they fell in love and bought it. You don't have to worry about a new app coming that will cause your guitar not to run two years from now if you don't buy the new model.

Let's unpack the emotion or worry that many people have. They're worried that if V-Class is really better, their guitar will be worthless, or worth less. Your

question clearly relays that worry. Some may hope that we control that market by making X-braced guitars even if we think V-Class is better, just like Mr. Martin years ago thought that X-bracing was better than Spanish-style fan bracing. He made the change. Yes, we're into flavors, and we can dilute our opinion on V-Class by saying it's just another flavor in order to get past that tough moment with an owner of a X-braced Taylor, but that's unfair to our commitment of spending our lives trying to make new discoveries and better guitars.

Now, I agree with you that not everyone will prefer a V-Class guitar. Not everyone will prefer Andy's designs, just like not everyone prefers my designs, and not everyone prefers Mr. Martin's design. So, like I say, time will tell. We love V-Class, we believe in it, and it's

"One reason we use ebony as a fretboard is that frets stop when they hit ebony, whereas with softer woods like rosewood or maple, it's easy to crush them into the wood."

selling to people who also love it. It's also one of the final changes that makes a Taylor truly a Taylor. We already created our own shapes, trade dress, neck attachments and sound, but we, like others, have borrowed from past designers in the area of bracing, and so we're very happy to have something that's truly an original Taylor design. It's all part of the growth of the company, the brand and the state of the art of guitars. But we love the guitars we've already made, those million and a half X-braced guitars, just like you love your guitar. My guess is that many people like you will buy a V-Class guitar and love it, use it and enjoy it, and you'll keep your X-braced guitar and have the same love.

I heard that Taylor cut off orders for koa guitars in June because you were "sold out" for 2018 (with the exception that you reserved enough wood for 200 more Builder's Edition guitars). Would you please address this situation, the cause and outlook, and comment on any effect the Hawaiian volcano is having on your reforestation efforts there or any interruption of commerce? I was considering a new V-Class purchase, and

this news pushed me over the edge. I am now greatly enjoying my new V-Class K24ce. Congrats to Taylor for producing such a fine and beautiful instrument.

G.S. Thompson
Indianapolis, IN

G.S., koa is harder to get, but Paniolo Tonewoods has cut more koa this last year than we've cut in many years. It's just that people are buying it in greater numbers. Recently, Paniolo made new "harvesting in trade for reforestation" agreements with new property owners who have seen the success of our efforts on other properties. We feel like we could end up with the bridge from here to when the newly planted trees yield lumber. As for the volcano and recent hurricane, we haven't seen any

damage to our reforestation efforts. Paniolo has acquired ownership of a 560-acre property that is perfect for growing koa. We plan to forest it over the next 10 years. We have named it Siglo Forest, "siglo" being Spanish for "century" to signify our long-term commitment. So, all is good in Hawaii, but the flow of timber is limited, as it should be in order to build a sustainable plan, and that means a limit to the guitars, giving us a sold-out condition from time to time. This doesn't mean you can't find one at a dealer; it just means our production for the year has all been reserved.

Wow, my new K14ce sounds good. What can you tell me about using a guitar [vibration device] like one made by ToneRite to accelerate the playing-in process? Is this voodoo, or is there science behind what they claim?

Leni Wojnowich
Savannah, GA

Leni, I'm glad you like your new guitar. It's a good question, and I consider my 45 years of making guitars part of an experiment to help answer this. Ten

years in I couldn't really answer it. But here is an example of what I've observed over the long haul. I have two 20th anniversary Taylor guitars. They have very little play time. One spent 20 years on display. I took it off display during extreme humidity conditions, such as dry spells. But this guitar has a very aged tone. Its twin spent that same time in a case and does not have that same advanced tone. So that is an example of a guitar aging without being played, simply due to the natural stretching and seasoning of the wood from the changing environment around it. It was a surprise to me, but undeniable. I've not seen the same huge change by playing a guitar aggressively, without the time factor, or with the time factor but locked up in a case.

Here's what I have observed overall. The guitar improves in the first hour after birth. Then, another improvement after a year of normal use. Then another after 10-12 years. What's interesting is that if you read the online guitar forums, almost everyone claims we made better guitars 12 or 15 years ago, almost no matter when that post is written, because they have a 12-year-old guitar that sounds better than a new one, and they attribute it to us, rather than time. ToneRite certainly doesn't hurt. The most important advice I have, which I've written about many times, is to choose one or two nice guitars and keep them forever. Don't constantly trade into new guitars – you'll miss out on some of the wonderful tonal benefits you get from age.

My 914ce from 2003 has an Engelmann spruce top. Why don't I see guitars anymore with this kind of wood? Is it special? Different in sound? Please tell me more about it.
Bert

Bert, it's a simple answer. Engelmann is nearly impossible to obtain. The trees have been cut. Probably 99 percent of them went to 2x4s to make houses. Very few went to guitars. It's a mountain tree, small by comparison to Sitka spruce, and has a smaller range. They're still cutting it in Canada for construction lumber, but we don't see any coming our way. Sitka is a lowland coastal tree that lives in the mist and clouds. The trees are big and have a large range. And still most

of them go to construction, believe it or not. Meanwhile, we have a high interest in Lutz spruce, which is a natural hybrid of the mountain varieties like Engelmann and the lowland Sitka. We think it will survive climate change, unless it burns up in forest fires, which are increasing with global temperature. And Sitka could suffer death from warming. I don't mean to sound bleak, but some forces are bigger than what we can do about them. We've got our fingers crossed, and we're hoping for the best. But there will always be great-sounding, beautiful guitars. It may take smaller trees that won't yield 2-piece tops like we're used to, but we'll all adapt, as we always do.

Bob, for years I've had a 6-string and a 12-string Taylor: a 2003 714ce and a 2005 655ce. I was happy with this arrangement and thought I was finished buying guitars. Then, a few years ago, you guys dredged up (literally) this sinker redwood. It was love at first sight for me. I came to find out that, at the time, I could get one only by building a custom guitar. That sounded good to me. The problem was that I wanted a 12-string sinker-top guitar. After several weeks of back-and-forth emails and phone calls, it was finally decided (I think by Andy Powers) that the sinker top would not support a 12-string. I ended up buying a 6-string version (with lots of help from Eric in your Sales department), which I love to death! My question: Would the new [V-Class] bracing system make a sinker redwood 12-string guitar a possibility? As much as I love my guitar, I would seriously consider the 12-string if it were doable.

Paul Goldrath

Paul, you might be in for some more back and forth as you try to convince Andy to make it. Redwood is not as strong as Sitka, and it has a nature that makes it hard to glue a bridge to, which makes us reluctant to make 12-strings with it. The new V-Class might help the situation, but I think Andy will probably feel the same way. We love that you love to buy a special guitar, but in this case, we think it's best to be conservative, which sometimes means saying no.

Got a question for Bob Taylor?

Shoot him an email: askbob@taylorguitars.com

If you have a specific repair or service concern, please call our Customer Service department at (800) 943-6782, and we'll take care of you.

NEW WAVE

V-Class bracing comes to the 300 and 400 Series

By Colin Griffith

When we first unleashed V-Class bracing back in January, many players asked when our game-changing innovation would appear across our entire solid-wood guitar lineup. We asked for patience while we began to integrate the design into production, gradually adding it to more Grand Auditorium models across the Taylor line in the months that followed.

Well, we're happy to share that our third wave of V-Class guitars is here. Players can now enjoy the V-Class experience in both our 300 and 400 Series, with four newly refined Grand Auditorium models that boast a sonic upgrade in volume, sustain and all-around musicality.

The two series, especially the Grand Auditorium editions, already share a reputation as versatile and expressive instruments, making them popular with everyone from novices to working musicians. With the V-Class update, we've further expanded their broad-ranging utility.

"We want lots of players to be able to enjoy these V-Class guitars," says master guitar designer Andy Powers. "These guitars are so useful for such a wide variety of playing styles, I'm excited to see them in the hands of more musicians making creative music."

For this V-Class release in particular, Andy is especially pleased to promote the functional benefits of the design, now that it's more accessible than ever.

"The concepts behind V-Class aren't meant as mere parlor tricks," he explains. "They're functional improvements that benefit the musician. These guitars work really well on stage. They play well with others. Whether you're playing in a band, at a club, a coffee shop, or solo, you'll want good intonation, balance and projection, acoustically or amplified. Those are all musically useful characteristics."

With that philosophy in mind, let's explore the models.



Above (L-R): Sapele/Spruce 314ce, Blackwood/Mahogany 324ce;
Below (L-R): Inlaid pegheads of the 314ce and 324ce (now with satin black tuners)

300 Series

Model: 314ce
Back/Sides: Sapele
Top: Sitka Spruce

The sapele/spruce 314ce has always delivered player-friendly versatility, built for the day-in, day-out experience common to emerging and established musicians alike. V-Class brings an upgrade in musicality and expressive range, producing increased power and articulation that broaden this Grand Auditorium's already-impressive utility.

"This is no one-trick pony," Andy says. "It fits a giant swath of the gui-

tar-playing population. You can write songs with it. You can front a band with it. You can play jazz on it."

Sapele's dry response is comparable to mahogany; its pairing with Sitka spruce makes an appealing tonewood marriage for guitarists who value control and expression.

"You hear this vibrant, strong articulation coming from a spruce top over the somewhat dry and fundamental-strong sound of sapele," Andy adds. "It ends up being a clear and dynamic guitar."

Extra volume is a given with our new bracing design, but the guitar also benefits from the way the bracing interacts with the sapele/spruce combo specifically. The guitar yields a remarkably even response that gives the player

newfound control. Each player will find ample space to express their own stylistic flavor.

Model: 324ce
Back/Sides: Tasmanian Blackwood
Top: Neo-Tropical Mahogany

The 314ce's rootsier counterpart – thanks in part to a shaded edgeburst mahogany top and satin-finish body – shares the former's wide range of playing applications while offering players another distinctive tone profile. With the 324ce, the mahogany top boasts a remarkably consistent tonal response across the frequency range. Coupled with Tasmanian blackwood back and sides, the 324ce yields a forgiving,



malleable sound that allows the player a high degree of control.

"The mahogany top over blackwood is interesting because you get a bit of compression on the attack," Andy says. "It's a leveling effect – when you hit it hard, it tends to absorb the initial hit and give you something balanced and smooth, as if the sound was put into an oak barrel to age and take the edge off."

Again, V-Class bracing makes itself known here, complementing the dry sound of mahogany with boosts in volume and sustain, as well as greater note-to-note harmony.

"You can drive every note and it will all be there," Andy says. "You can play it forcefully or delicately; in either case, you'll have plenty of volume and dynamic range."

With its hardwood top, the 324ce also performs exceptionally well when amplified. With a seamless attack-and-decay progression courtesy of the bracing upgrade, the guitar reaps big rewards from its Expression System 2 electronics.

"It's one of the happiest amplified guitars we make right now," Andy says.

"It's super well-behaved on stage, whether through a PA or amp."

New Appointments

Both 300 Series V-Class guitars sport subtle aesthetic updates. Andy designed a new Gemstone inlay motif, which was inspired by a trip to get his wife's wedding ring repaired.

"For such a physically small item, a lot of interesting design goes into a ring," he says. "You can convey a whole different aesthetic by the way you arrange the setting for a diamond or gemstone. Talking with the jeweler after the worn area was repaired inspired me to sketch out some inlay ideas."

The Gemstone design also includes a peghead inlay component, which provides a helpful visual indicator of V-Class bracing when you're browsing the acoustic wall at your local shop.

Additionally, the V-Class 324ce now features satin black tuners that complement the body's shaded edgeburst top and black pickguard.

400 Series

Model: 414ce-R

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood

Top: Sitka Spruce

While the ovangkol and rosewood Grand Auditorium siblings from our 400 Series share many sonic traits, the addition of V-Class bracing helps highlight the subtle distinctions of each tonewood.

The rosewood 414ce-R balances a strong foundation of low-end power with top-end shimmer, producing a warm, full-spectrum tone that's rich with harmonic complexity. As showcased with the V-Class models we released from the 700, 800 and 900 Series, the bracing allows the lush overtones to

blossom in a more well-behaved way.

"Rosewood has a super-low damping factor, so all the harmonic content from the strings and woods is displayed," Andy says. "By itself, rosewood has an overtone-rich quality. If you take a piece of rosewood and drop it on the floor, you'll hear this bell-like clatter instead of a dull thud. In the context of the V-Class designs, all of this extra sonic flavor is harmoniously in tune."

The orderly response also translates into a better amplified sound with our ES2 electronics, giving players an even more reliable tool for gigging.

"You can play it without weird, erroneous frequencies leading to feedback when amplified, or turning certain chord voicings to mush," Andy explains. "It's just very clean and in-tune sounding."

Aside from the rosewood's darker hue, you'll be able to distinguish the 414ce-R from its ovangkol counterpart by its Renaissance fretboard/peghead inlay (the ovangkol 414ce features Small Diamond inlays).

Model: 414ce

Back/Sides: Ovangkol

Top: Sitka Spruce

The ovangkol 414ce lacks none of the rosewood edition's clarity or musicality, but adds a slightly different tonal character that's most noticeable in its midrange presence. If rosewood's mids are somewhat scooped, revealing warm lows and pronounced highs, ovangkol by comparison delivers a boost in the mids, evening out the frequency spec-

trum for an exceptionally well-balanced sound.

"The ovangkol pulls up the mid-range a bit so it feels less flat there," Andy says. "It feels like everything got pushed up a bit, making the whole register feel positive."

With V-Class helping to orchestrate the guitar's response, rosewood's warm lows sound even duskier, while ovangkol's bright top end and punchy mids feel even more recognizable. That said, even though V-Class gives each tonewood pairing a more distinctive tonal character, those qualities can remain difficult to adequately describe.

"I know we often resort to using EQ analogies to describe the sound properties of different tonewoods," Andy says, "but in some respects with V-Class designs, the EQ analogy seems less appropriate than ever. The guitars take on aural qualities that we perceive when we play them, but that I can't describe with the vocabulary I have. It's like chefs who talk about that indescribable extra flavor. You can experience it, you can try to identify what it is, and yet struggle to describe it. There's this whole other quality that was there all along, but was somewhat hidden. Now, within the context of the V-Class design, the unique, mysterious elements of each of these wood personalities show more."

You'll find these new V-Class guitars from the 300 and 400 Series at authorized Taylor dealers everywhere. When you play them, we think you'll hear them in a whole new way. **W&S**



Above (L-R): Rosewood 414ce-R, Ovangkol 414ce;
Right (L-R): Inlaid pegheads of the 414ce-R and 414ce





STUDIO GRADE

SESSION ACE JERRY McPHERSON AND PRODUCER WILL YIP SHARE THEIR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF OUR V-CLASS GUITARS AS STUDIO TOOLS

By Jay Parkin and Jim Kirlin

ONE OF THE MOST GRATIFYING PARTS OF INTRODUCING our V-Class guitars this year has been getting them into the hands of music pros, especially session players and recording engineers who rely on acoustic guitars to craft the songs we love to hear. Studio recording is one specific musical context in which the enhanced in-tuneness of these guitars promised a sweet payoff, so we were eager to elicit initial feedback from folks with discerning ears.

As we noted in our V-Class cover story from the winter issue, putting a microphone in front of an acoustic guitar magnifies its sonic details, for better and for worse. And given the historical idiosyncrasies of a guitar's intonation, it's often been necessary to use a collage approach to getting a usable track – recording a passage in multiple takes so a certain chord can be retuned to “sweeten” the voicing – especially if the track needs to sit in an instrument mix.

This summer we talked to a couple of accomplished recording pros in the wake of their first exposure to our V-Class guitars. One was A-list session guitarist Jerry McPherson, whose playing has been featured on hundreds of country and pop records tracked in Nashville. The other was Grammy-nominated, Philly-based engineer and producer Will Yip, who has worked across different musical genres, from hardcore to hip-hop to Americana. In each musical context, McPherson and Yip immediately discovered the merits of a V-Class guitar as a recording tool. This is just one of a series of reactions we'll share as more music pros have a chance to work with these guitars.

JERRY MCPHERSON

Perusing Jerry McPherson's musical resume is an exhausting exercise, one that underscores how in-demand the first-call session guitarist is. A Nashville resident for more than 30 years now, McPherson's body of work includes years as a touring guitarist alongside Amy Grant, Vince Gill, Reba McEntire, and Faith Hill and Tim McGraw. In the studio, he's played on everyone's records, including Kelly Clarkson, Rhett Walker, Lee Brice, The Band Perry, Don Henley, Dolly Parton, and many, many others, which means he knows what it takes to deliver the goods when tracking during recording sessions.

Today he's in the main tracking room at Zac Brown's Southern Ground Studios, playing a V-Class guitar for the first time: a maple/torrefied spruce 614ce (the standard version, not the Builder's Edition). He's set up as if for a recording session, parked on a stool with a studio mic positioned off the soundhole, headphones on. There happen to be some chord charts on a sheet music stand from a previous session, so he plays through those, and then runs through some chord shapes that progress all the way up the neck to the cutaway.

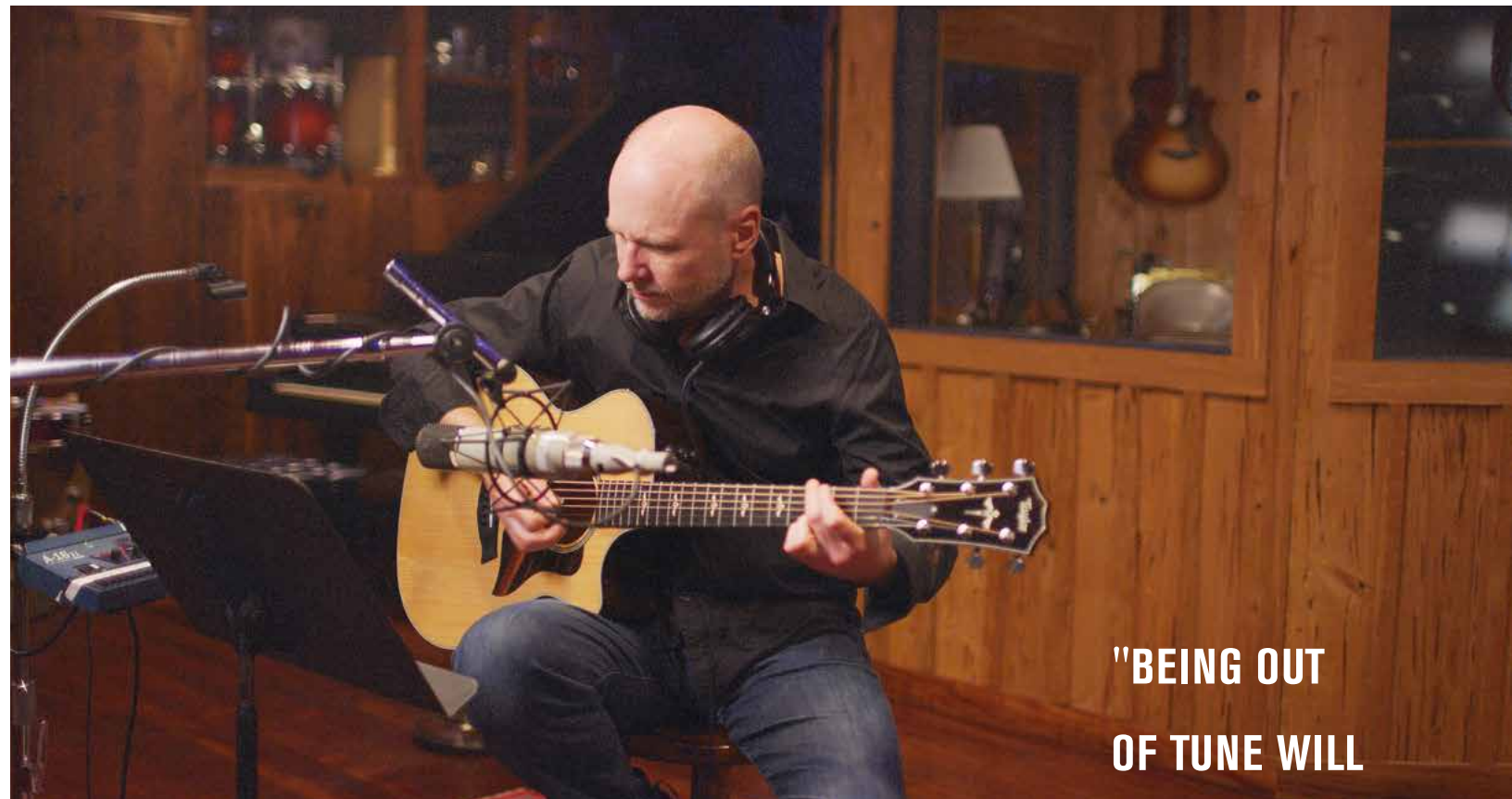
"Damn, it's still in tune," he laughs. "That's crazy. I don't have a guitar that'll do *that*. I mean, *c'mon!* I would have to retune and punch...let me get set up for this last chord," he jokes.

McPherson is acknowledging the tedious realities of recording with an acoustic guitar.

"An acoustic [guitar] has been described to me as, just part of the math behind it, it's not gonna play in tune, just like tempered tuning on a piano, but it's compensated in a way that I would never play up here," he says, referring to the cutaway end of the fretboard. "A cutaway helps, but a cutaway to out-of-tuneness is what I would have on my other guitars. And this is just dialed in, no matter where you are on the neck."

When tracking acoustic guitar parts for a session, McPherson explains, the sound is scrutinized, especially if it needs to fit in a mix with other instruments.

"Everything gets pointed out – the tone, the tuning," he says. "It's got to play well with others. I'll tell you what,



being out of tune will knock a zero off the value of the guitar. A \$1,500 guitar will sound like a \$150 guitar if it's out of tune."

A guitar with great intonation up the neck will also save time (and money) in the studio, and allow more time for creativity. Brandon Bell, Southern Ground's studio director and chief engineer, who's been manning the console during McPherson's playing session, knows the value of this from the years of studio time he's logged.

"You're trying to capture stuff in a creative moment," Bell says during a break, talking with McPherson. "You're really trying to capture something while it's of importance, while people feel it, while people are inspired."

McPherson agrees.

"And engineers are on the hot seat," he adds. "I've been on tracking dates where the final chord rings out, everyone looks at each other like, 'That [take] was the one,' and the engineer will go, 'Hey, can you go around your toms?'

And we're like, 'You're still getting sounds?! Really?'"

McPherson says the consistently accurate intonation of the V-Class 614ce he's been playing makes it a more musically useful tool for what he's trying to accomplish.

"It gives you time – the time you would've [spent] messing with your tuning and with how it's sounding – to work on the creative part of it," he says. "Things like, what am I going to play here, or how am I going to voice these chords? Is there something special I can come up with?"

Bell has had some extended time with our V-Class guitars in a recording context. He and Zac Brown were early beta testers of Andy Powers' V-Class prototypes.

"These [V-Class] guitars definitely have a different harmonic structure," he says. When Bell explains to McPherson that the intonation improvements are caused by the new bracing architecture rather than adjustments to the frets,

bridge, string length, or saddle compensation, a quizzical look appears on McPherson's face.

"It's because of the *bracing?*"

Another appealing attribute McPherson noticed during his test-drive was the broader array of "good" acoustic sounds he was able to get as he shifted the position of the guitar in relation to the microphone.

"There are so many cool personalities in there," he says. "That's crazy. I'm so used to doing that just to find where it sounds good, not where it sounds different. And this sounds good everywhere, just different."

His overall experience with the 614ce reminds him of a Danocaster electric guitar he owns.

"It's like they took all the great aspects of every Tele you've ever played and put them in one guitar," he explains. "This acoustic feels like that for me."

"BEING OUT
OF TUNE WILL
KNOCK A ZERO
OFF THE VALUE
OF THE GUITAR."

continued

WILL YIP



"THIS IS CRAZY.

THIS IS THE MOST

IN-TUNE THING

I'VE EVER HEARD

OUT OF AN

ACOUSTIC GUITAR."

Producer, engineer, songwriter and drummer Will Yip has plied his production talents across a range of musical genres, from hip-hop to hardcore to indie rock. His musical home base is suburban Philadelphia's Studio 4, located in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, where he worked his way up from floor-sweeping intern to ownership partner with Grammy-winning producer Phil Nicolo (Sting, Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, Aerosmith). Yip has produced and engineered albums for the likes of Lauryn Hill, Title Fight, Circa Survive, Balance + Composure, MeWithoutYou, La Dispute, None More Black and The Wonder Years.

Young and energetic, Yip has forged a reputation for bringing out great performances from artists in a recording environment. One of the common denominators of any project he works on is working with an artist to craft songs that, above all, resonate with emotion and musicality.

"People know me for not being a sound nerd," he says. "I am, but I don't put myself out there like that, spending weeks and weeks talking about pedals. I'm more of a song guy. I want the songs to be awesome."

To that end, in a recording environment, Yip values instruments that both perform well as tools and inspire the artist and engineer to create their best music. Ultimately, he says, it provides a clearer path to building great songs, with fewer distractions along the way.

"The vibe can get so crushed when you're worried about tuning every single chord," he says. "Especially when you're writing, you might think, wait, this chord doesn't sound good. I have to find another chord because the intonation doesn't sound right. And that could just be from the instrument. But when you have an instrument like this [V-Class guitar] that's so well intonated, you're inspired to do cooler things. It's all about musicality."

Yip already had an X-braced 814ce on hand at Studio 4, where it's been a staple for recording acoustic parts during tracking sessions. Then Jay Parkin from our marketing team, who has known Yip for years, sent him a V-Class 814ce. Parkin didn't want to reveal too much ahead of time; he simply teased that it was a game changer, and let Yip go through his own organic discovery process in the studio.

"I didn't know what to expect," Yip recalls. "I took it out of the box for the record I was working on and played just a few chords up the neck. I texted Taylor immediately and said, 'This is crazy. This is the most in-tune thing I've ever heard out of an acoustic guitar.'"

Parkin followed up with Yip in July, after he'd had a month with the guitar, and Yip was effusive in his praise. "It really is a game changer," he shared. "It's everything I want out of a guitar, especially for recording. Every acoustic part I've recorded in the last month has been on this guitar. It's changing how I'm recording guitars."

Here are some other impressions Yip shared after recording with the V-Class guitar. *[Ed. Note: Some comments have been edited for clarity.]*

ON THE SOUND PROPERTIES

"Not only is the tuning there, but the sustain is there. It's so musical... I think even playing the songs you wrote two years ago, you'll play them differently because it just sounds better. It's like plugging an electric guitar into an amp; you'll play a little differently because you're inspired by what's coming out."

"All those little inconsistencies with fretting and muting – things that are an issue when I'm playing older guitars in the studio – actually sound musical on these guitars because the resonance is so correct."

"I was playing the guitar in the control room, where we were tracking, and it sounded awesome. Then I gave it to the guitar player and moved about 10 feet away to my Pro Tools rig. Not only did it feel louder, it felt [like it had] more presence to it. I think that has a lot to do with the sustain of the guitar and allowing the frequencies to [project] through the air instead of fighting and dying right away. With acoustic [guitars], I think we're just accustomed to that – sound just dies from the source."

"We do a lot of live in-house acoustic gigs here. I might not even need a mic [with this guitar]. This room's loud for one, but where the audience will be hearing it, it will be even a little more present."

ON THE TRADITIONAL CHALLENGES OF RECORDING ACOUSTIC GUITARS

"Recording acoustic guitars with players is stressful because when you're using different mics, once you get the phase alignment right you have to stay there. Once I find where my [microphone] wants to live against the guitar, I tell the guys to measure by the inch because sometimes we do a lot of punching in on tracks, especially if you have tuning issues. And people change their sitting position because they're human. But when you're capturing acoustic guitar, that's always been an issue because every punch sounds different...the shape of the frequency spectrum changes if you move or slouch, or if you're tired. So when I go in and mix an acoustic guitar, I'm compressing it to make up for it; I'm EQing sections to make up for it."

ON MIKING THE V-CLASS 814CE

"I noticed how clear, how precise this guitar was. I wanted to capture all of it. There was this lack of woofiness. So the first thing I did was reach for an 87 [Neumann U 87 condenser microphone] and put it above the guitar. I thought, this is balanced bass, without EQ on the Neve [console]. So I had a [Neumann] 47 on the neck and then an 87 at the butt of the guitar, and once I got them in phase, I didn't have to touch the EQ because it was so balanced. Whereas, every time I try doing that, I'm sucking out so much between 90 hertz and 330 hertz. Instead, I was just letting it rock. I wanted it to sound the way it sounded in front of my face, where the low-end frequencies were so precise, the low-end sustain was so tight but still big and loud and present. It was all musical."

"Woofiness, or non-musical frequencies, honkiness – the mud-diness – that's just distracting. It's not just that it sounds bad; it's distracting you from the good stuff. I feel like, out of the box, Taylor solved that problem for people."

ON EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO MIKING A V-CLASS GUITAR

"Miking it farther away, shotgunning it, even putting some ribbon mics 10 feet away has been creating something cool, because 10 feet away the guitar feels a little louder and more present to me, so the ribbon mic is taking that presence and just fattening it up. You get a different picture there than you do right in front of the guitar. I like options, and it's allowing me more options."

"The way the sound [travels], I'm inspired to mic this guitar not just like an acoustic guitar but the way I would mic a beautiful old violin. I've heard it with string instruments with friends recording from the Philadelphia Orchestra...that's why people put shotgun mics a few feet away from a violin or cello: because [the sound] travels through the air beautifully. I've never really gotten that from an acoustic guitar, any 6-string guitar – until this guitar. It made me think of the last time I miked an expensive cello. That instrument has hot spots in places around the instrument, not just right in front of it, because the frequencies and waves are moving through the air in such a unique way that you want to capture it in different places. And I think this guitar has that."

ON HOW THE V-CLASS SOUND IMPROVES THE ENTIRE RECORDING PROCESS

"You're getting a wider frequency response that all feels very consistent. That might not sound that important, but when you're in the studio tracking for eight hours at a time on an acoustic guitar part, you can cut your studio time in half. You're not stressing about every punch-in. It saves you editing and mixing time. It saves you time in terms of the performance because the artist [doesn't have to] stand perfectly still in the same position for eight hours. You're letting the artist just play, and they'll be inspired to play better. So you'll get a better take faster. It's a better musical instrument on all fronts – frequency-wise, sonically, performance-wise...it's all musical; everything is usable."

"I think every studio should have a V-braced guitar for sure. Anyone that cares about a balanced frequency response, intonation, presence or how a guitar resonates in a room is going to fall in love with these guitars. Tracking guitars is what I do. And getting a guitar that's inconsistent or muddy or intonated poorly literally stresses me out and keeps me up at night. So when I have an element of that eliminated, it makes my life easier all around."



V-CLASS
814CE

ON HOW V-CLASS INSPIRES A BETTER PERFORMANCE

"If you play a chord and mistakenly hit a low E string or something, everything's a little more musical, so players can be a little more vibey with it.... With better sustain and intonation, they're inspired to commit to that chord, so they feel better playing it. Even if they don't play something different, I think they're playing differently, a little more confidently."

"I'll always have this conversation with bands: I don't care about the most objectively right performance...with something like [V-Class], we're getting takes where guys can just play. I get chills talking about it."

Cover Story

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

INSPIRED BY ELECTRIC GUITARS AND VIOLINS, OUR NEW BUILDER'S EDITION 614CE REVEALS ANOTHER PLAYER- FRIENDLY FUSION OF FEEL AND SOUND

By Jim Kirlin

It's early afternoon in late July and Andy Powers is bathed in a picture window's worth of El Cajon sunlight as he hand-sands a final-prototype guitar neck in Taylor's design studio, our test kitchen for new guitar recipes. As he nuances the neck's contours, he explains how he sometimes uses the light, and the way it falls over the curves, to help gauge when the shape is right.

"This one's pretty close," he decides after eyeing it.

The neck, which features some especially complex geometry, is slated for a future offering from our newly minted Builder's Edition collection. But today we're talking about our latest Builder's Edition delicacy — a deluxe-edition 614ce, the second release from Andy's envelope-pushing subset of the Taylor line. He starts by revisiting the underlying design ethos that helped spawn Builder's Edition.

"I want to make guitars that are more player-centric than anything we've done before," he says with a mix of heady conviction and humility, pausing to blow the puff of sawdust he's just made before surveying the neck's shape one more time.

Back in January, Andy's Builder's Edition debut, the glorious K14ce, was unveiled at the Winter NAMM Show to celebrate the launch of V-Class bracing. The groundbreaking new internal architecture has lived up to its promise as a new sonic engine for an acoustic guitar, not only by bolstering the important acoustic properties of volume and sustain, but by solving some rather persistent intonation issues, replacing sour, dissonant notes with greater harmonic cohesion that delivers exceptional musicality along the entire fretboard.





The thrust of Builder's Edition, as we shared in the feature story from our winter issue, is that Andy wanted to match the musical virtues of V-Class with improvements in playing comfort. He imbued the guitar with refined body contours, including some we'd never offered before – chamfered edges around the entire body to complement the beveled armrest, plus a beautifully engineered cutaway that combined two distinct sculptural elements into a fluid whole: a finger bevel in the front, with compound contouring that allows the curved side panel to flow cleanly into the line of the neck heel. The net result was a sublime blend of feel and sound, of form and function, intended to connect the player to the instrument in an inspiring new way.

"The Builder's Edition idea is meant to be an expression of the direction I can see our instruments going," he elaborates. "We want to make guitars that are more creatively useful to people playing music today, as well as the players we expect to come next."

Last issue we shared an assortment of rave reactions to our V-Class and

Builder's Edition designs so far. Among guitar reviewers, the K14ce earned some of the highest praise any Taylor model has ever received, both for the significance of V-Class in terms of the evolution of acoustic sound and for its ergonomic appeal. Chris Devine from *Performer* magazine opened his review by calling it "quite simply the best acoustic guitar we've ever played."

Beyond the guitar's feel and sound, the K14ce also exudes unique aesthetic appeal, starting with gorgeous Hawaiian koa back and sides, a torrefied spruce top, and the distinctive matte complexion of our new Silent Satin finish together with a Kona burst around the back, sides and neck.

The reception of the K14ce in the retail world has been gratifying for Andy, in part because it validates what he considers really just the first page of an entirely new chapter for Taylor acoustic guitar design, thanks to the V-Class platform. This has prompted speculation on what the next "director's cut" model from the Builder's Edition framework might be.

Meet the Builder's Edition 614ce

"This is a *really* cool guitar," Andy says of his follow-up, the Builder's Edition 614ce. Like the K14ce, it features a torrefied spruce top, this time paired with figured Big Leaf maple back and sides. "I actually built the maple version first," he confesses, implying that this version is as true to the original spirit of the Builder's Edition concept as the K14ce. (The K14ce was released first because it was more compatible with our initial V-Class launch, which included the Koa Series.)

With the Builder's Edition 614ce, players will recognize many of the same ergonomic features that were introduced with the K14ce: the beveled armrest, the chamfered body edges, the beveled, contoured cutaway.

"Those physical elements are definitely borrowed from the electric guitar world," Andy points out, acknowledging that many contemporary players are influenced by electric guitars, whether they realize it or not. It might be because they also have played electric

guitars somewhere along their guitar journey or because their playing style is influenced by artists and music that incorporate electric guitars.

Heck, Bob Taylor helped put his company on the map by borrowing – intuitively – from the electric guitar world, attracting electric players to his slim-profile, easy-playing necks. And many of those electric players had first picked up a guitar after seeing the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*.

"The music we've all grown up hearing may have acoustic guitars in the mix, but is likely to also have electric guitar sounds," Andy says. "We're all influenced by that now. We've been exposed to the 'system' version of an instrument – guitar plus amplifier. That has totally changed our repertoire, the way we approach an instrument, the type of instrument we play, the types of music, the sounds we'll coax from it. Sure, we'll want to strum chords on an acoustic guitar sometimes, but that's not all a guitar is doing. Look at the vast numbers of guitarists out there; they'll be just as influenced by an electric player as an acoustic player."



BUILDER'S EDITION
K14CE





**"THIS GUITAR'S
VOICE DEPENDS
ON WHO PICKS
IT UP, HOW THEY
PLAY IT, AND WHAT
THEY PLAY ON IT."**

At the same time, Andy also drew deep inspiration for his latest Builder's Edition acoustic from the violin world, starting with the classic violin wood pairing of maple and spruce.

"In some respects this instrument is also like the violin version of an acoustic guitar," he says. "Maple is chosen for violins because of its transparency — it sounds like what you make from it, and what a player brings to it. It seems funny, but we often think of violins as the quintessential ultra-conservative heritage instrument, right? But here you have an instrument that's equally at home on a rock stage, in an orchestra, in a country band, in a bluegrass band, a jazz band, or playing Celtic music in a pub. This one instrument will effortlessly fit into nearly any musical situation."

Andy sees the genre-bending musical capability of this guitar as a key strength.

"I think of this as a cutting-edge acoustic guitar, with a chameleon-like personality. A player can bring all their influences, no matter how wide and varied they are, to this instrument and simply play. It doesn't really matter whether those influences were electric guitar sounds, fingerstyle jazz, or any other stylistic approach. You can accompany a voice, you can play bluegrass or blues, you can make it sound like a mandolin or a harp and achieve an orchestral quality. It's player-centric like a good violin. Its voice depends on who picks it up, how they play it, and what they play on it."

Like the standard V-Class 614ce we introduced a few months ago, the

bracing and torrefied spruce top of the Builder's Edition give the player incredible touch sensitivity and dynamic range. One very subtle tonal distinction of this version, Andy says, is that the refined contouring makes the body just slightly shallower by the neck heel.

"This gives it a little extra vibrancy on the attack compared to a typical GA body."

New Color Burst and Inlays

The violin aesthetic heavily informed the look of this guitar. Andy retained the Silent Satin finish sheen of the original Builder's Edition K14ce — which brings the sonic benefit of reducing the sound of incidental body contact, along with a smooth feel — but instead of the Brown Sugar stain of the standard 614ce, he worked with our Finish department to create the new Wild Honey Burst, which evokes the deep, varnished hues of a violin.

"I have two good friends who are both wonderful fiddle-playing musicians, and both have these gorgeous old instruments," Andy says. "I've been around those two fiddles quite a bit as we've played music together. I've admired other beautiful violins, but those two instruments are just gorgeous. Every time I look at one I think, that's what an instrument should look like. This Wild Honey Burst was birthed from that inspiration."

The color application process is not easy, and the stakes are high.

"It's a different coloring process than what we'd normally do on a sun-

burst guitar or a shaded edgeburst guitar," Andy explains. "It's even a different material. The process is difficult due to the color setting into the wood instead of staying on top of it as a film. When you look closely at the wood, there's a lot of dimension and depth in the color. Often, a sunburst guitar is finished by sealing the wood and then applying a tinted lacquer over top, almost like putting makeup on the surface. With these Builder's Edition guitars, we're using a process where the coloring is actually penetrating the wood's surface. Because it doesn't get sealed first — it's all just going into raw wood — the preparation has to be spot-on because any little mistake will show up afterward, at which point it can't easily be corrected."

The Wild Honey Burst is featured on the back, sides, neck (Hard Rock maple to match the maple body) and top, with a natural-top edition also available.

Another new aesthetic component is the Scepter fretboard/peghead inlay motif, in mother-of-pearl, inspired by the Queen — of a chess set.

"Our oldest son McCoy is really into playing chess," Andy says. "We have this old chess set where the queen piece looks like the handle of a royal scepter. I drew this shape where the centerpiece looks like the stem of a scepter, and then added the little stylized leaf. It seemed to fit with the violin-like aesthetic as I imagined instruments from the 1700s — a classical era of royalty, of counts and countesses —

that ornate, formal look, with a modern twist."

The rest of the guitar's detailing completes the aesthetic with elegant simplicity: maple purfling around the top and back of the body, a maple rosette, Gotoh gold tuners (with their precise 21:1 gear ratio), a black graphite nut, and our Builder's Edition guitar label inside the guitar.

As much as any of Andy's guitar designs for Taylor thus far, this latest Builder's Edition effort reveals his ability to synthesize sonic and tactile virtues from different instrument-making disciplines, *and* from different periods of history — like the violin and electric guitar worlds — with his own problem-solving designs, such as V-Class bracing, to forge an artfully distilled musical whole. But really what matters to him as a builder is what he also craves as a player and wants to share with other players: instruments that enable a wide range of musical expression.

"The goal of a great instrument is to inspire, to invite players to create, to enable their musical pursuits," he says. "We're excited to offer this guitar — we feel it will be a breath of fresh air, something that will take their music to exciting new places."

You can play the Builder's Edition 614ce, along with the K14ce, at authorized Taylor dealers around the world. If you need help finding one, just call or email us and we'll be happy to help. For complete specifications, visit taylorguitars.com. **W&S**

BUILDER'S EDITION 614CE



[Profile]

TEACHING THE WORLD TO PLAY

Forced to improvise along his musical career path, guitar instructor Marty Schwartz has harnessed the power of digital platforms like YouTube to inspire the next generation of guitar players

By Colin Griffith



school. By his account, he still felt like a casual player, and when he went to college, it was for film, not music. However, it didn't take long for Schwartz to realize his creative energies seemed to focus best when applied to the guitar.

"All I did was hang out with guitar players," he says. "I kept digging in and eventually realized this was something I was good at. It's exciting and motivating to find out that you're good at something."

Thus began a lifelong immersion in the guitar world. He lived as the quintessential college-aged budding musician, driving an orange van outfitted with shag carpet and a Jimi Hendrix poster. After switching his major to music, he began playing guitar in a band that played funk covers well enough to pay the bills. During his time bouncing between different parts of the music scene, Marty found himself inspired less by the virtuosic guitar slingers who graced the covers of industry magazines than by friends who were earning a living by teaching others to play guitar.

"They were living the music life without being a famous guitarist," he says. "They showed me that you can actually have a great life and figure it out along the way."

In a way, improvisation has been Schwartz's most valuable asset in growing a career as a musician. From the late '90s through the early 2000s, he played with a range of bands, took on session jobs, and scraped his way through the music world on whatever opportunity presented itself. Teaching guitar became a day job, and he credits it with keeping him afloat in his early post-college years. It's a useful reminder to guitarists with ambitions of fame and musical success: The career paths are myriad, and persistence is more reliable than luck.

Schwartz became uncomfortably familiar with that idea in the late 2000s. In 2005, he began working as an elementary school music teacher.

"I thought that was going to be my calling," he remembers. "It was this phase where I became part of a community; I had a steady job and plenty of students. I was considering getting certified as a teacher."

The economic recession of 2008 scuttled those plans. The school laid off Schwartz, and it wouldn't be the only time he'd be a budget casualty. Parents began withdrawing their children from private lessons with him to curb their spending on extracurriculars during the financial crunch.

"In what felt like a week or two, I lost what felt like my entire income," Schwartz says.

But before long, he discovered another approach.

"I was scrambling, thinking, 'How can I get more students?' he explains. "I can panic, but I have to take action. It was at that time that I started putting up videos on YouTube, really just as a resume builder."

Schwartz recalls the first tune he played: "Don't Let Me Down" by the Beatles, a heartfelt melody into which he poured his frustration and emotion over losing his job. Though he had no way of predicting the effect of posting that one video, it became a turning point in his career. What started as an exercise in networking and a way of

at that time. I told him, 'I'm going to put this on YouTube so you'll have no excuse not to practice.' I titled the video 'How to Play "Mississippi Queen,"' along with the student's name. For some reason, that little change made a big difference."

Schwartz calls it the happy accident that catalyzed his transformation from online guitar videographer to influential YouTube guitar teacher with a global platform – and eventually, a substantial following. But Internet stardom was never Schwartz's end goal. A decade into his teaching tenure on YouTube, he looks back on the trial-and-error nature of his experiences and recog-

channel, the options are even broader. In addition to his many videos focusing on learning a single song (usually a current hit or a classic tune from the guitar canon), Schwartz also shares his knowledge of more technical guitar topics, like using pedals to achieve a desired tone; how to choose the right guitar; or specific techniques like bends and pinch harmonics.

Still, he sees the key to his success in his personal, friendly approach – projecting an online presence that simply conveys his most authentic self.

"I've told younger people that you have to make content for the people you really know," he says. "Make a video for your friends that *they* think is funny. I started by making videos for individual students, even telling jokes that were just for that kid. And it resonated."

Despite the stereotypically laid-back persona, Schwartz's workload is hardly relaxed. He keeps a diligent agenda for each day, one that revolves around his video release schedule. Since he posts a new instructional video each day, Schwartz dedicates his mornings to marketing and promoting the new content, which involves creating clips for Instagram and other platforms that will link back to the full cut of the day's lesson. Afternoons are for creating content. Whether it involves practicing a difficult piece of music or actually recording a new video, he stays at least a week ahead of schedule to prevent a lapse in new material for his dedicated audience.

That dedication to his craft as an instructor has ultimately powered Schwartz to online success. His connection with Taylor follows the same appreciation for authenticity and accessibility, growing out of a neighborly connection with Taylor Director of Artist Relations Tim Godwin. Schwartz is a longtime follower of Taylor's innovations and products, and plays an 814ce DLX featuring V-Class bracing in his acoustic videos and live performances.

Asked to sum up his underlying teaching philosophy, Schwartz returns to the memory of that disappointing experience with his first guitar instructor, who barely seemed interested in helping him learn the instrument.

"He showed no interest in me as a person, and just taught out of the book," Schwartz says. "Before I knew I'd be teaching on the Internet, from the very first lesson I ever gave, my philosophy has been the same: to teach my students the way I wish I had been taught that first day." **W&S**

**"I'VE TOLD YOUNGER PEOPLE
THAT YOU HAVE TO MAKE
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THAT THEY THINK IS FUNNY."**

expressing the emotional fallout from the recent changes in his career helped him establish a prolific YouTube presence.

The videos began simply as a way to help students practice. As any teacher will tell you, kids aren't the easiest people to motivate, and they don't always keep their studies organized the way a teacher would like. After dealing with excuse after excuse – they forgot the riff, didn't have the book, etc. – Schwartz decided to make the extra effort of recording a portion of each private lesson and uploading the video to YouTube, where a student could simply search their own name and find everything they would need to practice until the next session.

"It was this common thing that kept happening with one student," he recalls. "He wanted to learn 'Mississippi Queen' by Mountain – I was very grateful to [the video game] Guitar Hero

nizes that improvisation was at the heart of every step forward. Especially in today's briskly evolving digital era, it has become an essential survival skill for those pursuing a career in music.

"I followed all these different paths, and the next thing I knew, this was all I was doing," he says. "I was paying attention to what was going on around me, looking for opportunities that would catch on. There's no one trajectory."

At this stage of his career, Schwartz has built enough of a following through YouTube and other social media channels that he no longer has time for private, in-person lessons. He's filled that space with a diverse schedule of educational offerings for budding guitarists. Through Marty Music, students can order specific lessons or sign up for longer courses on guitar topics like soloing in the blues, incorporating scales, and getting started with fingerstyle guitar. On his YouTube

When Marty Schwartz first picked up the guitar, he didn't imagine he'd become the world's most popular guitar teacher. In fact, he almost didn't learn to play at all.

"I had a failed attempt when I was 13," he explains. "The teacher kept going out of the Mel Bay book – 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' and that kind of thing. After that, I put it into my head that I couldn't play."

Fortunately, life brought him back to the guitar. In the time between plucking his first chords and finding success as a YouTube-based guitar teacher, Schwartz has learned a few things about making a living as a musician and a teacher. Though by all appearances as laid-back as you might expect a Southern California lifer to be, Schwartz boasts a guitar resume that speaks to decades of hard work and self-improvement, not just as a devoted player but as an ambassador to new generations of emerging guitarists.

What began as a job to fill in the blanks between shows and recording gigs eventually became a full-blown enterprise. Between his prolific YouTube channel and social media, Schwartz's lessons have surpassed half a billion views, making him one of the most successful and widely viewed guitar teachers in the digital world. His videos consistently draw view counts in the tens of thousands and above, and he's amassed enough of a following on the popular video hosting platform to launch his own independent education company, Marty Music.

"Anyone who's known me from age 18 to now knows that I've always had a guitar nearby," he says of his passion for the instrument. "I started senior year of high school, and I'm 43 now. I've played every day since then."

Like so many others who pursue music in their post-high school years, Schwartz's guitar-centric career started humbly and took many improvised turns. His motivations were standard – love of music, interest from girls at

[Sustainability]



Is Our Wood Good?

Are Taylor guitars ethically made? Scott Paul unpacks an important question and explains what we're doing as a company to pursue responsible sourcing and manufacturing practices.

I'm seeing more and more media coverage of corporate transparency, sustainability and ethics. I think that's great. Here at Taylor we are increasingly asked about it, partly, I believe, because we make a sexy product. People love guitars. As Bob Taylor has said: "The media wouldn't be calling if we were making sofas."

The other day we received another set of questions from a magazine preparing to write an article on "ethical guitars." Such questions are familiar to me – I've built my career in forest

policy/advocacy by asking and answering them. Over the last 25 years, I've worked on forest issues all over the world and examined everything from 2x4s to toilet paper, from soybeans to palm oil, and Bob's right. There is something special about a guitar, a product made from different tree species sourced from around the world, all coming together in the form of an instrument designed to touch the soul and tell the human story.

To hold a quality guitar is really to hold something special in terms of what

had to come together to make it possible. I wish more people fully understood this. What's more, when playing guitar you can transcend politics, culture and language. Here in the U.S., I like to say that red states and blue states love the acoustic guitar equally. And abroad, I've seen a person who seemingly did not understand a word of English play a guitar and sing "Let It Be" with a Liverpool accent.

Anyway, the other day Bob and I were bouncing back and forth a series of emails with points we wanted to

make for the "Is Your Guitar Ethical?" article. Our answers needed to be short, but this wasn't anything out of the ordinary. The questions were familiar, and in many ways so were our answers, and yet that night I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking about it. I had more to say. So, I'll share it with you.

If you break it down, a typical Taylor guitar is made up of many different materials: four or more different species of woods (comprising the top, back and sides, neck, fretboard, and internal bracing, to name some key structural

components); decorative elements like inlays and binding that might feature other wood species or shell materials like abalone and mother-of-pearl; some metal parts; and some glues and finishes. Let's take a closer look at some of these ingredients.

Wood

Guitar makers use a remarkably small percentage of the wood bought and sold each year, but you might have to take my word for it. Good data for global trade in wood products is elusive, and at times what you find is questionable. I tried several times to quantify global trade in, for example, rosewood, mahogany or maple, in order to compare it to the amount of these same species purchased by musical instrument manufacturers (or just guitar makers, or just guitar makers in the U.S., or even just Taylor Guitars), but it's virtually impossible. The best I can say, based on a consensus educated guess from a few different large and well-known manufacturers, is that guitar makers worldwide purchase less than one-tenth of one percent of the global trade in these species. A major exception to this would be ebony, a species with a radically smaller international demand. Koa, which grows only in Hawaii, would also be an exception to this rule of thumb.

Guitar makers do tend to use higher qualities of the species they select – and these are gathered from the four corners of the globe, in both temperate and tropical areas. I've long considered acoustic guitar makers to be the proverbial canary in a coal mine when it comes to the health of the global forest estate. We will be among the first to notice change in availability, quality and price.

If managed correctly, forests are a uniquely renewable resource, and there are many responsible forest managers out there. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Thus, the first ethical step when purchasing wood for guitar building is to ensure that it comes from a legal source. This might seem like a simple step, but for a company that buys wood from often-far-away places all over the world, I can assure you that it is not. According to the report "Transnational Crime and the Developing World" from Global Financial Integrity (GFI), a non-profit, Washington, DC-based research and advisory organization, illegal logging is the most profitable natural resource crime and accounts for 10 to 30 percent of the global trade in timber products, and 50 to 90 percent in some tropical countries. These are important numbers, especially for the 1.6 billion people around the world who directly

depend on forests for their daily survival. Besides, the last decade has seen the emergence of important new laws in the U.S., European Union, Australia and Japan pertaining to the importation of illegal wood products. It's serious business no matter how you look at it. For us this means boots on the ground, including the investment of time to maintain personal relationships with our suppliers.

Another often underappreciated ethical step in wood use is to be efficient: to do more with less and to limit waste. It's only logical that more waste means more trees to make the same amount of product. At Taylor Guitars, manufacturing efficiency has been baked into our DNA from the very beginning, well before anyone here was even consciously thinking about our environmental footprint. We've come a long way since Bob and Kurt bought the American Dream shop in Lemon Grove, California, in 1974. Yet each step along the way followed an instinctive drumbeat to make higher-quality guitars with less energy, less material and less waste. Unbridled by tradition, the company has always strived to innovate in this regard.

A classic example of innovation combined with efficiency came in 1999 when Taylor broke tradition and changed its approach to making guitar necks. Bob introduced a completely new design, featuring a better neck joint and a three-piece design, which not only produced a more stable, playable, serviceable guitar, but also increased the number of necks yielded from each tree by about 50 percent. Today we are able to use the entire tree, whereas before we could only use choice pieces from about half the tree.

Another issue of ethical consideration with woods is the long-term sustainability of the supply, and in recent editions of *Wood&Steel* we've highlighted our restoration and reforestation efforts in Cameroon (ebony) and Hawaii (koa). We also are working to help the long-term sustainability of the supply through our use of variegated ebony fingerboards. As we've shared, in the musical instrument industry the long-established aesthetic standard for ebony fingerboards has been a uniformly jet-black color, but in nature not all ebony is black. For decades, the people who cut the trees only knew that the far-off buyers in, for example, North America, Europe or Asia, wanted it black. So, once cut, a variegated tree was left abandoned on the forest floor. Upon learning this, Taylor bucked more than a century of tradition and started using, and promoting, marbled ebony on its guitars. There's nothing wrong with a jet-black fingerboard, but there's nothing wrong with a marbled one either.

It's pure aesthetics. Why waste the resource?

Another ethical concern for Taylor is respect for our suppliers. When we source guitar wood we need to consider not only the forests but also the people who live there and all our partners along the way. Accordingly, we strive to maintain predictable purchasing levels. We are in a symbiotic relationship with our suppliers, and we must be aware that our buying decisions impact their livelihood. For example, we prefer smaller, predictable purchases rather than boom-and-bust purchases that secure large stockpiles, which can result in no further need for purchases for the next several years. Think about it: It's tough for a supplier to gear up for a big order and then have nothing. In fact, we often purchase small quantities of wood even when we really don't need it if it will help a supplier's business through a tough time. What goes around comes around.

Shell

Apart from wood, the other natural resource traditionally used for guitars comes in the form of decorative inlay, and the same ethical consideration of legality, efficiency, long-term sustainability and respect for our suppliers obviously applies. However, due to the nature of the industry, Taylor does not directly buy from the primary producers.

Taylor inlays are either natural or synthetic (i.e. acrylic). Aside from wood inlays, natural inlay material is a byproduct of shell — either oysters (mother-of-pearl) or sea snail (abalone), invertebrates with a soft, unsegmented body whose meat was an early human food source and is still important in many cultures. Both are historically col-

lected primarily as food, but their hard inner shell produces a material known as nacre, a smooth, iridescent substance, fragments of which have been found in archaeological sites dating back 100,000 years, and which is used to this day in art and jewelry. That said, the market for the meat from these two mollusks far outweighs the relatively minor value of the shell.

Taylor sources its abalone from cooperatives in Baja California, a desert

helping to stabilize kelp forests and rocky reefs. It is a slow-growing species with a long lifespan, and it needs high local densities to successfully reproduce, making it extremely vulnerable to overfishing. Growth is significantly influenced by wave exposure, which correlates with food availability. Unfortunately, the broader decline in abalone populations has drastically altered many marine habitats. Adding insult to injury, a major food source for abalone is kelp

“

We often purchase small quantities of wood even when we really don't need it if it will help a supplier's business through a tough time.

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peninsula of western Mexico with a reputation for productivity and sustainable fisheries, and from New Zealand, where it is referred to as paua, the Maori name given to three species of abalone indigenous to that region. Both are species of the genus *Haliotis*.

The Mexican cooperatives have exclusive access and use rights to abalone within a clearly defined territory. The New Zealand fisheries are also closely regulated. Both are considered among the finest in the world. This is important, as abalone is an important wild species; they graze the rocks,

(i.e., seaweed), which tends to prefer colder temperatures. Increasing carbon dioxide in our atmosphere has warmed ocean temperatures, starving abalone of their food source. Increasing ocean acidification is also making it harder for abalone and oysters to form their calcified outer shells.

Finishes

When it comes to finishes, what people in the building industry call “wet applied products,” the major ethical issues concern human health related to off-gassing of the chemicals.

The potential health impact depends on exactly which chemicals are used and how they are applied. Taylor uses the same chemical applications as other guitar companies, such as conversion varnish, polyurethanes and polyesters, but years ago we did phase out nitrocellulose lacquer. What is noteworthy with Taylor is the application process itself. Some 25 years ago, Taylor ushered UV-curable guitar finishes into existence, and today our robotic/electrostatic finish application and the UV-cured, high-solids polyester topcoat process has improved transfer efficiency (i.e. the amount of finish that adheres to the product) to 85 percent. This is roughly a five-fold increase from the previous manual spraying. Again, less energy, less material, less waste.

Metals

I know less about metals, although we use very little. For now, it's a lesser concern compared to wood, inlay, and limiting waste or the energy we use in our factory. Yes, metalworking relies on mining, and undoubtedly some manufacturing along the line is not considered green, but governments regulate the ever-cleaner progress. And frankly, we don't have a strong voice in that space. It would be the proverbial tilting at windmills, and not because the problem is imaginary, but because thinking we could change it is...at least this year.

Transparency

Like the concept of efficiency, the issue of transparency is often overlooked in discussions of sustainability and ethics, but it is increasingly being raised as more and more consumers ask questions about the products they choose. In short, it's good to be transparent. That's one reason why I'm writing this article. As the saying goes, sunshine is the best disinfectant. Guitar makers are not the face of natural resource destruction, but we clearly have ethical responsibilities for our actions. Taylor Guitars will continue to examine the social, environmental and economic issues related to the resources we use, as well as our manufacturing processes, and seek to build a better guitar while reducing our footprint. And maybe, because people love their guitars so much, and because guitar makers do indeed rely on small amounts of high-quality materials, we can be the face of responsible use and restoration too.

Scott Paul is Taylor's Director of Natural Resource Sustainability.



Soundings

Getting to Know *Know*.

It's always a good day when a local kid has new music to offer. Grammy-winning singer-songwriter **Jason Mraz** returned to the music scene this August with his sixth studio LP, *Know*, his first since 2014's *Yes!*. A longtime member of the Taylor artist family who honed his craft in small venues around San Diego, Mraz dropped his new record after making his Broadway debut earlier this year with a stint in the musical *Waitress*, featuring music and lyrics penned by his pal Sara Bareilles. *Know*. brings a thoughtful continuation of Mraz's best work, full of memorable hooks, fluid lyrical rhythms, and catchy choruses that practically beg the listener to tap their toes and sing along.



Photo: Justin Bettman

True to his rootsy nature, Mraz has populated the record with acoustic-based tunes that highlight organic sounds and coffeehouse intimacy, albeit with a tasteful production sheen that goes down as smoothly as his buoyant vocals. Acoustic guitars and ukuleles share the spotlight as they have through much of Mraz's work, lending to the album's warm, good-vibes feel. A few years ago, Mraz helped us design the signature nylon-string guitar that bears his name, and the attention to detail and craft he displayed through that process are evident in his new tunes, especially in his strong melodies and empowering, joyful lyricism. "Have It All" jumps out of the gate as an early single and leading track, and the album maintains that song's sense of grace. A duet with pop artist Meghan Trainor, "More Than Friends," captures the thrill of crossing an emotional threshold in a relationship with someone special. From start to finish, it's an album worthy of Jason's refined songwriting chops, and a must-listen for any fan of acoustic pop.



Iron, Wine & Weeds

We profiled **Sam Beam** (714ce, 314ce, 714ce-N, 614ce, 714ce-N WSB), the raconteur and multi-instrumentalist behind **Iron & Wine**, in our Fall 2017 issue, and he's been as productive as ever since then. This fall finds him touring on the heels of his newest EP, *Weed Garden*, which arrived in August. Lush arrangements highlight Beam's woodsy vocal lilt, as *Weed Garden* carries on the Iron & Wine standard of organic melodies and poignant songwriting. Its quality matches the best work in his catalogue – standout tracks like "Last of Your Rock 'n' Roll Heroes" conjure wide-lens imagery of clear mornings and campfires at dusk, thanks to Beam's evocative lyrical storytelling. Minimalist percussion forms the rhythmic baseline for a host of stringed instruments, including cellos and Beam's Taylor guitars, the latter of which he's used both in studio and live settings for years. The EP bears his stylistic stamp of naturalistic production against complex instrumentation, and yet Beam never fails to impress with the ingenuity of his lyrics and his immersive sonic atmospheres. Listening to *Weed Garden*, one never feels too far from the natural world; it's an expansive record that transports the listener to a quieter, more peaceful place.

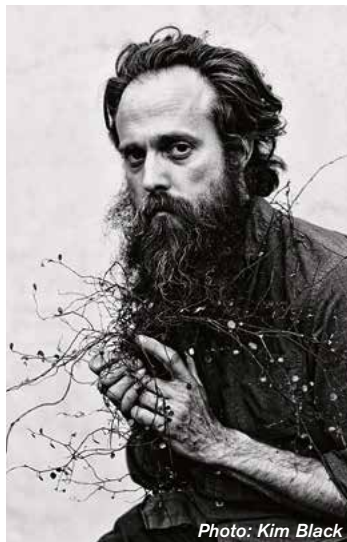


Photo: Kim Black



Juke's Journey

At age 24, **Juke Ross** (GS Mini, 322ce 12-Fret) has already worn several hats – cricketer, med student, singer-songwriter. The native of Guyana and youngest of 14 children seems to have found his calling with music, penning rich melodies to accompany his inventive lyrics and warm, soulful voice. With a knack for storytelling through song and the guitar skills he's taught himself via YouTube over the years, Ross brings a distinctive feel to his music – an appealing blend of softly fingerpicked acoustic guitar, folk-tinged pop sensibilities, and light Caribbean flavoring, most notably in his stirring vocal phrasing. For an introduction to his music, check out his track "Colour Me" online.

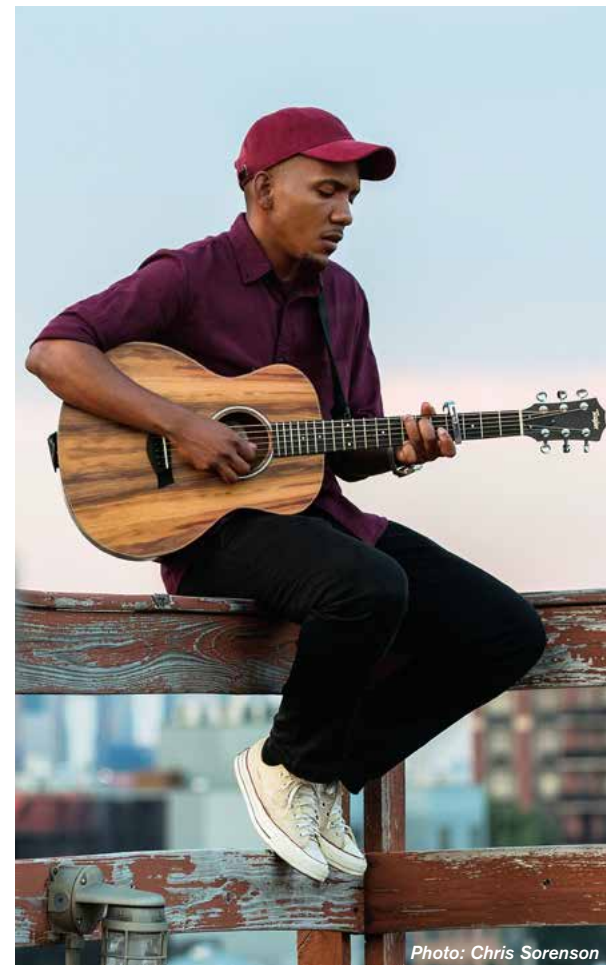


Photo: Chris Sorenson

We recently interviewed Ross in New York City, currently his home base, delving into the ways his personal history has informed his songwriting. Ross first joined the Taylor fold after deciding on a **GS Mini** with some help from YouTube. In fact, he learned to play with help from online videos by Marty Schwartz, also profiled in this issue. (Ross and Schwartz connected in person over the summer when Schwartz brought Ross on stage during a gig at the Iridium Club in New York City to play a tune). These days, Ross's Mini and his **322ce 12-Fret** have become writing and performance staples. Head over to Taylor's website and social accounts for video from the interview, and to JukeRoss.com or your favorite streaming service to hear more from this talented newcomer, including his latest track, "Hey Lil' Mama."

The Wedding Singer

Taylor fans who saw the blockbuster rom-com *Crazy Rich Asians* likely spotted a Taylor cameo in the film. In a wedding scene, a performer played by singer-songwriter **Kina Grannis** covers the ballad “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” made famous by Elvis Presley, accompanying herself on her all-koa **K22ce**. Grannis, a native of Mission Viejo, California, first enjoyed a big splash of mainstream exposure a decade ago, after winning the Doritos Crash the Super Bowl contest in 2008. That year, the online competition, in which sponsor Frito-Lay solicited music submissions from independent artists, paid for 60 seconds of commercial time during which a music video featuring the winner would air. Grannis, then age 22, performed her original tune, “Message From Your Heart” with her **814ce**, which was seen by 100 million viewers. (She also won a record deal with Interscope Records.) In terms of exposure, Grannis did pretty well this time around too. As we neared our press date, *Crazy Rich Asians* had grossed more than \$200 million worldwide.

Grannis was out on tour this fall with her husband, Jesse Epstein, who performs as Imaginary Future.



Photo: Justin Higuchi



Photo: Fedor de Lange

Dutch Discovery

Dutch rock guitarist **Adrian Vandenberg** (Vandenberg, Whitesnake) has been playing his custom **T5z** with a Macassar ebony top on tour with his current band, Vandenberg’s Moonkings. Vandenberg discovered our guitars a few years back while recording at Wisseloord Studios, located in Hilversum, the Netherlands, whose other clients have included Def Leppard, Mick Jagger, Iron Maiden, U2, The Scorpions, and many other marquee rock acts. The studio has a couple of Taylors on-site, and studio manager Dennis Barbie says the guitars are constantly being used for songwriting and recording.

Vandenberg has been using his T5z for several songs on stage: the acoustic intro of the Vandenberg hit “Burning Heart,” along with Whitesnake tunes “Judgement Day” and “Sailing Ships.”

“I am really happy with the guitar, and so is my front-of-house mixing engineer!” Vandenberg shared via email with Fedor de Lange from our European marketing team. “Feedback issues are of the past, and this particular guitar produces a rich, natural acoustic sound. On top of that it is very comfortable to play. In the past two years I have taken the T5z with me for shows in the Netherlands, UK, Germany and France, playing huge festivals as well as clubs, and I’m determined to show it to a lot more places around the globe in the coming years.”

A professional guitarist since he was 16, Vandenberg’s playing was noticed by Whitesnake frontman David Coverdale, who invited him to join the band in the mid-’80s. From 1986 to 1999 he was band’s lead guitarist and was fortunate to be a part of two No. 1 hits with the band, “Here I Go Again” and “Is This Love.”

Vandenberg says he has always been drawn to the different textures of both acoustic and electric guitar.

“Ever since my very first record I’ve enjoyed the light and shade dynamics of pairing acoustic and electric guitars within a song, both onstage as well as in the studio,” he says. “It’s something I also do with my current band.”

As of our press date, Vandenberg was putting the finishing touches on an acoustic album, which is slated for release later this year.

Picking Rotation

The major league baseball season is a major slog – at least 162 games worth, spanning at least six months. Between the grind of travel and the pressure to perform at the highest level of their sport, pro players all have outlets to decompress during their down time, and over the years we’ve made friends with a lot of ball players who have a 6-string acoustic in tow for clubhouse or hotel jam sessions. Especially starting pitchers, who aren’t everyday players and tend to have a bit more free time.

In August we caught up with Philadelphia Phillies starting pitcher **Jake Arrieta** (a Cy Young award winner in 2015 and World Series champion with the Chicago Cubs in 2016), whose team had rolled into Taylor’s home town of San Diego for a series with the Padres. Arrieta, who first discovered Taylor through his friendship with the guys from Pearl Jam, loves his **914ce** and recently got his hands on a **Builder’s Edition K14ce**. But on the road, he and fellow starting pitcher **Vince Velazquez** bring their GS Minis. Arrieta has a **GS Mini Koa**, Velazquez has a **GS Mini Mahogany**, and neither leaves home without them.



Photo: Jay Parkin

Hats Off to Hill

Congratulations to golden-penned Nashville tunesmith **Byron Hill (GS8)**, who was recently voted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. Hill joins four other esteemed peers in this year's class of inductees: K.T. Oslin, Ronnie Dunn, Wayne Kirkpatrick and Joe Melson. The induction ceremony will take place during the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame gala, slated for October 28 at Nashville's Music City Center.

Hill's prolific songwriting career began after he moved to Nashville and signed his first publishing deal in 1978. Since then, his songs have generated more than 700 recordings, and have been released on 91 industry-certified Gold and Platinum albums and singles. They have earned 10 ASCAP awards, 34 U.S. and Canadian top-ten chart hits, and have become hits in many other worldwide markets.

Notable songs in Hill's recorded catalog include "Fool Hearted Memory" (George Strait), "Born Country" (Alabama), "Pickin' Up Strangers" (Johnny Lee), "Politics, Religion and Her" (Sammy Kershaw), "Nothing On But the Radio" (Gary Allan), "Over You" (Anne Murray), "High-Tech Redneck" (George Jones), "Size Matters" (Joe Nichols), "Lifestyles of the Not So Rich and Famous" (Tracy Byrd), and "The Pages of My Mind" (Ray Charles).

Other iconic artists who've recorded songs written or co-written by Hill include Kenny Rogers, Reba McEntire, Randy Travis, Porter Wagoner, Jason Aldean, Trace Adkins, Toby Keith, Conway Twitty, Barbara Mandrell, The Oak Ridge Boys, and Asleep at the Wheel.

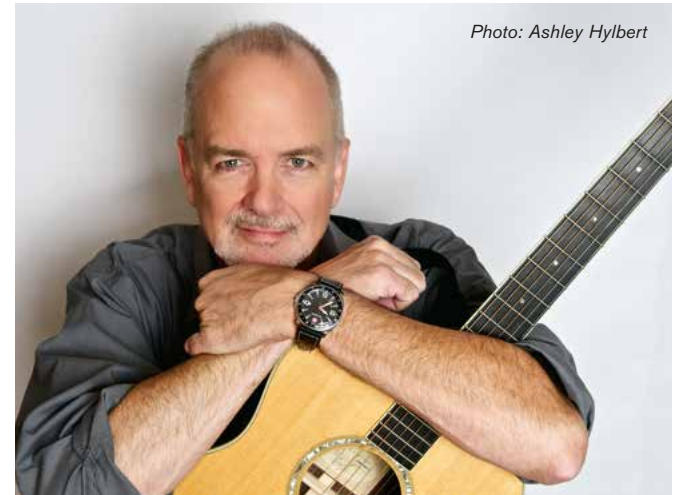


Photo: Ashley Hylbert

Gives Bees a Chance

Guests who tour the Taylor factory often ask what we do with our scrap wood. Typically, excess wood pieces that can't be used for other guitar-related parts go into our industrial wood chipper, and twice per week a local nursery retrieves our wood chips and sawdust.

Recently, we connected with a small local business that has found another eco-friendly outlet for the mahogany end blocks we cut in the process of milling our neck blanks: shelters for native bees.

As you might have read in the news, we have a shortage of honey bees in the U.S. The causes are not conclusively known, but some indicators include disease, nutritional issues, and the use of pesticides. While hive-dwelling honey bees get much of the attention, the honey bee is actually just one species. In fact, of the 20,000 bee species in the world (with 4,000 species in the U.S., according to a joint report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the non-profit organization Pollinator Partnership), 90 percent are solitary bees that live alone. That's why Candace Vanderhoff, an architect with a passion for nature and regenerative systems, felt compelled to create solo bee shelters (solobee.com). And as it turns out, our mahogany end-cut blocks make great prefab homes for them.

Most native bees are considered "super pollinators" – they're up to 60 times more effective at pollination than honey bees due to their unique ability to collect and distribute pollen. In the U.S., native bees pollinate about 80 percent of all flowering plants and nearly 75 percent of all fruits, nuts and vegetables.

But with the habitat loss in certain regions, the bees have an increasingly harder time finding a place to nest and lay their eggs.

"Our SoloBee shelters mimic a wood cavity in nature – such as an abandoned beetle hole in a tree – and provide a clean, safe nest site for each bee," Vanderhoff says, adding that native bees tend to be gentle and rarely sting because they don't have a traditional hive to defend.

Vanderhoff has been an admirer of Taylor and our efforts toward greater sustainability, including initiatives like the Ebony Project and koa reforestation in Hawaii. Our work resonated with her own experiences working and traveling in Micronesia and seeing how fragile the ecosystem was there. It motivated her to work toward protecting ecosystems back home in Southern California. Her work with garden landscaping even-

tually led her to design bee shelters, which she showcased at regional fairs. As interest in them grew, she decided to turn the project into a small business. She reached out to Taylor, and we were happy to put the wood to good use.

Her bee shelters consist of our blocks of mahogany – upcycled as nesting blocks – that are drilled with holes to provide nesting cells for the bees to lay their eggs. Vanderhoff has designed different arrangements of housing units, from a single unit to a tower village, and some are decorated with a copper roof that includes a solar-powered light to make them an attractive addition to one's yard or garden.

"We are so excited and humbled by the serendipitous events resulting from making bee shelters and connecting with Taylor," she says. Vanderhoff and her assistant stop by the factory every couple of weeks to pick up a fresh supply of blocks. She now has CNC machinery to support her production process.

It turns out that Vanderhoff has another interesting connection to Taylor: Her shop is located in the same building where Taylor Guitars first started 44 years ago.

"What's also remarkable is that we have the same landlord!" she adds.



SoloBee shelters in Vanderhoff's shop – the original home of Taylor Guitars

Photo Finish

In August we bade farewell to longtime Taylor staff photographer Tim Whitehouse, who retired this summer after 13 years with us. If your eyes have been seduced by the guitar photography that has colored the pages of *Wood&Steel* or our website over the past dozen years, you have Tim to thank. It's not hard for people to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of our guitars, but capturing that beauty in a photo can be deceptively tricky, between the mix of curves and reflective surfaces. Tim brought a special knack for lighting guitars and artfully capturing the visual harmony of the tonewoods, inlays and other appointment details impeccably rendered by our craftspeople. His lighting chops had been honed during a longtime association with renowned photographer and lighting guru Dean Collins, an industry pioneer. In fact, Tim was on the forefront of emerging digital processing technologies like Photoshop, and he spent years (with Collins) traveling the country and presenting educational seminars to professional photographers.

Beyond his talents as a product photographer, Tim also excelled at capturing the personalities of people, whether shooting artists and performances on our NAMM stage, lifestyle photos of people playing their Taylor guitars, or fellow Taylor employees once they reached the 10-year mark here, to be displayed as part of an internal photo gallery wall to honor their contributions.

If you toured the Taylor factory in recent years, there's also a chance that Tim was your guide. He was a great ambassador of our culture and took great pride in sharing the Taylor story with guests. He especially loved the spirit of innovation and creativity that percolated around our production complex and reveled in picking the brains of our talented product development team, tooling engineers, and production staff about their latest projects. At a company luncheon to honor his contributions in August, Tim shared how his love of making things as a kid had prompted his father to give him the nickname da Vinci.

"At Taylor, we have a whole company full of da Vincis," he said, adding that he'll miss being in such a creative environment.

Tim also brought an infectiously playful spirit to work each day, along with a wonderfully subversive sense of humor. And he was an undisputed master of the photobomb. (We're waiting for the coffee table book, Tim.)

A talented guitar builder in his own right, Tim is looking forward to having more time to craft an assortment of stringed instruments. And because he loves a challenge, he's starting with a traditional lute. Happy trails, Tim!



Clockwise from top left: Tim with Bob Taylor; photobombing during a shoot for our winter 2015 guitar guide; a "reflective" moment; one of his adventurous instrument designs: a ukulele/guitar combo; one of his many artful images of our guitars; setting up for a guitar photo shoot



New Road Shows This Fall

A fresh season of Taylor in-store events kicked off in September across different parts of the world, and will run through late November. For all the latest Taylor event listings, visit taylorguitars.com/events.



The Taylor Line By Series

A snapshot of our series framework, tonewood pairings, and current models. For complete details, including photos and specifications, visit taylorguitars.com

Presentation Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Milagro Brazilian Rosewood or Cocobolo
Top: Sinker Redwood (GC, GA, 6-String GS) or Sitka Spruce

Available Models

PS12ce, PS12ce 12-Fret, PS14ce, PS16ce, PS18e, PS56ce



800 Deluxe Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce

Available Models

812ce 12-Fret DLX, 812ce DLX, 814ce DLX, 816ce DLX



800 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce

Available Models

812ce, 812ce-N, 812e 12-Fret, 812ce 12-Fret, 814e, 814ce, 816ce, 818e, 818ce, 856ce, 858e

Koa Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Hawaiian Koa
Top: Hawaiian Koa or Torrefied Sitka Spruce (Builder's Edition)

Available Models

K22ce, K22ce 12-Fret, Builder's Edition K14ce, K24ce, K26ce, K66ce, K28e



700 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Lutz Spruce

Available Models

712ce, 712ce-N, 712e 12-Fret, 712ce 12-Fret, 714ce, 716ce, 756ce



900 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce

Available Models

912ce, 912e 12-Fret, 912ce 12-Fret, 914ce, 916ce, 956ce



600 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Figured Big Leaf Maple
Top: Torrefied Sitka Spruce

Available Models

612ce, 612e 12-Fret, 612ce 12-Fret, Builder's Edition 614ce, 614ce, 616ce, 618e, 618ce, 656ce

500 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Tropical Mahogany
Top: Mahogany, Lutz Spruce (GS), or Cedar (GC, GA)

Available Models

512ce, 512ce 12-Fret,
522ce, 522e 12-Fret,
522ce 12-Fret, 552ce, 562ce,
514ce, 524ce, 516ce, 526ce



400 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Ovangkol or Indian Rosewood
Top: Sitka Spruce

Available Models

412e-R, 412ce, 412ce-R,
414e-R, 414ce, 414ce-R,
416ce, 416ce-R, 456ce,
456ce-R, 418e, 418e-R,
458e, 458e-R



100 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Layered Walnut
Top: Sitka Spruce

Available Models

110ce, 110e, 114ce, 114e, 150e



Academy Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Layered Sapele
Top: Sitka Spruce or Lutz Spruce (Nylon)

Available Models

Academy 10, Academy 10e,
Academy 12, Academy 12e,
Academy 12-N, Academy 12e-N



T5z

Specifications

Body: Sapele (Hollowbody)
Top: Koa (Custom), Figured Maple (Pro), Spruce (Standard) or Mahogany (Classic)
Electronics: Proprietary 3-pickup configuration (magnetic acoustic body sensor, concealed neck humbucker, visible bridge humbucker), 5-way switching, onboard tone controls



Available Models

T5z Custom, T5z-12 Custom,
T5z Pro (Tobacco Sunburst,
Molasses Sunburst, Pacific Blue,
Borrego Red, Gaslamp Black),
T5z Standard (Black, Tobacco
Sunburst, Honey Sunburst),
T5z Classic, T5z-12 Classic,
T5z Classic DLX



300 Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Sapele (Spruce Top) or Blackwood (Mahogany Top)
Top: Sitka Spruce or Mahogany

Available Models

312ce, 312ce-N, 312e 12-Fret,
312ce 12-Fret, 322e, 322ce,
322e 12-Fret, 322ce 12-Fret,
352ce, 362ce, 314,
314ce, 324, 324e, 324ce,
316ce, 326ce, 356ce



GS Mini GS Mini Bass

Woods

Back/Sides: Layered Sapele, Koa or Walnut
Top: Sitka Spruce, Mahogany or Koa

Available Models

GS Mini Mahogany,
GS Mini-e Koa,
GS Mini-e Walnut,
GS Mini-e Bass



Baby Series

Woods

Back/Sides: Layered Sapele
Top: Sitka Spruce or Mahogany

Available Models

BT1, BT2 (Mahogany Top),
TSBTe (Taylor Swift Model),
BBT (Big Baby)



T3

Specifications

Body: Sapele (Semi-Hollowbody)
Top: Figured Maple
Electronics: Proprietary high-definition humbuckers (optional vintage alnicos), 3-way switching, onboard tone controls, and coil-splitting capability



Available Models

T3 (stoptail bridge), T3/B (Bigsby vibrato tailpiece)

To see our full range of top options, color finishes, and other appointments for each series, visit taylorguitars.com



The Craft

Rethinking a Flaw

A tiny knot in a guitar neck reminds us what's special about a tree — and our musical journey.

Last week I was shaping a neck for a new guitar. I needed this neck to have a very particular contour, so I spent a good deal of time minutely adjusting its curves, guiding the piece toward the sculpture it would become. Guitar making, like sculpture, is largely a reductive process; we take big cuts from our materials first, then ever-smaller cuts, finally cutting away tiny, dust-size specks of wood. Essentially we start with wood and cut away everything that isn't a guitar. We take a risk each time we take even a small shaving of wood away because we can't be entirely sure what we'll find beneath it. Unlike archeology, where a find is a good one, any surprise in wood shaping is generally unwelcome. We start with the most predictable, beautiful, un-marred piece of wood we can find, and hope this consistency extends throughout the board as we cut the "not a guitar" areas away. In the case of my new guitar's neck, the wood was nearly perfect. At least, it seemed to be ideal until a tiny knot revealed itself just as I was carving the finished profile. While structurally fine, this flaw would be on

display for all the years this guitar would exist. This exact scenario has played out more times than I care to count. In the guitar-making world, this would often mean starting over with a fresh piece of wood.

While I stood at my workbench, I thought of all that had gone into making this neck. The metal alloy that was mined, melted, refined, and drawn into fret wire and installed into a fingerboard that was harvested, sawn and dried in Cameroon. The care with which the fingerboard was decorated with shimmering inlays cut from mother-of-pearl shell. The flared headstock and precise joinery needed to fit the neck to the guitar body. The installation of the steel truss rod and finely calibrated adjustment system, not to mention the mahogany tree, which was felled to yield this very neck, and others like it. All those materials and effort would be wasted if it were thrown away. As I considered a plan to salvage the fretboard, I thought of that knot, and wondered what the tree would say if it could talk.

From a tree's perspective, a knot isn't a flaw — it represents optimism. A

knot is the foundation of a branch and new growth — the very opportunity for life. Who am I to scorn the slight aberration of grain caused by a tree doing its best to sustain life a century before I lived simply because it made my guitar a little more difficult to build?

I looked at the knot on that neck and thought, alright, you can stay.

This imaginary exchange reminded me of the relationship between music and the instruments used to make it. We've recently expanded our new V-Class bracing architecture into our 300 Series instruments. While by no means inexpensive guitars, they certainly feature simpler appointments than some of our most lavish models. Yet their sound surprises me every time I pick one up and play it. At times we might be tempted to look at this relatively understated visual aesthetic and think of a plain and simple guitar, but from a musical perspective, they are anything but plain. These guitars are made with musically responsive tonewoods carefully sourced from all over this planet, and put together in a refined way that offers a stunning

amount of musical potential. In some form of poetic irony, it seems the musical function of these instruments outshines all else, as if more decoration might interfere with the instrument's ability to sing.

The violin world has realized this for a few centuries now. While there have certainly been some elaborate fiddles made, the musical world has celebrated the profound elegance in that instrument's most distilled form. Nothing is there that isn't utterly essential for function. Even what appears to be a decorative edge element — the slim inlaid strips of maple or holly around the perimeter — are put there for a functional reason: to prevent would-be cracks from forming around the top and back edges.

This beauty-in-function concept extends to the design intention behind our newest Builder's Edition guitar, the 614ce, showcased this issue. These instruments are intended to offer supreme musicality and creative freedom to a player. Of course we want them to please our eyes, but foremost, to please the musical whims of each

player by borrowing expressive elements from both electric guitars and violins, and everything in between.

Indeed, great music doesn't need an instrument with the most elaborate trimmings. It simply needs an instrument and a player with hope, creativity, inspiration and a desire to express themselves. Our musical past is built upon a long series of growth, hope and tomorrows — just like the trees we make these guitars from. Day after day, we grow and look for fresh opportunities to sustain life in song.

That knot in the neck will stay on this guitar I'm making. It deserves to live in the hands of the musician who will hold it. While the wood sawyer may see it as a flaw, I think every guitar would do well to hold on to the evidence of a hopeful future.

— Andy Powers
Master Guitar Designer

“
From a tree's perspective, a knot isn't a flaw — it's the foundation of a branch and new growth.
”

Ebony Guitar Slides Now In Stores

As of October, our new ebony guitar slides were available at Authorized Taylor Dealers across North America and Europe. The slides feature African ebony sourced from our Crelicam ebony mill in Cameroon, where the slide blanks are also produced. Crafting the slides from smaller pieces of ebony that aren't used for other instrument parts reduces waste and enables Crelicam employees to create greater economic value around this tonewood. Your purchase supports the staff and families of the Crelicam mill.

Tonally, these ebony slides produce a warm tone with a natural damping effect that is altogether distinct from traditional metal or glass slides. Their light weight also helps you control the pitch and vibrato.

The slides are offered in four sizes (with corresponding ring sizes listed for reference):

- Small (size 7)
- Medium (size 9)
- Large (size 11)
- Extra Large (size 13)

Customers in North America will also be able to order the slides via TaylorWare soon.



TaylorWare

CLOTHING / GEAR / PARTS / GIFTS

Visit taylorguitars.com/taylorware to browse our complete line of Taylor apparel, guitar care products, parts and accessories, gift cards, and more. 1-800-494-9600



L-R: Demetrius from Taylor's Body department in our new **Men's 1974 Raglan Baseball T**; Katryn from Customer Service in our **Women's California Bear T**; and Ryan from the Marketing team in the **Men's California Bear T**.

Crown Logo Cap





Aged Logo Thermal
Long Sleeve 60/40 cotton/poly waffle thermal with gray Taylor logo on front with contrast stitching. Slimmer fit (sizing up recommended).
(Black #2022X; S-XXL, \$35.00)



Two-Color Logo T
Standard fit. Heavyweight preshrunk 100% cotton. (Navy #1654X; S-XL, \$22.00; XXL-XXXL, \$24.00)



Men's Urban Zip Hoody
Eco-Jersey triblend. Low-impact yarn-dyed/fabric-washed. Standard fit.
(Urban Grey #2299X; S-XXL, \$59.00)



Men's Shop T
Fashion Fit. Pre-shrunk 100% cotton.
(Black #1652X; S-XXXL, \$24.00)

Matt from our Finish department rocks our Shop T.



Men's Quarter Zip Sweatshirt
Soft-washed, garment-dyed 80/20 ring-spun cotton/poly. Fabric-lined collar. Taylor logo on chest. Standard fit.
(Blue Jean #3952X; S-XXXL, \$59.00)

Original Trucker Hat
One size fits all.
(Black/Khaki #00390, \$20.00)



Men's Cap
One size fits all.
(Black #00378, \$25.00)

Taylor Guitar Polish
Spray-on cleaning polish that is easily and safely wiped away. 4 fl. oz.
(#80901, \$12.00)



Ultex® Picks
Six picks per pack by gauge (#80794, .73 mm, #80795, 1.0 mm or #80796 1.14 mm; \$5.00).

Primetone Picks™
Three picks per pack by gauge. (#80797, .88 mm, #80798, 1.0 mm or #80799 1.3 mm, \$8.50).

Variety Pack (shown)
Six assorted picks per pack, featuring one of each gauge. Ultex (.73 mm, 1.0 mm, 1.14 mm) and Primetone (.88 mm, 1.0 mm, 1.3 mm).
(#80790, \$10.00)



Taylor Bar Stool
30" high.
(Black #70200, \$99.00)

24" high.
(Brown #70202, \$99.00)



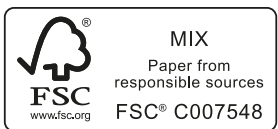
Guitar Stand
Sapele/Mahogany. Accommodates all Taylor models. (#70100, \$70.00; assembly required)



Travel Guitar Stand
Sapele, lightweight. Accommodates all Taylor models.
(#70198, \$59.00)



Black Composite Travel Guitar Stand
Accommodates all Taylor models.
(#70180, \$39.00)



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Red Rocks

Been missing cocobolo? So have we. This limited-run T5z Custom-C sports a top featuring the striking tonewood, whose vibrant color palette is a riot of deep red, orange, brown and violet hues. But this guitar is much more than just a pretty face. Plugged in, our versatile hollowbody electric/acoustic reveals its own rich palette of amplified tones, thanks to our innovative pickup system and five-way switching. Appointments include a full-gloss, shaded edgeburst finish around the entire guitar, inlays borrowed from a former version of our 900 Series, white binding, and a choice of nickel or gold hardware. Quantities are limited. Contact your local Taylor dealer to inquire about availability.