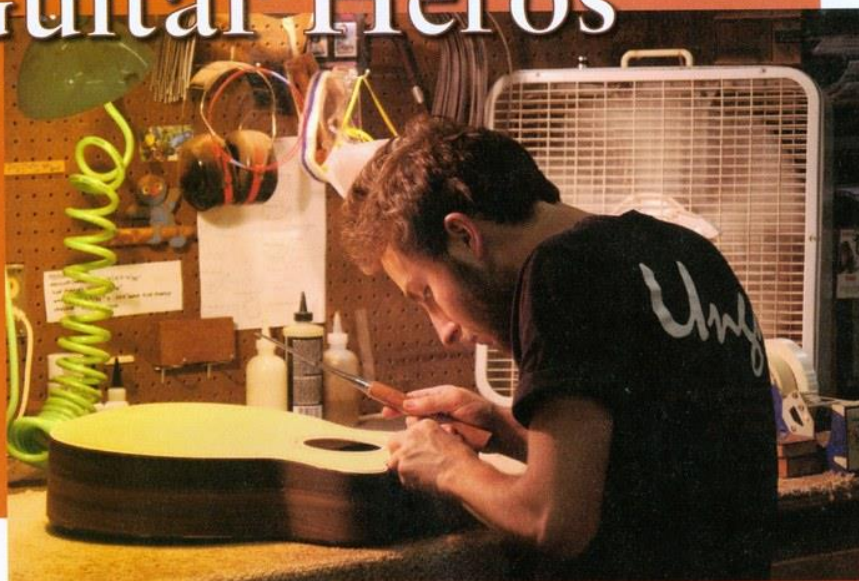


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Guitar Heros



Sam Jarvis, a craftsman at Santa Cruz Guitar Company, applies a celluloid binding to a guitar body.

Local luthiers: Masters at fine tuning

made in santa cruz

By Isaiah Guzman

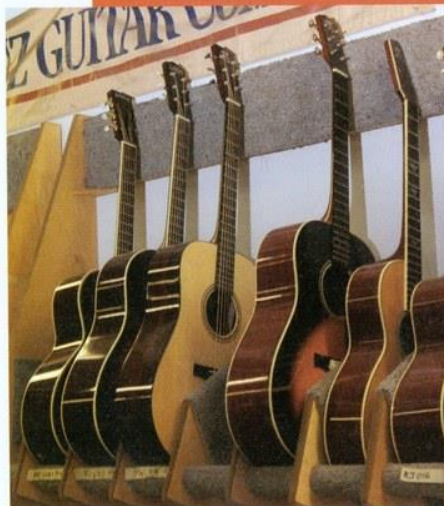
The sound of pick on steel strings filled the lobby of Santa Cruz Guitar Company and soon the group waiting to take a shop tour was in a trance. John Doyle, a left-handed Irish guitarist who played for the Obamas at the White House last St. Patrick's Day, was demonstrating a right-handed baritone upside down. After a bit, he went to lay it back in its case.

"I could keep playing that," he said, giving it one long last look, as if saying goodnight to a beautiful date.

"Please do," said Richard Hoover, company owner and founder.

Doyle obliged and the group concurred.

Hoover is an unassuming man with a counselor's voice who hesitates to toot his own horn. But he, like Doyle and some of the most respected players out there, has to



(Above) A variety of Santa Cruz Guitar Company's guitars await fine tuning.

admit his instruments make a good sound, the kind of sound that has made Santa Cruz Guitar Company one of the most respected

makers in the world.

Since Hoover opened for business in 1976, the entire county has grown into a sort of epicenter of high-end guitar making. Santa Cruz's Jeff Traugott, the Westside's Rick Turner, Felton's Kenny Hill, Bonny Doon's Fred Carlson and a growing number of small makers all are part of the movement.

Eric Clapton, Dave Matthews, Mark Casstevens, Doc Watson, Brad Paisley, and Jimmy Buffett own Santa Cruz Guitar Company instruments.

(Right) An example of James Patterson's intricate inlay work.

Stephen Ford hand carves the neck for each instrument at Santa Cruz Guitar Company.

Even Brad Pitt has one. President Barack Obama has played one. Seven-time Grammy Award winner John Mayer owns guitars from Santa Cruz Guitar Company, Traugott and Turner.

"What a run we've had," Hoover said.

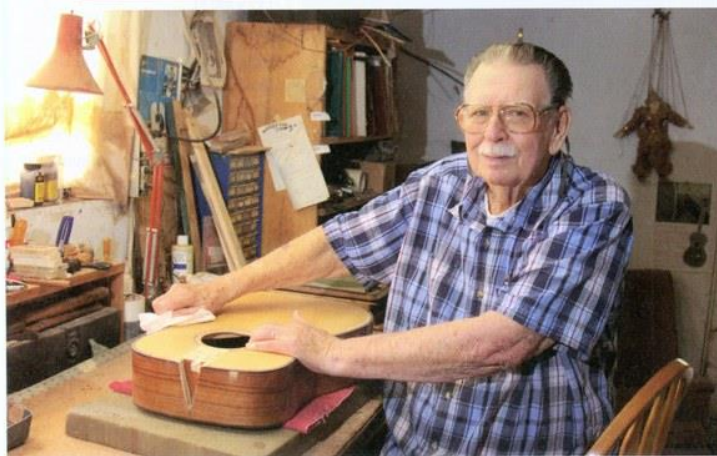
Santa Cruz guitars can cost upwards of \$7,500 — and that's low compared to Traugott's price tag of \$26,500 a pop.

"They're not for everybody, obviously," Traugott said.

Of the local makers, Santa Cruz Guitar Company is the largest. Hoover's intimate crew of 13 builders will produce about 700 guitars this year. The company prides itself both in the attention it gives each instrument and in the wood used to create them. The wood is harvested in environment-friendly ways and often has a story of its own to tell.

While leading the shop tour, Hoover stops to show the group a piece of sycamore that was discovered under the foundation of an old apartment building downtown. He also has wood from an old British Columbia spruce tree, nicknamed the "Gray Ghost," that was taken out to make room for a new road. Hoover is always looking for wood that has been dead as long as possible. The oldest piece he used was 113 years from the living tree. It came from a building beam in Brooklyn.

"Wood gets better the further away it gets from the tree," he said. "The sap in the



James Patterson began hand crafting his guitars in the 1960s. Now 83, he continues to create his instruments in his Westside workshop.

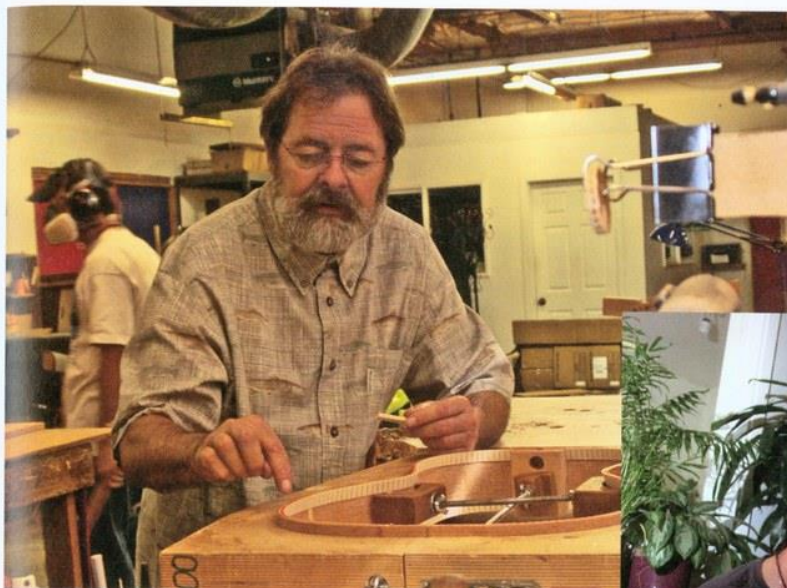
wood crystallizes and it sounds more like a bell over time."

Local artist Bob Brozman, who was voted Best World Guitarist by *Guitar Player Magazine* readers and has a signature pro model with Santa Cruz Guitar Company, said the company helped pioneer what is now the Golden Age of small-scale guitar manufacturing.

"Santa Cruz is unique as having more high-end guitar makers than anywhere else in the world," he said. "I know all the makers in the world, really."

Hoover traces the roots of local guitar making back to two older men named Bruce McGuire and James Patterson. They showed him how to make guitars when there was no literature on the subject and the only thing to do was carry over violin-making principles.

McGuire and Patterson continue to make guitars. Now 83, Patterson works from the garage of his Westside home. It always has been just a hobby for the retired printer, who



Richard Hoover points out some techniques used by violin makers that have been incorporated in to the Santa Cruz Guitar Company's guitars.

in 1991 published "Pearl Inlay," an instruction manual for abalone and mother-of-pearl fret inlay. It is still regarded as the bible on the subject.

"When I first started out I didn't know anybody around here building guitars," Patterson said. "I'd say, 'I build guitars,' and they'd say, 'you don't build guitars, you buy 'em at the store.' There's quite a few builders around here now."

As the tour came to an end in the finish room, Doyle bent over and peered inside one of the guitars.

"I've seen other places that don't pay as much attention to each individual sound," he said. "I'm going to get one at some stage just by hearing that baritone I played. I want it now."

Back in the lobby, Hoover told how he got his start. He'd walked into McGuire's finance office to get a loan for a new guitar after his had been stolen. Instead, McGuire told him he made guitars and Hoover asked when he could start.

"I couldn't have imagined," Hoover said. ♣

Local guitar maestro Bob Brozman relaxes with his Santa Cruz Guitar Company Pro model at his Santa Cruz Mountain home. Bob will be performing locally in January at the Kuumbwa.

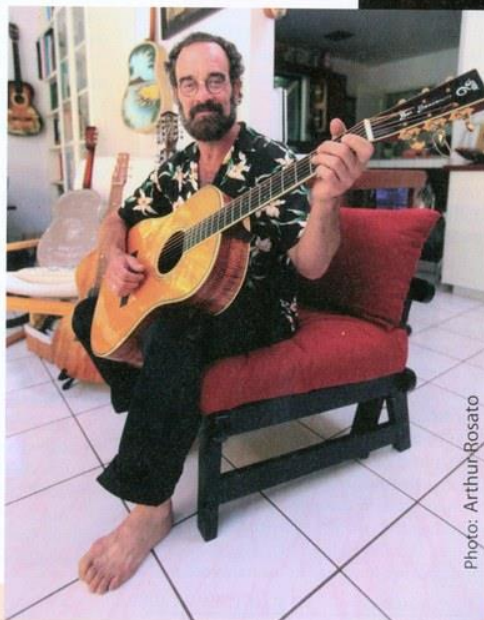
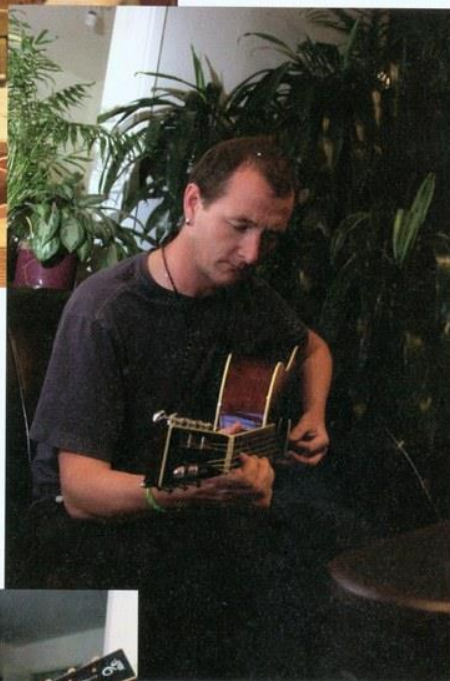


Photo: Arthur Rosato



(Above) John Doyle, a left-handed Irish guitarist, plays a right-handed Santa Cruz Guitar upside down. John currently plays guitar with Joan Baez.

More Information

Fred Carlson Guitars
www.beyondthetrees.com

Jeff Traugott Guitars
www.traugottguitars.com

Kenny Hill Guitars
www.hillguitar.com

Rick Turner Guitars
www.renaissanceguitars.com

Santa Cruz Guitar Company
www.santacruzguitar.com