



# *The* Guitar Note

---

VOLUME ONE

---

ISSUE  
NO. **02**

SAMPLE 2

# INSIDE THE SANTA CRUZ GUITAR COMPANY

## Richard Hoover on the art of composing musical instruments

By P.T. Hylton

Richard Hoover and his team at the Santa Cruz Guitar Company build guitars with world class care and precision. Their instruments define quality, with each guitar individually voiced and tuned by a skilled luthier. Yet, Richard also sees the value in mass produced guitars.

“We should all be grateful for the mass producers of musical instruments,” he says, “because through their efficiencies they can get guitars in the hands of people who otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford it. No matter how crummy a guitar is, you can still write a song on it. You can still woo a spouse or change an international border through a message. Cheap guitars are a good thing.”

When Richard Hoover talks, you can’t help but listen. He engages in conversation with the same level of passion some men reserve for Super Bowls.

We met with Richard at the SCGC headquarters in Santa Cruz, California. We sat on couches near the front of the small administrative offices that are attached to the much larger factory. Throughout our conversation, phones rang. Two large dogs wandered the office floor, occasionally stopping to gnaw a chew toy, let out a random bark, or give one of us a nudge to remind us how adorable they were. At one point, a random guy stuck his head in the door, blinking like he’d just stepped into paradise, and asked, “Is this the Santa Cruz Guitar Company?” He was met with a warm welcome. He left after buying a couple of tee shirts, a kid-at-Disney-World grin on his face. Acoustic jazz guitarist and Santa Cruz Guitar evangelist (not to mention video columnist for this very publication) Eric Skye walked in and was greeted with a warm round of hugs from just about everyone in sight, a gift of Portland’s finest coffee beans in his hand.

This was not a tranquil environment. Yet, the business of the office was not the hectic, stressed chaos you might imagine finding at the epicenter of one of the world’s most successful and respected high-end acoustic guitar brands. Rather, it was the pleasant bustle of a large family gathering on Thanksgiving. The welcoming, lively home where everyone who walks through the door is treated like family.

These may seem like odd statements to describe a guitar factory. But Santa Cruz is an atypical company, somehow creating world-class instruments and a warm family atmosphere at the same time. The Santa Cruz brand and the family of employees that have grown up around it are an accurate reflection of the company’s founder.

Richard has a bright smile and friendly, active eyes. In spite of the bustle going on in the room, he had a laser-like focus during our conversation, answering questions carefully and thoughtfully, and asking plenty of his own in return.



One of the Santa Cruz Team Members

Hoover has been building acoustic guitars since the early 1970s. He talks about those early days with nostalgia, but also with a self-deprecating smile that shows he’s glad he has learned so many lessons along the way.

The early days of Santa Cruz Guitars were challenging in many ways, but Richard points out that one of the most difficult tasks in growing a high-end guitar brand is finding a dependable and consistent source for high quality tone woods. Wood suppliers in those days were not always the most approachable, and the new kid on the block had to work hard to build the business relationships that would be essential to his company’s survival.

“The first thing to do was to get them to talk to you, which was hard,” says Richard. “And then we had to establish a relationship where they knew what our quality standards were, and where they knew we paid our bills.”

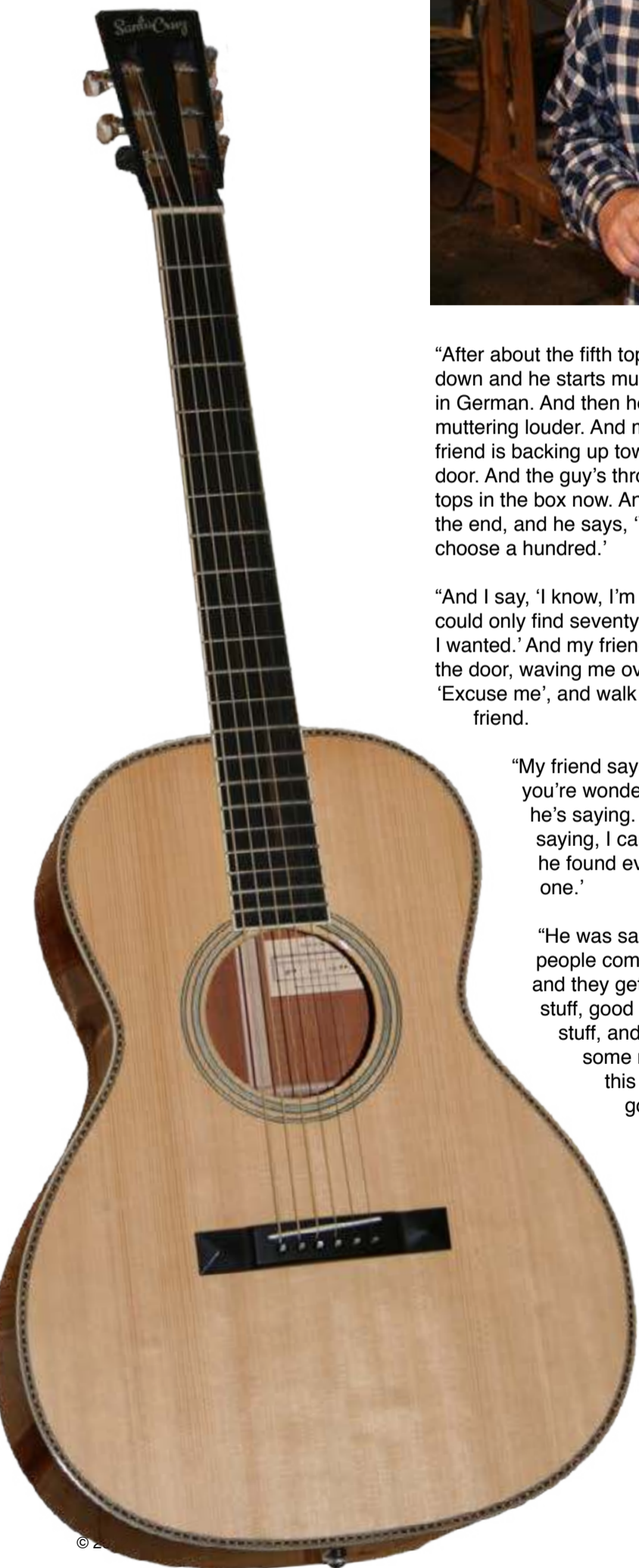
“On one of my first trips to Germany, I was introduced by a friend to a violin wood supplier over there. They’d been in the business for generations. They came from Markneukirchen, which is where C.F. Martin came from in the early 1800s. So, it was in their DNA, getting wood for violins, knowing how to choose it, knowing how to stack it up, and knowing how to deal with artisans, and they were fiercely proud of it. I’d written them a few letters – this was back in the letter writing days – without response, and finally my friend interceded for me and asked if I could have an appointment to come visit them. I told him I was looking for wood for one hundred guitar tops, I was happy to pay extra if I could choose them, and I’d be looking for the highest grade.

“I showed up, and, since my friend knew the proprietor, he introduced me. It was like ten in the morning, we had Elephant beer, which I think is like the highest alcohol content on the planet – no coffee, just beer – and then he says ‘Well, I’m busy today. My mother will show you around.’

“So, I go out with his mom to this outbuilding. All their woods are in these outbuildings for seasoning – cycles of hot/cold, wet/dry – and getting stabilized. He had put five hundred pieces of wood suitable for tops in a pile for me to go through so I could pick the hundred best ones. I went through the pile, and I found seventy-seven of them I wanted. He comes back and says ‘I’m done with my company. Let’s go have some lunch and some beer.’ So we go literally have hot dogs and sauerkraut and beer, and then we come back. He looks at the pile of seventy-seven tops I’ve selected, and he gets out a box to start packing them up.



Richard  
Discussing  
a Neck.



“After about the fifth top, he slows down and he starts muttering in German. And then he starts muttering louder. And my German friend is backing up toward the door. And the guy’s throwing the tops in the box now. And he gets to the end, and he says, ‘You didn’t choose a hundred.’”

“And I say, ‘I know, I’m sorry. I could only find seventy-seven that I wanted.’ And my friend is over by the door, waving me over. So I say, ‘Excuse me’, and walk over to my friend.

“My friend says, ‘I’ll bet you’re wondering what he’s saying. He keeps saying, I can’t believe he found every fucking one.’”

“He was saying, ‘Most people come in here and they get a mix of stuff, good stuff, bad stuff, and I make some money. With this guy, I’m not going to make any money!’”

“So, I thought, ‘How do I get out of this and salvage this relationship?’”

“I went back to him, and I said, “As you know, I’m a guitar builder and I don’t know everything about this wood, but these are the tops that I liked. What I wanted to ask you is if you would choose the remainder for me.’ So I let him choose the remaining twenty-three, and we could both go away saving face.

“He thought we were cool because we knew our stuff and, plus, I was nice to him. We’ve built a life-long relationship with that company, and now I don’t have to go pick the wood out. He knows to send the good stuff.”

Richard has been on a quest to find the good stuff ever since. Not just quality wood, but quality processes, quality guitar building techniques, and – maybe most importantly – quality people to share his vision.

**“Operating in a void.”**  
Richard started on his path to guitar building with a suddenly realization.

“I was sitting on the curb playing my guitar at my girlfriend’s house waiting for her to come home,” says Hoover, “When it crossed my mind ‘Wow, somebody makes these.’”

But the stage for his journey had been set years before, growing up in rural California.

“We lived right in the middle of the void between Fresno and Bakersfield, which is actually rich in music

and diversity. Great place to be a kid.”

His father was a commercial artist, a mechanically minded man who supported his son’s curiosity. “My father always encouraged me to tinker. He always encouraged me to take things apart, so I took my guitar apart. That made sense to me. So, my first blessing was my dad.”

The second profound influence was Richard’s mother. He gets emotional even today when talking about her.

“I grew up really rural. I could have grown up really stupid. But it was her mission to raise us with some sophistication and a worldly outlook on things. So, I have immense gratitude for what those two gave me.

“I had absolutely no patience for school. I regret it, because I missed out on a lot of fundamentals. But my mom was a huge influence. We didn’t home school in those days, but my house was rich with encyclopedias and we read like crazy. We had music lessons from my mom, and science stuff. We were always into the sciences.

“My mother was the Google of the day. She was a reference librarian. When people were researching a book, article, or essay, they went to her to look it up. My mom could give you the author and the date of any poem ever written to date by the first two words of the poem. She started in a one room school house in Nebraska teaching kids from four



A Bunch of Necks

As he began to put the Santa Cruz Guitar Company team together, there was still much to be learned, most of which they had to learn on their own through experimentation.

“We were really operating in pretty much of a void. There was no Internet. There were no books on guitar building and no organizations yet. So, there really wasn’t a network of guitar making. Since that time, I fast forward through my whole career of being able to both teach and study instrument making in Japan, Germany, Scandinavia, Spain, and, recently, Bulgaria. So, I’ve been well schooled.”

## “Composing your instrument.”

Taking a tour of the Santa Cruz Guitar Company factory is a bit like a entering a time machine. In one room, you’ll find state of the art equipment capable of scanning and measuring an instrument down the finest detail. In the next room, you’ll find luthiers working wood by hand.

To understand the dichotomy of why some portions of the guitar building process use machines and other portions never will, you have to understand Richard’s philosophy of lutherie versus mass production.

“I don’t mean this to dismiss mass production at all,” he says, “But, I’ll explain how mass production of guitars is a lot like making a chair.

“Here’s the difference between woodworking and lutherie. With a chair, like a mass produced guitar, the first thing you do is determine what the design dimensions are. So you have a formula of dimensions. You can take those individual components and dedicate machinery to it. You can make them really quickly and efficiently and have oodles of these parts. And, since they’re accurately and precisely made, they can fit in fixtures and only go one way, which diminishes mistakes, errors, and waste. You add those things together, with an eye toward paying prudently for your materials, and you’ll get something that goes into the marketplace with a really affordable price.”

Richard clearly respects the efficient results of mass production. But mass production has its drawbacks. “You minimize the worker’s choices. In fact, you eliminate the worker’s choices, and you come up with a consistent product.”

years old to eighteen. She came out west during World War Two to California. During her lifespan, she experienced the first electric light bulb all the way to a man on the moon. Just remarkable. My dad came out to California, again during World War Two, with the Navy. He met my mom in Laguna Beach, and then went off to the Pacific before returning and staying home.”

Richard put his mother’s encyclopedic knowledge to use as he began to research guitar building. “We found out quickly there was nothing written on steel string guitars at all, and very little written on classical in English, but a ton of stuff on violin building. So that’s where I went. I read everything on violin building. It was super fortunate, because from that I learned that you control the sound of your instrument by manipulating the mass in the material, and by composing the instrument of frequencies rather than dimensions. That made sense to me at the time, and that’s how I began building my guitars. I just assumed that’s how guitars were made.”

Although he had the passion and was beginning to acquire the knowledge, Richard didn’t immediately dedicate himself to guitar building. “I was following another path at the time, so it was really in fits and starts I could work on the guitar. My real beginnings were when I moved to Santa Cruz as a musician. My guitar was stolen, and I met Bruce McGuire, who was the loan officer at this little store front loan place. He was also a hobbyist guitar builder. So Bruce McGuire got me started. He was

my mentor as a classical luthier, which was a good background. Concurrently, I met Jim Patterson, who’s still here in Santa Cruz. Jim’s in his eighties now. Jim was also a hobbyist. He built steel string guitars. Nobody knew about him, but there he was, right in my town. He was an absolute angel in helping me with discovering and getting stuff done.”

There is a big difference between having the tools and knowing how to use them. As Richard became more and more dedicated to guitar building, his skills grew steadily, day by day. He says that he can’t identify a single moment when he realized he was getting good as guitar building.

“It was more like a boomerang,” he says. “I started out thinking I was good at it. And it didn’t take long before I thought I was really hot stuff. As more and more discoveries opened up, I started realizing that I’d just scratched the surface. I know this sounds like the old homily you hear over and over again, but every day I realize the limits of what I’ve already learned and the potential of what I can achieve.”

Yet, there were a few key revelations along the way that changed the way he thought about guitar building. Richard explains, “One ‘ah-ha moment’ was the about nature of practice. I was so full of myself as a kid. Other than being insufferable, I thought practice was for people who weren’t as smart as me. That if you were just willing enough and smart enough, you could just get it and do it.

“I was building guitars, and I was also playing a lot of baseball. One day in a baseball game the ball was hit, and I didn’t have to think about it. It was a triple play. The play just happened. About the same time, I was getting to a point with guitar making, where – let’s say with a fingerboard – I could measure, draw a line, cut it on the bandsaw, join it, and be accurate within like five/ thousandths of an inch. That’s not really possible, but that’s what practice does. So the revelation was, ‘Oh, if you do something over and over again, you get good at it.’ And with that it opened up a lot of possibilities.”

Starting at that point, Richard shifted his approach. With the background of his father’s mechanical mind, and his mother’s love of the sciences, he knew he needed more than just practice to take his building to the next level. He also needed to apply the scientific method.

“If you want to find something out, you take something you know and add one thing to it, and you see what the results are. You don’t add two things, because then you don’t know what did it. And in guitar making, that was going to take a really long time by myself. So, my revelation was: if I work with other people, I can accelerate that process. And, also, I didn’t think I’d be the best in the world at every part of guitar making. So, getting together with other people... that was a huge tipping point. It was like, ‘Wow, you mean I don’t have to compromise what we do, how we do it, and do it all myself?’ That was a huge breakthrough.”

The pure lutherie approach is a quite different. “For lutherie, we have to go back to violin making. Instead of assembling parts, what it evolved to was the art of composing the important parts of the instrument like you’d compose a chord on a piano. Music theory describes what that is. It is complimentary wave lengths that, when put together, work to allow sustain and overtones. So, you get rich, full, colorful, desirable sounds instead of what you’d get from knocking on a rock.

“If you go about composing your instrument the same way, by composing these different components with their frequencies instead of their sizes, the finally assembly is in tune with itself. You excite it through the string energy, and it develops overtones and it sustains. Those are the qualities that we all agree, ‘Ooohh, that’s a good one.’”

In the early days of the Santa Cruz Guitar Company, Richard was eager to talk guitar building with the other luthiers in his part of the country, one of whom was Bob Taylor. Richard has massive respect for Taylor to this day. “When we talk about mass production, Bob is the master. He will leave a huge legacy to guitar players for what he’s done. I have a lot of gratitude to the guy. We were kids together when we were doing this stuff, and it was mutually beneficial, of course.”

The two young luthiers would occasionally kid each other about their divergent approaches to guitar building. “One time, he was laughing about some of the fussiness we have about our guitars. And I’m asking him, ‘Hey, how can we do this more efficiently? How did you figure this out?’

“And he says, ‘Well, first, you’ve got to stop doing that.’ And he points to someone sanding a bridge by hand. My comment was, ‘Well we’ve got to do that because...’

“And he said, ‘Look, so, you’re gonna make the best guitars in the world. We’re gonna make the most.’”

In developing his own approach to guitar building Richard sought to insert efficiencies in the areas that it would not impact quality, while still staying true to the Old World lutherie traditions of composing an instrument.

“There’s a clear dividing line. There’s the stuff where the super

experienced talented, skilled, and practiced artisans are doing this voicing and tuning and composition of the instrument. And then there’s the stuff that’s absolutely the same each time. The stuff where you don’t even care about the artists’ opinion, like where the fret slots go. Let’s not talk about that. Let’s just put them in the right place. You go to do fret slots, you don’t have to think about it. You follow the rules. Tuning and voicing the top, you take everything you’ve ever learned, and all the stuff all the people who taught you have learned, and put it into that. That’s the artistry”.

This approach has allowed Richard’s team of builders to develop the skills to fine tune instruments to match a particular player’s needs and tastes. The majority of the guitars SCGC makes are custom for just that reason.

To Richard, this ability is a direct result of the time and hard work each of his builders has put in at the bench.

“Here’s what we are doing. We have our benchmarks, and then we improvise beyond that. It’s just like if you learn your chord shapes, your fundamentals, and you practice, practice, practice. You can go anywhere from there. But you always know where to come back to. With what we’re doing, the ‘chord shapes’ are the voicing and tuning of the instrument to ensure the development of overtones and sustain. Where we improvise is on the things that are personal choices and subjective. The bluegrass person wants big bass, the jazz person wants even, or anywhere in between. That’s your choice, and that’s the improvisation we can do.

“How bright or dark is the sound? Again, in vocal accompaniment or bluegrass, people usually like a warm, blended tone. A jazz person wants a clear, bright tone with a lot of separation between notes. We also control the presence of the guitar. Where it sounds its biggest. The back of the concert hall, the immediate group, or the microphone.

“We don’t have slide rules and calculations and stuff like that. We have the body of knowledge of 35 years of doing this. Not only that, but we stand on the shoulders of giants in the violin tradition and the classical tradition. They kept so close to the chest with trade secrets that it took a long time to start



finding out that we are doing the same thing.

That intense customization can lead to some misunderstandings among guitarists about the Santa Cruz sound. “It’s really amusing to me when somebody says, ‘Ah, I played Santa Cruz, I don’t like them.’ It’s like 65% of what we do is custom. I’ll bet you didn’t dislike the sustain or the complexity of overtones. I’ll bet what you didn’t like was the tone or the balance or something that you could choose.”

But the custom work has also helped Richard become proficient in describing the complicated factors involved in a guitar’s sound in a way the average guitarist can understand.

Richard says, “It’s really unfortunate that there’s so much noise about how a guitar sounds. We can get really flowery. But, we can break it down into components that are really understandable, and I can help you walk into a music store and evaluate the sound of a guitar.

“There’s tone, which, in an acoustic physics sense, is the quality of bright or dark. Not high or low or how cool you are with your pick. It’s the difference between playing really close to the bridge where you get a bright tone, and playing up over the soundhole where it blends and warms and rounds a little. So that’s tone. We could sit down with the guitars, and I say, ‘Okay, you want that bright tone. We know how to get it.’ And I’ll be happy to suggest some woods. Or, you may come to me and say, ‘I want a guitar made out of these woods, and I’ll advise you what sound you’ll get.

“It’s easy, it’s straight-forward. It’s just a collection of agreements on the terminology and vocabulary. It’s easier to show you than to talk

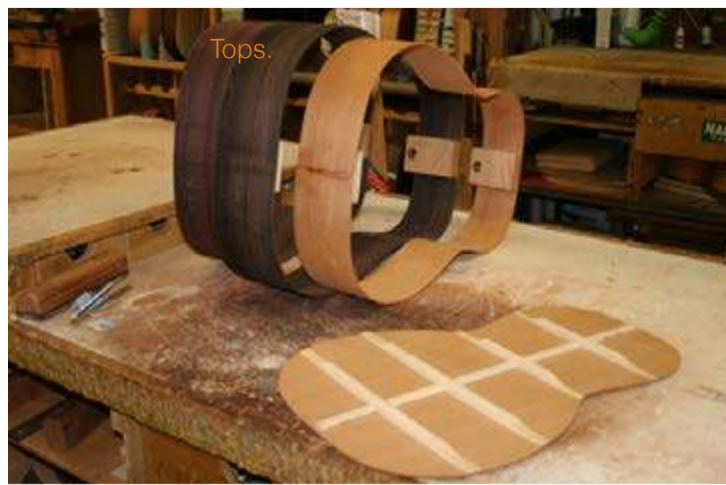
about it. I’ll show you.” (See accompanying tour video)

“That’s one of the big challenges with our guitars. Everybody who makes guitars talks about hand-made, voiced, tuned, whatever. They use all those superlatives, so we don’t really stand out in ad copy. Somebody’s got to play it, and then it can be revelatory. They can say, ‘Oh! That’s what they’re talking about.’ Don’t let what you think is your lack of knowledge intimidate you.”

While Richard appreciates the accessibility of mass produced guitars, he also has had great feedback from newer players who have purchased his guitars. He discourages the idea that you have to be an accomplished player to treat yourself to a quality instrument.

“A lot of people get guitars to learn on, and some people don’t get very far. Some people do. One of the factors in people continuing is that there’s some reason, some gratification, in it. And, one of the things is how it sounds. A frequent comment we get goes like this: ‘I’ve been playing guitar for thirty-five years. I’ve played all kinds of brands. I got my Santa Cruz, and, dang, I’m playing further up the neck. I’m writing songs. I’m inspired.’ That sophistication is enticing. It’s satisfying, and you say, ‘Oh, look what happens when I go here!’ or ‘Whoa, that’s different. I didn’t know I could get that. What happens if I do this?’ Don’t listen to the Internet and all the stuff you hear. If you hear a sophisticated guitar, it’s not subtle. You say, ‘Wow. That’s different. I’d like to play that.’ And, you’ll get inspired to do stuff.

Tops in preparation.



## “Ongoing improvement”

“The short version of the mission statement is: Ongoing Improvement,” says Richard. “The longer statement is: It all boils down to quality of life. We are here to have a satisfying, fulfilling time. There are a lot of formulas to achieve that, but, for us, it’s having purpose. It isn’t increasing efficiencies and profit for the sake of profit itself. It’s having purpose, enjoying the thrill of discovery and the ongoing newness of stuff. That’s what we do. We figure out better ways to do what we do, cooler ways to make guitars, and how to have more and more control over how the guitars sound. That’s really the fun thing, improving on what we’ve done before.”

One of the things you can’t help but notice as you walk the floor at the Santa Cruz Guitar Company is that everyone seems happy to be there and proud of the work they are doing. Surprisingly, many of his employees had very little or no guitar building experience before joining the team.

“Sometimes we get people who specialize and have experience, but it’s not very frequent,” says Richard. “What we are looking for is somebody that has had some work experience. We don’t want to be their first job, because your first job always sucks. You don’t have anything to compare it to, so it’s horrible.

“Then the skill that we value the most is someone who is willing to accept what we have to offer, which is a safe place to do your best. I’ve had a lot of jobs, and especially when I was younger, I had a lot of jobs where they didn’t deserve my best, at least from my point of view. So this has to be a place where people really can do their best and really want to do their best. That’s what makes it fun to do what we do.

“And they have to actually enjoy the teamwork process. That’s not for everyone. Some people would rather be like ‘Okay, I’ll get my stuff done, but I don’t want to have to talk to that guy or answer to this guy. Our quality is totally dependent on communication between people.”

“So, teamwork, a work ethic, and a genuine enjoyment of working around other people. All the qualities you would want in a roommate or someone you worked with. And then the practice and the instruction, we can do that. If people have that other stuff, we can train them. What’s nice to have in addition to that is someone who wanted to make guitars, went to a guitar making school, and still wants to make guitars. That’s like boot camp. They saw the reality, they saw the downside, and they still want to do it.”

“The fact that everyone here plays guitars probably isn’t coincidence, but it isn’t mandatory. We’re looking for people who want to work for the Santa Cruz Guitar Company because they heard something about us.”

Luthiers starting out today have a much different path to walk than Richard did, and different challenges, as well. Richard says, “I laugh, ‘cause it’s my walking uphill to school in the snow story. But, it took a long time to collect the information and get going. Now it’s all there. And it’s a beautiful thing. I’m torn. I would love to have had that information when I started, but instead of pioneering new territory, I’d be going out the gate with eight hundred thousand other people at the same time. So, it’s much more difficult for an individual to make a name for themselves now. It’s just like being a rock star. You’ve gotta be really good, You’ve gotta be really personable. You’ve gotta do

# PROFILE

good business. And, you have to have some really good breaks.

“I want to be careful... I want to encourage people in this because it's been really, really good to me. But, the disadvantage people have is they can make a really credible instrument. Let's say they have that God-given hand to eye coordination. They can benefit from a lot of information, a lot of DVDs, a lot of good tools. They can make an instrument of a quality way beyond what we could have made in our first guitars. And, they could go to a place like Healdsburg [the Healdsburg Guitar Festival], and people could go, 'Wow, here's another guitar builder.'”

“What they don't have access to is: how do you control the sound of it? And they might not even know what the possibilities or the depth of that is. It's like, 'Well, I made it well. I used good woods. Of course it sounds good.' And it does. But, could they duplicate that? Or could they riff on that and do the improvisation? There's not any good place to get that, unless you make all the mistakes yourself, or you work with somebody who's made the mistakes to do that. So, it's bitter-sweet. I can fool people into thinking I speak a few languages, but just for a little bit. I can parrot it, but I don't comprehend it. And that's the problem with a lot of the information.

For Richard, it all goes back to the measured, scientific approach he took when developing his craft. “The biggest mistake people make is not respecting the scientific method. Putting more than one idea into an instrument at a time and therefore having no true control over the colors on your palate. Or people assuming, as I did, that just because I did it, it's better. Because I want it to be, and I will it so, it really is a world-class sounding guitar. We talk about the subjective. It can be loud, it can be bright, it can be brash. But can you control the development of overtones? Can you tune it so that it sustains? And can you realize that you are not important at all, and take the information of somebody like Eric Skye, and create his vision rather than your own?”

“Being an artist in guitar making means being able to do the same thing over and over again consistently, and then being able to ad lib from there.”

“The difference between us and a studio artist is that his or her work is complete. But with the guitar, it is

absolutely nothing until it is out of our hands. When we are out of the picture, that is when it becomes art.”

## “It might be life changing.”

Richard always has an eye toward the future of his company. Part of that is realizing that he won't always be here, and trusting what will happen to it after he is gone.

“I have provided a plan for the company,” says Richard. “These guys can run the company in my absence, but the nuts and bolts – who signs the checks and all that stuff – that I've prepared. The real beautiful thing is that we have this super high horse power network of people that we've developed because of our customers. I'm not kidding. We've got specialists, the best in their fields in the world in a lot of things. And that would include finance, planning, management, and things like that. So, I've got assignments for that stuff.

“What will the company look like? Whatever these guys think is best. And I'll bet it's influenced by what I've done while I was here.”

Richard doesn't mind looking back and talking about the past, but he much prefers working with his team than his early days building alone.

“When I did it all, it's not necessarily and beautiful thing. I really need guitar making people that can develop expertise. We will do better as a whole than we would do separately. But also I surround myself with responsible grownups who can make sure it's a business, and I can be artistic.

“There's stuff I didn't like to do that much. I had favorites, and usually if you like something, you develop the expertise for it. I love making multiples of stuff. It's really meditative and relaxing. So, setting up the tool and making components, which isn't very sexy. But, I also love the voicing and tuning of the guitar top, choosing the wood, dimensioning it for its response, shaping the braces, and stuff like that. That's real lutherie, and that's really, really fun.

His average work day now includes an ever-changing mix of lutherie, collaboration, customer service, and much more.

“I respond to what comes in. My job description is to protect, promote,



Eric Skye Playing



Here is Eric Skye playing a Santa Cruz 1929 OO. Eric is playing McCoy Tyner's Contemplation. The rattling and barking come from the resident dog.



Eric Skye riffs on four Santa Cruz Guitars that were in the shop during our visit. His own OO-Skye, the H Standard, a 1929 OO, and and H13. The rattling and barking come from the resident dog.



Cool Custom Inlay

and defend the company. That's first and foremost. The nature of the job of anybody in my position is that there's stuff that comes up where there's really truly no right or wrong answer. But somebody has to do it. And in your position as the boss, you are not taking any risk so it returns to you to find out what to do with that stuff. Everybody here is completely capable of running this place in my absence."

No matter what is going on, Richard always makes sure to get some hands-on time building guitars. "I've always got in my mind that I've got an absolute budget. I spend 20% of my time doing some kind of guitar making. Prototypes, troubleshooting, training, filling in, and things like that. That's what I need to keep things right. And, I come in and I check in with Finance. It's funny; this is such a small company, you can see everybody from the seat you sit in. So, to say I check in with Finance is a little bit affected. But, I'll check in with Patty, our

operations manager. I check in with her to see if any decisions need to be made. I check in with strategies and projects. I meet with Joseph after that. Joseph is in charge of overseeing the flow of guitar making. He knows every guitar, every serial number, where it is, and probably a good portion of what it is. That's an amazing amount of knowledge. He knows who does what, and what to do when they're not here. And we strategize together. 'Oh, hi. What would you like to do today? Next week? Next month? Next year?' These aren't very long meetings. They are just checking in each day. Then I come back in here (the office) and hit it with these guys.

"Then my day, the logic goes wang, like that. It's a combination of 'I'm gonna talk to the guy in Missouri that wants a custom guitar, and we're going to talk about it and choose woods, arrange to have his pictures sent for his woods to pick. Then I'm going to put a little time

into trying to wrench our trademark out of the hands of somebody in China. Then I'm gonna field a phone call. Then, I don't know, Environmental Health wants to come by and do a snap inspection to make sure everything's okay. You know, just a myriad of administrative stuff. And, I'm also going to budget some time to strategize a little bit."

Richard makes time for the non-guitar related interests in his life. "I've got a darling old 1959 Chevy Apache pickup truck that I could put every cent I could lay my hands on in. I've got brakes on four of the tires instead of just one now. I live really rural, and we've got a beautiful family of chickens. We have sheep occasionally. We'd like to have more animals. Me and my sweetheart just had our 40th anniversary. We live in a beautiful place. And I love to travel.

"I worked at my bench the first fifteen years of Santa Cruz Guitar Company without more than a two-day break at a time. Usually those were for some family emergency. I worked, and I never got out of the country until I was almost forty. I'm hell-bent on making up for that now. I've done a lot

of world travel. All in relation to the business, or my love. Wood, because I love wood. I love guitar making."

Richard's "love of guitar making" shows in his brand, his staff, and every instrument that goes out the door. "Sometimes we'll build a guitar and I have to suspend my judgment. I can't assume what it is going to be used for, but I can hope. The guitar is in-of-itself very powerful, and it can carry a very powerful message. You could change international borders with a guitar if you put it to the right use. It doesn't even have to be a good guitar."

"I have some really serious gratitude about some of the uses our guitars have been put to."

"It's a beautiful job, because there's always variety. It's never boring. And, sometimes, it's thrilling. You don't know what might walk through the door. It might be life changing."

Visit the Santa Cruz Guitar Company online at <http://www.santacruzguitar.com/>



We were very lucky to get Richard to give us a tour of the shop and explain the overall build process. We broke the video up into seven parts to make streaming easier. Part 1 starts at the very beginning and goes over wood selection.



The old shop.



Part 2 shows how Santa Cruz goes about making necks. Part 3 looks at how the tops are selected and made.



Richard

Part 4 expands the discussion about tops and explains different bracing options.





Richard showing the sides of a build.



Part 5 demonstrates how the dovetail works. Part 6 shows off the finish process.

And, finally, Part 7 showcases a team member and his personal guitar build. Eric plays it.

