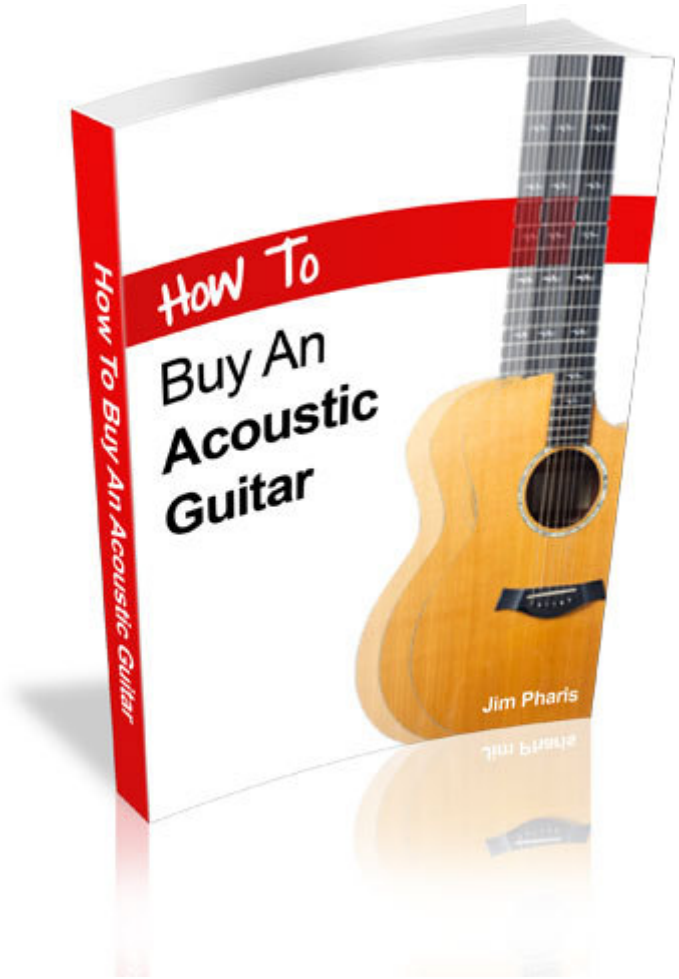
How To Buy An Acoustic Guitar



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Introduction

Maybe you've been toying with the idea of a new guitar. Maybe a child has been bugging you about it. For whatever reason, you've decided to buy an acoustic guitar.

I can understand your situation. I've been in the same situation for many years.

In the last 41 years I have bought dozens of guitars. The first was an inexpensive ¾ size model. There have also been some very nice high-end guitars.

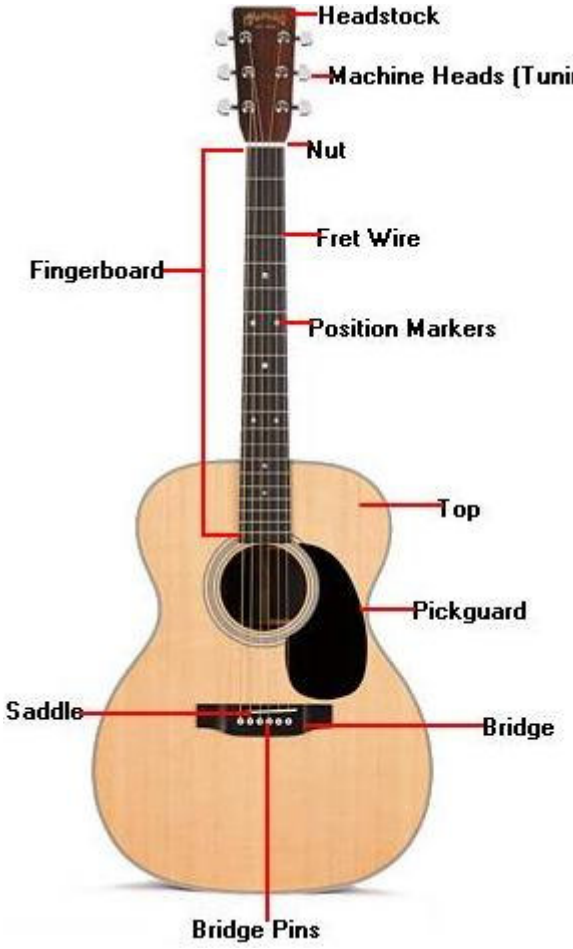
I've also sold a lot of guitars. Some were my own that I sold to buy an even nicer guitar. There were also several hundred other guitars that I've sold in a retail setting. Those acoustic guitars ranged in price from $200 - $5,000.

Some of the guitars that I've sold have been to brand new players. Other customers were very knowledgeable veterans.

I've also worked for a guitar manufacturer. My job with that company was to check the finished instrument before it was shipped to dealers.

The information in this book is designed to mainly help the beginner with their acoustic guitar buying decision. But even experienced players may find a new way to look at the guitar buying process.

It's my hope that the information in this book helps you find the guitar of your dreams.


Headstock
Machine Heads (Tuning Machines)
Nut
Fret Wire
Fingerboard
Position Markers
Top
Pickguard
Saddle
Bridge
Bridge Pins


Machine Heads (Tuning Machines)
Neck
Back


Heel
Side

Chapter 1

Types Of Stores

The type of store that you buy your new guitar in can make a difference. Music stores fall into a couple of different categories. The **combo** store or the **specialty** store.

Combo Store

A combo store will sell a wide range of instruments. Most will sell drums, basses, guitars, and keyboards. Some of them will also sell band and orchestra instruments.

Usually combo stores are big discounters. They can frequently offer good discounts on the items that they have in stock. A lot of their success is based on high volume sales at a discount.

There are some problems with combo stores, though. Their merchandise may be shopworn. The sales staff might not be knowledgeable about their inventory. And then there's trying to listen to the acoustic guitar that you're playing while someone else is auditioning a drum set.

Specialty Store

A specialty store sells just acoustic guitars. Or they might sell acoustic guitars and a few other high quality acoustic instruments (mandolins, banjos…). Occasionally you'll find a store just dedicated to guitars, both acoustic and electric.

There are several advantages of a specialty shop. You usually find a more knowledgeable staff, instruments by high-end builders and, guitars in better condition.

The biggest disadvantage of a specialty shop is availability. There may not be one near where you live. This makes it a little tougher to shop with them.

If there's not a specialty shop within easy driving distance, you may have to deal with them on the phone or online. If you do business with a store in that type of situation, reputation is important. Look for online reviews of their shop. Reading acoustic guitar related forums can also be helpful.

Shopping Online

Shopping online is the modern day version of mail order. There are pros and cons of buying online.

One of the biggest advantages is selection. Online dealers often have a bigger selection than a conventional brick and mortar store does. One reason for that is that some online businesses don't have a retail area. This helps them keep their costs down. That money can go into having a wider range of instruments.

There are a couple of disadvantages to buying online. One of them is not getting to play the guitar before you buy it. You may have a pretty good idea of what you're buying. But you won't know for sure until you get it.

The other problem is shipping costs. While a lot of online stores will have free shipping **to** you, none pay to have it shipped **back**. So if you don't like the guitar, you have to pay the return shipping costs. And the guitar will have to be in as good condition as when you received it. Otherwise, you may not get a full refund.

Online Auctions

Online auctions have many of the same problems as when you buy from an online dealer. There is a big advantage, though. Someone else has taken the depreciation on the guitar. So, if you buy it and don't like it, you may be able to get most of your money back when you re-sell it.

Chapter 2

Types of Salespeople

Just as there are types of music stores, there are different types of salespeople.

There are several common complaints with combo store staff. One complaint is that they employ people who aren't knowledgeable about the store's products. Another problem is salespeople who ignore the customer. Or the opposite problem; being too pushy with the customer.

The employees in a combo store may be musicians that resent having a day job. They may be only familiar with current popular music and what the musicians playing it use. They may also be paid mainly on commission. So, they may want to sell you an instrument that they make the most commission on. Not the one that's best for you.

In a specialty store you tend to find more attentive, knowledgeable employees. One of the reasons for that is because you may be dealing with the store owner. If not the owner, then a salesperson who has a deep love for the instruments that they're selling.

The most important thing for any salesperson is whether they spend more time listening or talking.

If you don't understand an expression that the salesman uses, have him explain it to you.

Don't let a salesman intimidate you if guitars are new to you. Everybody knows something but nobody knows everything. There are probably a ton of topics that you're knowledgeable about that the salesman is ignorant of.

If the salesperson treats you like a dummy, don't deal with him. Someone who listens to you without interrupting and treats you in a polite manner is what you need when buying a new acoustic guitar.

Chapter 3

When To Shop

When you choose to shop is very important. It's hard to say an exact best time, but there are some general guidelines.

Since most people work during the week, stores can be crowded on the weekend. That means that it will be harder to get a salesperson's help. It may be noisy if there are a lot of other people shopping (playing).

There **are** some cases where shopping on the weekend is O.K One scenario is if you live somewhere that has a lot of overcast, cold weather. If you get a weekend that is warm and sunny, people will want to be outdoors, not inside shopping.

Another situation would be if there is a major sporting event that everyone is watching on television. Who goes guitar shopping during the World Cup or the Super Bowl?

A better time to shop is a weekday. Preferably in the morning or early afternoon. Things get busier from mid-afternoon on (lessons, people stopping after class or on the way home from work).

It's worth the effort to re-arrange your schedule to be able to shop on a weekday morning.

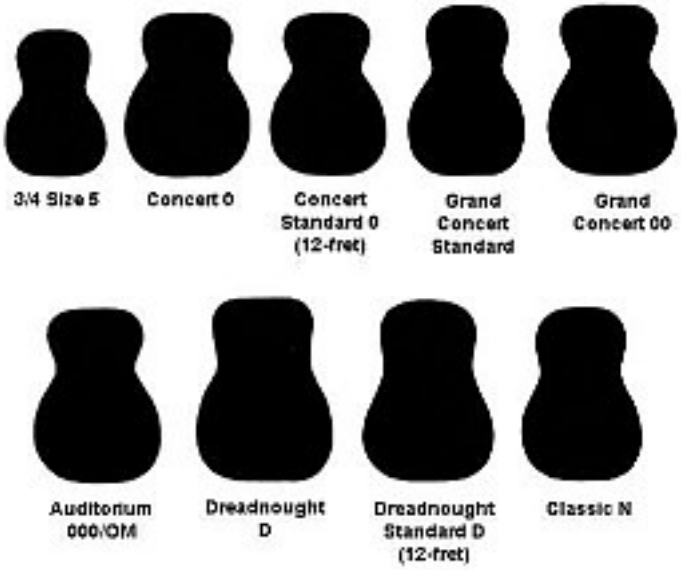
Chapter 4

Finding A Guitar That Fits

Contrary to what you may think, acoustic guitars aren't one size fits all. Just as gloves, shoes and hats come in different sizes, so do guitars. Some models are ½ or ¾ size and intended as starter guitars for children.

In other situations, the size is a result of what the guitar was designed for. In the 19th century the guitar was a small sized instrument that wasn't very loud. In the early 20th century guitar design changed. In nearly every case the guitar got bigger so that it would be louder.

A good way to understand this is to look at a Martin Guitar size chart. The size O and OO are pretty small. Then you get the OOO and its cousin the OM. The OM (Orchestra Model) was designed to be played in a band. Then they invented the dreadnought. It's even bigger than the OM and was designed to be used in dance bands.



Now we have pickups and microphones to amplify our guitars with. We don't often need a large sized guitar just for the volume it supplies.

Comfort, playability, how it sounds and, in some cases, how it responds when amplified are now the biggest factors in choosing a guitar.

The guitar needs to be a comfortable fit and size for the owner. Too large and the player has to struggle to keep it in position. Too small and it will cause pain in the back and shoulders from hunching over it.

Even if a strap is always used, the guitar still needs to fit. This can be difficult for a brand new player. There's a pretty good chance that any guitar will feel unfamiliar and odd.

Try this when shopping for a new guitar; sit on a stool with your knees at a 90 degree angle to your body. You may have to put your foot on one of the stool's rungs.

Hold the guitar in a normal playing position. Look at your right shoulder. Is it level or slightly elevated? If elevated, the guitar is probably too large. This may cause discomfort in your shoulder. There's a pretty good chance that you'll have to struggle to hold it in place, too. Ideally, your shoulder should roll over slightly toward the front of the guitar.

Learning to play the guitar well takes a lot of practice for most people. Having a guitar that's comfortable and the right fit can make a real difference.

Chapter 5

Size, Shape and Sound

The shape and size of the guitar make a difference in comfort. The shape and size also have a big effect on sound.

As a general rule, the bigger the guitar, the more bass and volume is produced. The smaller bodied guitars tend to be more even sounding between bass, treble and mids.

Large guitars like dreadnoughts and jumbos make a big sound but it can come at a price. The price may be in the difficulty of playing them. For sound to be made, the guitars top has to vibrate. Large bodied guitars usually need a larger thickness of string to vibrate their big tops. Heavier strings are harder to press down and to play. That makes them harder to play.

Smaller body guitars are generally designed to use light gauge strings. This makes them easier to play. They also tend to respond a little faster. They frequently seem to have a more balanced sound than the larger bodied guitars.

Because smaller bodied guitars are more even sounding, they are a good choice for amplifying. Since they have less bass, they are less prone to feedback when amplified.

Despite these general guidelines, the guitar builder has ultimate control over the guitars sound. Their choice of materials, bracing patterns and brace shapes will create their own unique sound.

For a beginning player, the comfort or fit, which is a result of size and shape, is probably more important than sound. Their ear may not be developed enough to tell one guitar from the other. But, they can tell if the guitar is too uncomfortable to play. **That** might stop them from playing. If that happens, the sound won't matter.

Chapter 6

The Neck

Another important consideration when buying a new guitar is the shape of the neck. It can be hard for the beginner to tell the differences between neck shapes. There are some general guidelines that you can follow, though.

Thickness

Thickness is a measurement from front to back of the neck. For most people, a neck on a guitar like a Taylor, the Martin low oval or low profile, or one of the models by Alvarez is comfortable. These guitars have what I refer to as a medium neck. Not too thick or too thin.

Shape

Another reason that these necks are comfortable is the **shape**. Most people like a neck with fairly straight shoulders. The shoulder of the neck is the part on the sides where the neck meets the fingerboard. If that's too flared, it can feel awkward. It all has to do with how it sits in your hand.

An oval shape is comfortable for most people.

Width

The **width** of the fingerboard is very important. It is measured from the side by the low E (biggest string) to the side with the

high E (smallest string). The most usual way of measuring this is at the nut (the nut is the piece of plastic or bone at the end of the fingerboard). Common fingerboard widths are 1 11/16", 1 ¾", and 1 7/8". While there is only 1/16" to 2/16" difference in width, it can make a difference. Different widths are good for different uses.

1 11/16" has been the norm for steel string acoustic guitars. It's a good width for most uses. The 1 ¾" width came into use with the increasing popularity of fingerstyle guitar. The 1 7/8" size isn't as common, but it was also developed for the fingerstyle guitarist.

Scale Length

The **scale length** of the guitar refers to the distance from the nut to the bridge. The scale length makes a difference in a couple of ways. First is the feel. A shorter scale length has a softer feel than a longer scale length. This means it's easier to press the strings down. A short scale length is normally found on guitars like the small bodied Martins and guitars patterned after them. This includes the OO and OOO body sizes. Some Dreadnoughts will have short scale necks, but that's not as common.

The down side of the short scale neck is note separation. Many guitarists find that playing a guitar with a longer scale neck makes it easier to hear the individual notes in a chord. Long scale lengths are normally found on OM, dreadnought and jumbo guitars.

Headstock

The last factor that we'll look at is the type of **headstock** that a guitar has. The headstock is the portion of the neck that the strings attach to. Most modern guitars have a **solid** headstock. The part of the tuner that the string attaches to sticks up through the top of the headstock.

There is also a type of headstock called a **slotted** headstock. Instead of being solid, it has a long slot on both the left and right side of the headstock. The tuner post is in the slots. So the string goes down at an angle to attach to the post. Because of this, the strings feel like they have less tension on them.

There's one more factor in finding the right guitar neck. The body size and shape can make the neck feel different. Say you have two different size guitars with the same neck on them. The necks will cross in front of your body at two different heights.

The height will affect the angle that your hand meets the neck. The necks may feel different because of the angle that your hand meets the neck. That may sound odd, but try playing both. You may be surprised in how the necks feel.

Chapter 7

Wood

Tops

The woods used in making a guitar have a huge effect on how it sounds. For guitar makers, the choice of woods used are based on weight, strength, density and availability.

The most commonly used wood for tops and internal bracing is Sitka spruce. The reason that Sitka is used is because of its high strength to weight ratio. This makes a top that can hold up under the high tension of the guitars strings and still be light.

Adirondack spruce was commonly used on what we now call vintage guitars. That's become less available and is now an expensive upgrade on a new instrument

Spruce is a wood that "opens up" over a period of time. This means that it develops a more open, even sound as it's played. So if you like the way a spruce topped guitar sounds new, you'll like it even more when it's played in.

Other woods that are used for guitar tops are western red cedar, redwood, and mahogany.

Cedar has a warmer sound than spruce and won't change much over the life of the instrument.

Redwood has a lot of the same tonal qualities as cedar.

There is some concern that a redwood or cedar top guitar will lose some definition in the bass register over time.

A mahogany topped guitar

usually has a more mid-range sound than cedar and spruce. Mahogany is usually used on less expensive guitars.

Backs and Sides

The classic tonewoods for backs and sides are mahogany, rosewood and maple. Other less traditional woods like cherry, sapele, and ovangkol are also being used now.

Mahogany has a fairly strong sound with light, airy trebles. In the rosewood family, East Indian rosewood is the type normally used. East Indian has a deep warm sound.

Maple is a real dense wood. It has a loud, punchy sound. Cherry wood is dense and reflective like maple.

Sapele is sometimes called African mahogany. It has a sound like mahogany.

Ovangkol combines the crispness of mahagony and the warmth of rosewood.

Composites

There is another material being used in acoustic guitar construction. This new material is a composite blend of carbon fiber fabric and a gel-like substance. These materials are put into molds and formed into the different parts of the guitar. This makes a material that is extremely tough. In fact, it's been used in the fuel tanks of the space shuttle.

It seems to make a pretty good sounding guitar. The downside of it is in its strength. It's so stiff that a truss rod isn't used in the neck. The problem with that is that the action (how close the strings are to the fingerboard) can't be adjusted. You're O.K. if you like the way the guitar plays when you buy it. You're out of luck if you want to change it.

Time will tell if the public accepts this flaw and the concept of a non-wood guitar.

Which Is Best

Try this technique to decide which wood that you like the best. Play guitars by the same manufacturer that are made out of different types of wood. For this to work all factors have to be the same **except** the woods in the guitars being played.

There are a lot of factors that go into how a guitar sounds. Wood is a big one.

Chapter 8

Solid Wood Or Laminate

Guitars are made out of **solid woods**, **laminates** or a combination of the two. What's the difference?

The term solid wood means a solid sheet of wood. It's a segment of a log. Think of it as a 2 x 6 that's real thin.
A laminate is when several thicknesses of wood are glued together to make the same thin piece of wood.

Tops

A solid guitar top usually sounds better than a laminated top. With a solid topped guitar you have a single thickness of wood put in motion by the strings vibration. Wood that's been specifically chosen because of it's qualities as a guitar wood.

With a laminate you have several layers of wood **plus** glue to set in motion. Some of the wood in the laminate won't be wood that's chosen for its guitar building benefits. A lot of the time there's a layer of spruce for the outside layer and less desirable woods in the middle. It's one way for the manufacturer to keep cost down.

How can you tell what's what? Usually the manufacturer will say if it's a solid top in the guitars list of specifications. If it's not solid they'll frequently call it a "select" top.

There's a way to see for yourself if a top is solid or laminate. Look at the edge of the soundhole. If a top is solid, the wood will gently curve down into the soundhole. You'll be able to see the grain of the wood slope down into the soundhole.

Figure 1 Solid Top

A laminated top looks totally different. The wood doesn't slope down into the soundhole. The wood on the edge of the soundhole looks chopped off. You won't be able to see the lines in the edge of the soundhole.

Figure 2 Laminate Top

Back And Sides

A lot of guitars will have a solid top and laminate sides and back. These will usually sound better than a guitar with a laminated top. They'll usually cost a little more, too.

Next up the quality (and price) ladder are guitars with a solid top, back and laminated sides. There is the general belief that a solid back guitar sounds better than a laminated back guitar. It's also a selling point for the retailer. Whether or not it's true is mainly up

to the ear of the listener. A prominent American guitar builder has stated that he could build instruments with laminated backs that sound as good as solid backs. He went on to say that the reason that he doesn't is because the public believes that the laminates aren't as good.

How can you tell if a back is laminated or solid? This is trickier than with the guitar top. Look through the soundhole at the back of the guitar. Try to find a knot or an unusual pattern in the grain. Now turn the guitar over. Look for the same pattern or knot in the wood of the back. If it's there the back is solid. If not, it's probably laminated.

Many people feel that the guitars sides are mainly to have something to glue the top and back to. That it really doesn't matter if they're solid or laminated. Other opinions are that it does matter. In most cases the biggest difference is to manufacturers and retailers as a selling point.

The Best Choice

If everything else is the same, an all solid wood guitar will usually sound better than a laminate or partly laminate guitar. Some of the reason may be in the manufacturing. Most manufacturers will put more care into building a guitar if it uses more expensive materials.

The sound can vary between manufacturers though. So don't let solid or laminate woods be the only reason that you buy a particular guitar.

Laminates are better in some situations. Solid woods need more care and maintenance. So if you're not too good at that sort of thing, you might choose a guitar with more laminates in it. Laminates can be better in situations where you amplify the guitar. Since the top is heavier than a solid top, it won't vibrate as much. This means it won't feedback as much.

The ultimate test for any guitar is how it sounds. Let that guide you in your choice of woods.

Chapter 9

Cutaways And Pickups

A very common feature on guitars is the **cutaway**. The cutaway is the notched out area on the guitars body where the neck meets the body. Many people buy a guitar with a cutaway because of how it looks. Of course, the guitar is made like that for a reason.

It lets a player play those notes way up the neck. But, it serves another purpose too. It lets you put a capo high on the neck and still have a little extra room to play. Despite the practical reasons, though, most shoppers buy a guitar with a cutaway because it looks cool.

The addition of a cutaway will usually add $200- $800 to the price of a guitar, depending on the manufacturer.

A lot of the time a guitar with a cutaway will come with a built-in pickup system. In the past, both built-in **and** aftermarket pickups turned your acoustic guitar into a poor quality electric guitar. There has been a tremendous amount of improvement in that area in the last few years.

There are a couple of ways that you can approach acoustic guitar pickups. One way is to buy an acoustic guitar and add an aftermarket pickup system. The other way is to buy a guitar with it already installed by the manufacturer.

Aftermarket Pickups

There are a couple of big advantages with adding aftermarket pickups. The first is that you buy exactly the guitar you want. If it only comes in an acoustic version, it's no problem. You add the pickups that you want.

Another good reason is that you can add the exact brand and type of pickup that pleases your ear. Also, pickups are always being upgraded and improved. If something new and better comes out, you can take out the out-of-date ones and put in the new one.

The biggest disadvantage used to be that there are rarely onboard controls. That means that you couldn't adjust the volume and tone on the guitar. You had to buy a stand alone pre-amp. Now, many of the new generation of aftermarket pickups have onboard controls. This makes them a much more attractive option.

Factory Installed Pickups

Until the last 4-5 years, the biggest advantage of buying a guitar with a built-in pickup was having volume and tone controls on the guitar.

The most commonly used pickups were piezo pickups. These fit under the saddle on the bridge. Yes, they would make your guitar louder, but it really didn't sound acoustic. Some systems came with both a pickup and internal microphone combination. That made a nice sound, but it still didn't sound like your acoustic guitar.

The big change came in 2003 with the introduction of the Expression System by Taylor Guitars. You were finally able to get an accurate reproduction of your acoustic guitar. That changed the game for everyone involved in the acoustic guitar pickup business. Time will tell if anyone else comes up with as real a sounding pickup.

The biggest problem with a built-in pickup is that you're stuck with it. Switching to a new and improved pickup can be difficult. It's common for the control panel to be mounted in the side of the guitar. There's no guarantee that the new pickups controls will need the same size hole. You might be able to put in new electronics by the same manufacturer. But it would be very difficult to use any other brand.

Which is best for you? If you occasionally play an open mike at the local coffeehouse, a simple aftermarket soundhole pickup may work. If you play out often, you might like the ease of use of a built-in system. Your needs should help you decide which approach is best for you.

Chapter 10

Fit And Finish

A guitar's fit and finish can tell you a lot about the overall quality of the guitar. There are several things to look for when you're inspecting a potential new guitar.

Frets

The guitars fretwires should be smoothly polished on the tops and ends. This means that the tops shouldn't have any bumps, grooves or uneven areas. The ends of the fretwire at the edge of the fingerboard should be rounded and smoothly polished.

Pushing a string back and forth over the fretwire will let you know if it's snagging on anything. Gently run your finger along the edge of the neck. You should feel a smooth bump when your finger goes over the ends of the fretwires. There **shouldn't** be any sharp edges.

Tuning Gears

The tuning gears, or machine heads, are the metal objects that the strings are attached to on the headstock. When the knobs are turned there should be a change in the pitch of the strings. The knob should turn easily and smoothly. The tuners should be well mounted to the headstock.

Most guitar manufacturers don't make their own tuners. Good brand names in tuners include Waverly, Gotoh, Schaller and Ping.

Nut

The nut is the white piece of bone or plastic at the end of the guitar fingerboard. The ends of the nut should be flush with the edge of the fingerboard. There shouldn't be any sharp edges on the corners of the nut. The nut should have a polished look to it.

Although it varies with different manufacturers, in general, about half of the diameter of the string should be sunk into the nut. Here's a way to test if the

string slots in the nut are the correct depth or not. Press down each string separately at the 4th fret. Tap the string that you're holding down at the first fret. You should hear a clear *pinging* sound. This tells you that the nut is cut correctly.

Bridge

In the case of all guitar manufacturers, there are specifications that all guitars leaving the plant must meet. One of those is that the bridge be in the right place. If it's not, the guitar won't play in tune. So you rarely find a guitar with its bridge in the wrong place.

I have seen a couple of instances on inexpensive imports where the bridge was coming loose on the back edge. Probably a case of not enough adhesive being used. You can check this by butting a piece of paper against the back of the bridge. If there's a crack, the paper will slip under the bridge.

Neck Joint

Look at where the neck joins the body. There shouldn't be any gaps. Check the finish at all the points where the neck joins the body. Sometimes the finish isn't evenly applied in that area. The finish will have a lumpy look.

While we're at the neck joint, check for fret buzz on the upper frets. On nearly all guitars the fingerboard extension just rests on the guitars top. All other support of the fingerboard stops where the neck joins the body.

The problem with that is that sometimes there will be a hump starting at the 14th fret. Play the notes in that area. You want to be sure that the notes sound clearly, without any buzzing.

Buzzing can be caused if the wood has dried out. That makes the guitars top drop lower than the sides. Re-humidifying the guitar will usually fix that. Otherwise, pass on the guitar.

Position Markers

Position markers are white dots found at the 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 12th, 15th, and 17th frets. Sometimes the guitar maker will use a figure of some type instead of a dot.

A newer trend is guitars **without** position markers on the fingerboard. The manufacturer is going for a sleeker look. In either case, there will be small white dots in the **side** of the fingerboard by the largest string.

Position markers are used to quickly tell the player where they are on the fingerboard.

Look at the position markers and make sure that they aren't chipped or loose.

Check Intonation

A guitars intonation is how in tune the guitar is with itself. There are several things that can keep this from happening.

They include -

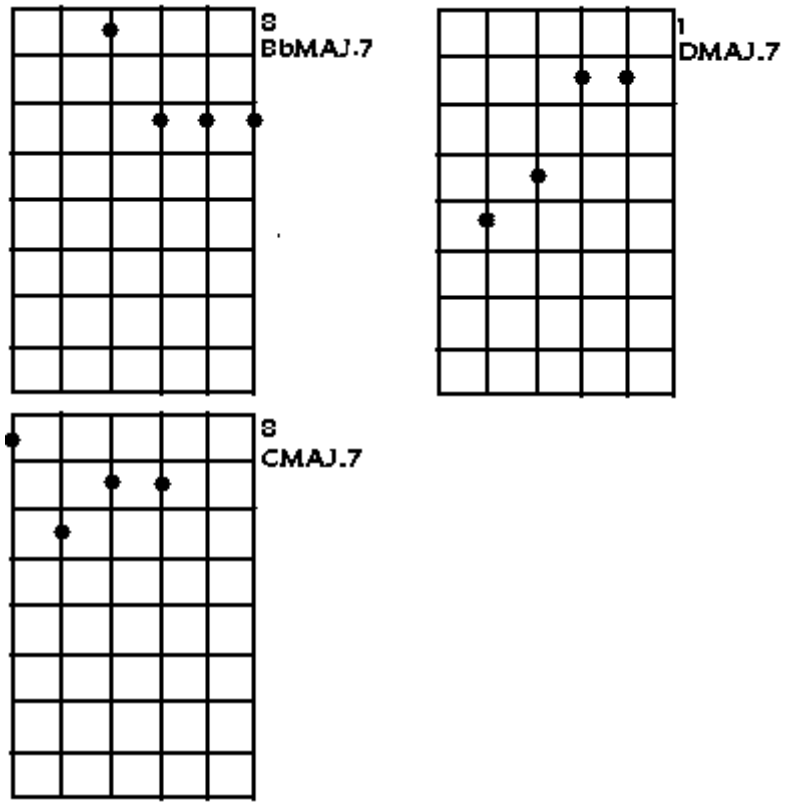
- the bridge being in the wrong place on the top
- the fretwires being placed incorrectly
- grooved or flat fretwires
- the slots in the nut being cut wrong
- the saddle being trimmed wrong
- excessive relief
- high action
- high frets
- worn out or defective strings

Most new guitars **shouldn't** have problems with intonation. That doesn't mean that they won't. The best way that I've found to check this is with some specific chords. I like to use four note 7^{th} chords. The notes of the chords that I use are on strings next to each other. Because they're next to each other, it's easier to tell if one of the notes is out of tune or not.

First make sure that the open strings are tuned properly. Then play each of the chords shown below. If the chords sound good, you're OK. If not, you might want to avoid that guitar.

This works the best for people who have some experience playing. If not guitar, some other instrument. If you're a brand new player, your ear may not be refined enough yet to tell if the chords are out of tune or not.

Here are the chords that I use:



You can move the chords to different places on the fingerboard.

Check Pickup

If you buy a guitar that comes with a pickup, be sure to check that it works. If you don't play, have the salesperson test it for you. Be sure that all of the knobs work and that there are no crackling sounds that might indicate a short in the wiring.

Look Inside

Finally, look into the guitars body through the soundhole. You'll want to look for things like globs of glue and rough braces. If there's sloppy workmanship in easy to see places, there's probably sloppy workmanship in areas that you can't see.

You may be new to guitars. But most of us have been judging things visually for our entire lives. Don't waste that experience!

Chapter 11

Plain Or Fancy

Some people are attracted to really dressed up guitars. Things like gold tuners and a lot of inlays. If you're someone who likes that kind of thing, then go for it! The choice of a guitar is a purely personal choice. There are a couple of things that you should think about before you take the plunge.

On guitars under about $1000, any extreme decoration isn't good. It may mean that the materials used aren't as good a quality as in a plain guitar that's the same price.

It can also hurt the re-sale of the instrument. The possible buyers of your guitar are narrowed down, too. Only people that like fancy guitars will be interested!

Having said that, if you find a guitar that you love, plain or fancy, buy it. If you don't, you may regret it later.

Chapter 12

Used Guitars

The alternative to buying a new guitar is to buy a used guitar. This can be a little trickier than buying new. But it can be a good option if you know what to look for.

For a beginner, buy from a reputable dealer. A dealer's livelihood and reputation are at stake when they sell a guitar. They gave the guitar a good exam when they took it in on trade. If they have an in-store repairman any issues should have been corrected. So buying a used guitar will be a pretty safe bet. There are still some things to keep an eye out for though.

Neck Angles

The tension that steel strings put on a neck can change the neck angle. The relationship between the bridge and neck has to be just right for the guitar to play correctly. Over time, the tension caused by the steel strings can change that relationship. The neck needs to be re-set. This is such a common occurrence that Martin Guitars offer a neck re-set as part of their warranty.

A neck re-set involves removing the neck from the guitar. After the neck is removed, the area where it mounts on the body has to be adjusted. The way that the guitar was constructed determines if that's easy or difficult.

Traditionally, the neck is glued into the neckblock. Sort of a male-female interaction. To unglue it, steam is injected into the joint and the parts are separated. They are then trimmed and re-glued.

On bolt-on necks, the process is much simpler. The neck is removed and the appropriate repair is done. Voila! The adjustment's made.

The bolt-on adjustment is obviously much easier. That means that it's cheaper. Should you pass up a guitar with a glued in neck if it needs a re-set? Not necessarily. You should find out what it costs and decide if the guitar's worth the additional expense.

The biggest indicator of the need for a neck re-set will be the strings height. Strings that are high above the fingerboard and don't respond to a truss rod adjustment, may need a neck re-set.

Think of it like this; the strings are attached at the headstock and bridge. As the neck joint weakens, it collapses away from the

strings. So you end up with the fingerboard moving away from the strings.

One temporary fix is to trim down the saddle. This does lower the strings. It doesn't fix the root problem though. If you see a guitar with just a little bit of a saddle sticking out of the bridge, that's why.

Bridges

The most common problem with bridges is if they've come unglued from the top. String tension pulls the bridge toward the nut. If the glue joint fails, it makes the back of the bridge separate from the top. You can check this by seeing if a piece of paper will slide under the back of the bridge.

This isn't a rare or guitar ruining condition. It just needs to be re-glued and clamped. That's a job best done by a competent repairperson. If you're considering buying a guitar in this condition, figure in the cost of repair.

Cracks

Guitars can develop cracks in the wood. While it may be scary to see a crack in your prized 6-string, it doesn't mean that the guitar's ruined. It **does** mean that your guitar has become dried out.

Guitars prefer a Relative Humidity of about 50% and a temperature around 72 degrees Fahrenheit. If the humidity falls below that, cracks can appear in the guitar.

Most cracks can be repaired. The repairperson will start by re-humidifying the guitar. She will then take a small wooden patch and glue it in

place, inside the guitar, over the crack.

If you're buying a used guitar and see a repaired crack, don't let it keep you from buying the guitar. If the repair's been done well, the guitar should be fine.

There's something else to check on a guitar with a patched crack. That's the fret ends.

Conditions dry enough to crack the guitar may have caused sharp fret ends. Metal fret wires don't shrink from dryness. Wooden guitar necks do.

This can lead to sharp metal fretwires sticking out past the edge of the guitars neck. Like cracks, these can be repaired.

The repairperson will have to file the sharp ends until they're smooth.

Is Used A Good Bargain

Is buying a used guitar actually a bargain? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. It depends on several things.

How much will it cost to get the guitar in good condition? Will that cost, added to the purchase price, be more than the guitar is worth? Not more than the guitar is worth as a **new** guitar. Rather, more than the cost of the same model as a **used** guitar that needs no repairs.

One way to find the right price for a used guitar is by using a Blue Book. There are Blue Books for guitars just like there are for cars. Orion's is a popular one. Get the brand, model number, and if possible, serial number of the guitar. Look it up and figure out what it's really worth before you buy.

A real advantage to buying a used guitar is that you won't take the depreciation on it. The depreciation that the guitar takes has already occurred with the original owner. Because of that, you'll get more of your money back if you decide to sell the guitar later.

Pre-Purchase Appraisal

If you're buying a used guitar from an individual, see if you can take it to an individual repairperson before purchasing. A repair shop that isn't part of a retail store will probably give you a more honest appraisal. They have nothing to gain by slanting their report on the appraised guitars condition. They won't be trying to sell you a new guitar instead of the one that you've brought in.

Suggest that the seller drop it off at the repairman's. The repairman can go over it and the owner can pick it back up. Then **you** pay the repairman. This only works in a situation of selling/buying an expensive guitar. Nobody will do that for a $149 import!

Buying a used guitar can be a great way to get a great guitar at a bargain.

Chapter 13

Budget

How much should you spend on your new guitar? That's a tough question to answer. Retailers usually discount 30%-40% off of the list price of a production guitar. A production guitar is one made in high volume by a guitar manufacturing company. Examples of these are stock models made by companies like Taylor, Martin, Yamaha and Alvarez.

There is less of a discount on models made by high-end "Boutique" builders. Examples of this are guitars by Collings, Froggy Bottoms, Sobell, and Lakewood. These companies may make only 200-300 guitars a year out of the highest quality materials.

Modern manufacturing methods and the globalization of manufacturing have made good quality guitars available for everyone. You can buy an easy to play, well made guitar for $300-$400 USD. Of course, there's a big difference between a $400 and $4000 USD guitar!

What is affordable to one person won't be affordable to someone else. If you're a violinist playing a $12,000 USD violin with a $2,000 USD bow then a $3,000 USD guitar may be in your budget. If you're a student with a part-time job, a $500 USD guitar may be out of reach.

There is one thing that's always true. If there's only a $100-S200 USD between what you can now afford and what you want, you should wait. Wait until you can get what you want. If you don't, you'll never be happy with what you settle for.

Chapter 14

The Expert

Sometimes people take a friend who plays guitar with them when they shop. That person is supposed to be the expert that helps them choose their new guitar. That's not always a good idea.

There are millions of people who play guitar. And there are thousands of people who sell guitars. But there is only one person completely devoted to your happiness. That's you. It doesn't matter how well meaning your expert is. Their opinion will still be biased.

Here are some situations that I've seen when selling guitars:

- The expert doesn't want their friend to have a better guitar than they have. If the friend finds his dream guitar and can easily afford it, the expert still tries to talk him out of it.

- Teacher with student – "Put your money on lessons, not a new instrument".

- Expert – "Look at what I can play". Puts on concert for his buddy and everyone else in the store. Buddy never picks up a guitar, let alone buys one

- Expert has no idea of what he's doing but can't admit it. His friend ends up with the totally wrong guitar.

- The expert is trying to sell his buddy his own guitar. He puts down every guitar that his buddy likes. Is expert's guitar actually the best one for his friend?

Even with the best intentions, the expert's frequently wrong. Have you ever gotten a gift that you hated? The person giving it to you wanted it to be the right gift. They just didn't know you well enough to get you what you **really** wanted or **needed**. In this case they don't know how to help you choose what you need.

That's why it's a good idea to deal with professionals at a shop that you trust and are comfortable with. You know what their ultimate motivation is; money.

Money to continue doing what they love to do. Being around guitars and other people with a love of guitars. There's only one way that they can do that. And that's to make sure that their customers are happy with the service, product, treatment and price that they get from them.

Deal with a professional, not an "expert".

Chapter 15

The Audition

Guitar shopping is like holding an audition. Each instrument auditions to be your new guitar. Knowing that, it's important to create a level playing field. The best way to do that is to eliminate as many variables as possible. Doing this will let you hear what the real differences are.

Here's how to do that. Play exactly the same song on each instrument. This takes the song out of the equation. That just leaves how they play and sound. That's what you're going for, isn't it? How the guitar plays and sounds?

What if you're a beginner that can't play a single chord? That's ok. The salesperson that's helping you can probably play. Have her play exactly the same thing on each guitar. Even if you can play, have her play for you. Stand in front of the guitar when she's playing it.

Guitars are designed to project sound forward. Standing in front of it while someone else plays gives you a real idea of what it sounds like.

After that, it's a little bit like an eye exam. "Do you like this guitar better or this one? Guitar one or guitar two?" Play the guitars that you're interested in one after the other. Play exactly the same songs and eliminate the guitar that you like the least.

Next, compare the one that you liked the most with the next candidate. Continue to use exactly the same process. By doing this you separate guitars that you sort of like from "the one".

If you're not making an immediate purchase, write down the brand and model number of the one that you liked the most. That way you'll remember which one it was the next time that you go to that shop. It can really help if the store has a couple of hundred guitars hanging on the wall!

Two Stores, Two Guitars

The only problem with this approach is if you like guitars in two different stores. How do you deal with that?

Find out the return policy of both stores. Buy the guitar that you like at the first store. Take that guitar to the second store. Then do your comparison.

The problem with this is if you allow yourself to be "sold" at the second store. You can't let the salesperson at the second store convince you that their guitar is better. You're better off being allowed to play both guitars by yourself with no interruptions. But don't get mad if the salesman tries to sell you on his guitar. That's his job.

If you decide on the guitar in the second store, take the first one back. That's where the second danger lies. To get a refund the guitar has to be in the same condition that you bought it in. So you have to be **really careful.**

Only you can decide if doing this is worth the risk to you.

Intuition

There's one more factor to take a look at.

Intuition. Also known as your "gut reaction". That voice that tells you "this is the one". This may be one of the most important factors when it comes to buying a new guitar.

The only guitars that I've kept for very long are the ones that I had a strong gut reaction to. The only guitars that I've seen customers keep for long were ones that they had a gut reaction to.

It's an important voice, so please, don't ignore it.

Chapter 16

Accessories

Cases

So you've made your decision and bought your new guitar. There are a couple of accessories that you'll need to go with it.

For starters, there's the case. A hardshell case is your best bet for protecting your guitar against accidental nicks and scrapes. It will also help protect your guitar from extreme heat and cold and humidity fluctuations.

On many guitars a case is included in the purchase price. If it isn't, allow room in your budget for one. My personal preference is the ones made out of molded plastic. They can get pretty scuffed up, but there's no fabric to tear and then repair.

A second choice is a gig bag. These are guitar shaped bags with straps and zippered compartments. The amount of padding depends on the quality, and usually cost, of the bag. They are convenient to use but don't offer as much protection as a hardshell case.

The last choice is a chipboard case. Chipboard is a type of heavy cardboard. It offers very little protection against damage and weather. Chipboard cases aren't as common now. The gig bag has pretty much taken its place.

Tuners

You'll also need something to help you tune your guitar. Tuning forks, pitch pipes, and electronic tuners are the most commonly used devices. Of these three, I suggest the electronic tuner.

An electronic tuner will have a meter display that uses either a light or needle. Because of that, you can see if your guitar is in tune or not. It's easier for most beginners than trying to match pitches by ear.

Humidifiers

The other accessory that I feel is essential is a humidifier. Many areas have at least one season that requires heating the home. This may be combined with a dry climate.

A lack of humidity can cause huge problems with your guitar. The problems may develop slowly over time. This can make them hard to notice before they get bad. No manufacturer will cover repairs under warranty that are caused by negligence.

Speaking of warranty, be sure to mail in your warranty card. It's tough to get warranty work done if you haven't registered your purchase!

There are a ton of other accessories available for the guitar. A case, humidifier and tuner are the essentials that you need.

Chapter 17

Care

Guitar Stands

There are some simple things that you can do to make sure that your guitar stays in good shape. One of the most important things is to keep it in its case when you're not playing it.

It's handy to have it sitting out on its stand. You can grab it at a moments notice. And it is easier to admire its beauty when it's out on its guitar stand.

It's also a lot easier for Rover or one of the kids to accidentally knock it over.

Keeping the guitar in its case also helps protect it from extremes in humidity and temperature.

Clean and Polish

Another good practice to get into is washing your hands before you play. This keeps the guitar clean and extends the life of the strings.

Smudges and fingerprints will still occur. There are a lot of good spray-on cleaner/polishes on the market made just for stringed instruments. Experiment and see which one you like best.

Don't use furniture polish. It will leave a buildup on the guitar and may damage the finish.

Temperature and Humidity

There are a couple of rules of thumb to follow about temperature and humidity. You need to begin using your humidifier when it becomes cool enough to run your furnace. In a dry climate use it whenever the humidity falls under 50%.

If you only own one or two guitars, an in-instrument humidifier will be fine. If you own several instruments, you might want to use a console type humidifier. A hygrometer will take the guess work out of whether you need to be humidifying or not.

Temperature extremes can be just as damaging as incorrect humidity can be to your guitar. Since guitars are glued together, letting them become too hot can cause them to come unglued. Common problem areas are the bridge and neck joint.

A cold guitar that's warmed up too quickly can develop finish problems. The guitars wood and finish expand and contract at different rates. If a cold guitar is warmed up too fast it can develop cracks in the finish.

How do you keep these problems from happening?

The easiest way is to **treat your guitar like you would a child or pet**. Don't leave it in a hot car. Make sure that it warms up slowly when the weather is freezing. By following this simple idea, you can save yourself a ton of problems.

Guitar Lessons

Guitar lessons don't exactly fall under guitar care. But they are an important question for both new and more experienced players.

I think that lessons for beginning players are crucial. That's when physical habits are developed. That's also when practice habits are developed.

For the more experienced player, lessons can provide knowledge that shows new approaches to old material.

The key to good lessons is a good teacher. But the teacher is only part of the answer. The student has to practice.

Buying a new guitar is one of life's great joys. I hope that the information in this book helps you buy the guitar that's best for you.

Suggestions Or Comments?

I would love to hear your comments about this book. If you would like to comment, you can contact me here.

How I Created This E-Book

I've always enjoyed writing. It was an area that I did well in at school. And I really enjoy buying and selling guitars. Why not write a book about how to buy an acoustic guitar?

I had the idea for this e-book but didn't know how to create it. So I started looking for information about how to write and produce an e-book. That's when I found this great book on how to create ebooks.

The process did take some work, but the instructions were clearly laid out. Even for a non- techie like me.

Of course, having a product to offer doesn't matter if no one sees it. That's why I'm lucky to have found SiteBuildIt. Take a few minutes to check it out.

The how-to instructions from the e-book and the traffic from my website go hand in hand. Without both of them I wouldn't be able to share this information with you.

Glossary

Action- the height of the strings from the fretboard. The action of a guitar is the result of adjustments in the nut, saddle, and truss rod.

Back- The portion of the guitar that faces toward the guitarist's body when the guitar is held in playing position.

Body- The wooden sound chamber that makes up the bulk of the guitar.

Boutique Guitars- Guitars made in small lots or one at the time frequently using traditional guitar making techniques. Boutique builders are generally highly selective in their choice of materials and their instruments are priced accordingly.

Bouts- The rounded portions of the guitar's body. The neck intersects the upper bout, the narrower of the two bouts. The strings attach to the bridge on lower bout.

Bridge- Raised portion of guitar on the soundboard that the strings are attached to.

Bridge Pins- Small tapered cylinders of plastic, bone or brass used to hold the end of the guitar string in the bridge.

Cutaway- Notch constructed in the treble side of the guitar body's upper bout.

Frets- The area lying between the fretwires on the fretboard.

Fretboard- The strip of wood that's glued to the face of the neck that the strings are depressed against. Also commonly called the fingerboard.

Fretwire- Metal strips of wire set into the fretboard at predetermined intervals to change the pitch of the strings.

Headstock-The smallest end of the guitar to which the strings are attached via the tuners. The manufacturers name and /or logo are usually displayed on the headstock.

Neck- Wooden half cylindrical shaft attaching to the body at one end and the headstock at the other end with the strings resting above it.

Nut- A slotted piece of plastic or bone mounted at the end of the fingerboard that the strings rest in.

Nut slot- The channel adjacent to the headstock at the end of the fingerboard that the nut rests in

Production guitars- Guitars made by large guitar manufacturers. Each model is usually made in large quantities with some degree of mechanized tooling.

Relief- The amount of curve in the guitars neck. Some relief is necessary to keep the strings from buzzing against the fretboard.

Saddle- Plastic or bone piece mounted in bridge that the strings cross over.

Sides- Curved pieces of wood that the soundboard and back are attached to, literally the sides of the guitar

.

Soundboard- The portion of the guitar's body that faces away from the guitarist's body when the guitar is held in playing position. Also referred to as the top or face of the guitar.

Tuning Machines - Sometimes referred to as machine heads or tuners. Geared mechanisms attached to headstock to increase or decrease tension on the strings, causing a raising or lowering of the pitch of the string.

Truss rod- a metal rod, threaded on one end, that can be tightened or loosened to create convex or concave movement in the guitar neck The truss rod is accessed either through the sound hole in the guitar's top or through a cavity in the guitar's headstock