

Pricing and Ordering

Till Guitars are individually made and individually priced. Generally speaking though, "new" full-size guitars start at about \$2500. My new "Shorty Joe" model was designed to be less expensive - starting at about \$1200, but hardware and wood choices can drive the price up from there.

I'm serious when I say my guitars are "Handmade". A TG-250 model with f-holes and a setneck will take me between 75 and a hundred hours to build, which equals about two weeks of shop time - spread out over a few months. And a decent hardware package will cost about \$500. Simple math will give you an idea of my take (minus utilities, taxes, tool maintenance, advertising, etc.). Please don't think I'm rakin' you over the coals - like the CNC guys do.

Till Guitars are available directly from me... shop direct. I do not have any retail dealers because... where to start... for one, I never want to see how cheaply I can make a guitar. Nor do I want to know how many I can build before lunch.

[See my Private Stock Guitars Here](#)

My "Private Stock" guitars are usually built at a more leisurely pace than my "custom" orders, sometimes taking years to complete. They often feature more fun and experimental woodworking ideas than my custom orders because I'm not under any sort of time pressure.

Private stock guitars also get the added benefit of me tinkering with them until they're nicely dialed in. There are still some options available to you even after they're completed, though... like hardware brands and color, pickups, switching schemes... to name a few. You usually just have to pay for the difference in my cost for these sorts of things.

The very best deals are reserved for those who venture into my shop in Westlake Village, Ca. I have things up in the rafters that might be just what you're after. Demos, prototypes... and guitars I just haven't gotten around to completing. I might even be able to help you with your own projects. Please remember to visit me when you're in Southern California.

Custom Orders

Now, don't get me wrong. I welcome Custom Guitar orders. I'm always up for someone else's good ideas. You can provide me with your dream list of features - the more detailed, the better. Then I can give you a good idea of the cost and we can go on from there.

I can build a lot of guitar for as little as \$2,500. That would include your choice of many species of cap woods with varying degrees of figure.

Glued in Setnecks will add a few hundred dollars. Whammies are more. Everything is more, but I don't get all nit-picky. Just know that the real premium woods are quite pricey. You're welcome to provide your own lumber, as well.

One thing to note is that the supply chain has been shaken up since the horrible earthquake off the coast of Japan. Many of the better guitar parts factories were located in the worst hit areas and I'm not sure they're back up to speed, yet. "Back-orders" are the rule these days.

Things To Consider Before Ordering Your Custom Till Guitar: (click "next")

Woods

There must be a hundred books on the subject. Someday I'll read one. I've made a concerted effort to ignore the myths that abound in guitar conversations. There are some truisms out there like Mahogany equals mellow and warm while Ash is bright and twangy. But to call one better than the other isn't for me to say. By now I can generally "steer" the tone of a guitar with careful choices of materials and pickups, anyway.

Most of what you read only has to do with the "Big Two" guitar companies. Ash vs Alder, Maple vs Mahogany...the usuals. But don't forget, we're designing a Till Guitar here. We don't have to worry about making a million more just like it. (10 million?)

I've made a point of using as many different species of wood that I can find. Honestly, beauty is probably my main criteria. If it has flames, swirls, burls or birdseyes I'm gonna buy it and make it into a guitar. If ever there was something objectionable about the tone, a different choice of pickups will save the day. The sky is the limit as far as woods go, in my book.

Weight is a big concern, though. But through experimentation I've developed various construction methods that can bring out the best qualities in just about any wood. Heavy woods can be hollowed out, brittle sounding woods can be fattened up with less dense woods...

Guitar building is almost like cooking... a little bit of this, a little bit of that...

Scale Lengths

The scale length is the distance between the nut and the saddle. The longer the scale, the wider the fret spacing. But there's more involved with scale lengths than just comfort, although that is a major concern - especially for people with short fingers like mine. What you might not realize is that the longer the scale, the more tension is required to reach the same pitch as with a shorter scale. That's why it's so much easier to bend strings on the shorter Les Paul than on a Strat. (Just wait till you play a Shorty Joe!)

On the other hand, the more tension on a string, the more power it has. That's why Telecasters sound so good on the

low strings. I believe a longer scale brings out more tone from the wood.

The Till Guitars TG-100 comes standard with a Gibsonesque 24 3/4 inch scale. I hesitate to go any longer on this model because it might tip forward - like an SG. We have to be very careful with neck to body weight ratios for the same reason.

But the TG-250 is balanced perfectly for a 25 1/2 inch Fender scale, which means that a shorter scale would be no problem. In fact, the "Lady on the Beach" rocks mightily with a short scale. The 25 inch scale (the bastard scale) is also an option because I now make my own fretboards to any scale. Baritones included.

Fretboard Radius

Smaller radiused fretboards (less than 10 inch) can be very comfortable to play but strings tend to fret-out when you bend them. A twelve inch radius seems to be just about perfect. And most bridges are designed for a 12 inch radius. Still, any radius is available including compound ones. No radius is also an option.

Other fretboard options include dots or no dots. Special inlays are a possibility, but I'd likely have someone else do them as inlay work is not my specialty.

Frets

22 seems to be the magic number of frets on both of my guitar models to deliver the widest range of tones - especially when I go with two humbuckers. Any more frets means the neck pickup has to be slid back toward the bridge, lessening the tonal richness. However, it's your guitar. I'll see what I can do.

The TG-100 will accomodate 24 frets without any modifications to the body. You might be able to convince me to go 25 frets on the TG-250, but I've yet to attempt such nonsense.

Going Fretless is an option, too.

All fretsizes are available too. As a blues playing chicken-picker I tend to prefer jumbo frets. My vibrato improves when my fingertips don't rub on the fretboard. Taller frets can also be redressed a few times before needing to be replaced.

However, Jazz players are known to prefer smaller frets (and elbow patches).

Neck/Body Joints

I now offer all three types of neck/body connections: Bolt-on, glued in (setneck) and neck-through-body. All three have their own benefits and drawbacks.

Bolt-on Necks are fitted into a 3 1/8 inch long routed pocket and attached to the body with 4 large stainless steel screws. The neck can easily be replaced should anything catastrophic occur. But some people don't like the brick wall (the heel) you hit where the neck meets the body. I do my best to minimize the abruptness of the neck/body transition by rounding and recessing the heel.

I can sculpt the heel further by using countersunk metal ferrules such as you might find on some Ibanez guitars. But I can't swear to the strength of this method. I'll only use ferrules in harder, more dense body woods.

A good fitting neck will cause no noticeable loss of sustain and resonance. I get lots of compliments on the acoustic properties of my bolt-on models. The fact that they're easier to build will be reflected in the final price.

Strats and Teles have bolt-on necks.

Neck-Through-Body construction provides for the smoothest neck/body transition because I can sculpt the heel down to nothing without loss of strength.

However, some people say that having the dense neck woods running the length of the guitar can strangle the frequency response. That can be good or bad, depending on the style of music you play and the amp you use. Modern solidstate amps love neck-thrus while vintage tube amps can sound a bit flat and stale. Be sure to look into this before ordering a neck-thru.

The original B.C.Richs had neck-through-body construction.

Setnecks give you the best of both worlds. Great sustain and easy access to the highest frets. My setnecks extend into the body about 5 inches (depending on pickup selection) which allows me to sculpt the heel down to where you hardly feel it.

And, a skilled repair person can replace the neck should the unthinkable happen (I am not volunteering to do this).

Les Pauls have Setnecks

BODY CONSTRUCTION

Most of my guitars have semi-hollow bodies. I like the throaty, almost human tone that the hollowness creates. I often laminate a beautiful cap and back to a lyre-like Alder center core (3 layers). Or, sometimes I'll hollow out a thick piece of wood, then glue on just a cap (2 layers). Notable factory-made semi-hollow body electric guitars include Gibson's ES-335 series, 12 string Rickenbackers and the McCarty line of PRS guitars.

I occasionally build solid-body guitars with one, two or three layers (sometimes more). Solid bodies are often preferred by players who play at very loud stage volumes because they are less likely to cause unwanted feedback. (note: I have never had a problem with unwanted feedback on my semi-hollow models)

I have yet to attempt a full hollow-body model, though I plan to someday.

NECK SHAPES

Definitely something to consider. Some argue, and I tend to agree, that a fatter neck tends reduce fatigue. It was explained to me by showing how a pair of channel-lock plyers grip wide things more powerfully than regular plyers. Try picturing that in your mind.

There's a whole alphabet of descriptions for neck shapes: C, D, U, V... I admit to being a little hazy on the differences, so let's plan to spend some time on this issue.

I'm clear on V-shapes, though. You can tell a V-shape by the ridge that runs down the back of the neck. Guys who like to wear their axes down at their knees often hook their thumbs over the top of the fretboard. V-shaped necks can help accomodate this style. But V-shaped necks aren't for everybody and resales can be more difficult.

I think a C-shape means that the curvature of the neck continues up around the fretboard. I've often heard it said that modern Telecasters have C-shaped necks.

Whereas U-shapes don't curve back over the fretboard edges.

If you have a guitar with a favorite neck shape we could take strategic measurements and try to duplicate it.

FRETBOARDS

I recommend having at least one on every guitar. I make most of my own, but I also order some of the more common woods like rosewood and ebony. Any wood can be used, but hardness is a virtue both tonewise and otherwise. Your fingertips will create ruts and divots in softer woods. I have a pretty good idea of how different woods work together and I'd give you my best opinion if I saw any potential problems with whatever wood you choose.

PICKUPS

I'm a huge fan of Seymour Duncan and his pickups. I've been through his shop in Santa Barbara, Ca. many times and I see how dedicated his employees are to making the perfect pickup for the job, He's got all the bases covered from blues to jazz, country to metal. He's made his entire catalog available to me including humbuckers, singlecoil pickups, P-90s and the new P-Rail. Even the Benedetto line. Be sure to check out SeymourDuncan.com to read up on all he's got cooking.

Having said that, I am open to using any pickup you desire. In recent years pickup winding machines (and plans for making them) have become quite popular. There are probably as many pickup makers as there are guitar makers.

SWITCHING and WIRING

Clever switching can expand the tonal range of a guitar immensely. For instance, just by adding a coil-tap switch to a guitar with humbuckers lets you go from a throaty growl to a jangly twang at the flip of said switch. Like wearing two guitars at once! Coil-tapping is practically a standard feature on my guitars. It can be done with mini-toggle switches, push/pull potentiometer switches or by wiring a pot to fade in or out one of the humbucker coils for what Seymour refers to as "Dial-a-tap". I often refer to this page of Seymour Duncan's website for great ideas on switching and tone modifying.

FINISHING

Finishing is the only skill I didn't already possess when I got into guitar making 18 years ago. But I have finished every Till Guitar (over 200 and counting) except one. That was a custom order (#173) for a polyurethane finish that I farmed out to my friend and famed guitar finisher Pat Wilkins. Though polyurethane is still an option, I can't stand the stuff. I feel that its hardness and thickness strangles the "natural" tone of guitars. (Don't get me started!)

Instead, I prefer the plyability, repairability and tradition of Nitrocellulose Lacquer, which I apply myself. It goes on in multiple thin coats and allows the wood to "breathe".

Lacquer also ages nicely. Maybe you've noticed the trend of "relic" guitars. This, I believe, came about because modern factory guitars with polypoisonothane finishes simply don't wear out! After ten or 20 years they still look like they did when they first got off the boat.

But vintage guitars with lacquer finishes age beautifully, showing every bit of blood, sweat and soul you've poured into them.

Oil finishes are also a valid option, but I've only done a few. Oils, in my opinion, are best on darker, denser woods like Cocobolo, Bubinga and others. Lighter, softer woods seem to show more dirt and grime with oil finishes.

Water-based clear finishes are improving all the time and I will be experimenting with it soon... stay tuned.

I use aniline dyes for color. I apply it directly to the wood with rags. Then I apply clear lacquer over it.

As you see, there is a lot involved in building a custom guitar. You don't have to concern yourself with any of it, though. You can simply point to any guitar you like and say, "make it like that one".