What makes a great guitar? For us at Schoenberg Guitars understanding the older classic models is a means to an end. Looking at individual design elements - like tone woods, bracing patterns, methods of construction - we believe strongly that there is great advantage in learning from past traditions, and expanding into the present.

We began in that tradition, having partnered with C.F. Martin for the eight years they built Schoenberg guitars with us. Our guitars, then, share the same DNA as the first OM Martins. For this reason we continue to deepen our understanding of the older designs of the great pre-war guitars, and then add what we've gleaned from years of playing these beauties.

Each vintage instrument was a product of its time, responding to, and sometimes having influence over, the music and its technology - for example, the heavy string gauges, blues and cowboy artists, big bands. Today we have different needs; string gauges are much lighter; guitar-playing styles are quite different, recording and performing technology is vastly changed.

What hasn't changed is our recognition of what makes beautiful tone in a guitar and what makes an instrument a pleasure to play. By taking the best from past designs and adding subtle improvements, our Schoenberg guitars embody these essential qualities to an uncommon degree.

Since 1985 we've been producing what we believe to be the highest quality concert-grade instruments, good enough for even the most demanding players; guitars known for the beauty and completeness of their tone, their phenomenal responsiveness, their playability, and much more. In this way we honor our roots, even as we work to surpass them.

Schoenberg Models

There are two basic Schoenberg models: the 'Soloist' is the 14-fret body; the 'Standard' is the 12-fret model. Both come in 0.00 or 000 (OM) size, with or without cutaway, and in various tonewood combinations. We are also open to discussing custom sizes, scale lengths, and specifications.

Basic string spacing for us is 1-13/16" width at the nut and 2-3/8" at the bridge, with a 25.4" scale length. Rosettes and purflings are ebony and maple, with wooden or ivoroid bindings. Backs and sides are Indian rosewood or mahogany with various spruce topwoods available. Necks are genuine mahogany.

Finishes are nitrocellulose, oil varnish or French polish.

Instruments also include a premium hard-shell case.

Some options - like custom inlay, premium materials, the pyramid bridge, cutaways, and the like - are upgrades. Some custom wood choices include: Brazilian rosewood, Tasmanian blackwood, black cocobolo, koa, Malaysian blackwood, and European, Adirondack, and Engelmann spruces.
One of the most important elements of a Schoenberg is the tone-wood/spruce combination. We look for combinations that will best fix the tonal range a player may want in a guitar. We’ve found through our twenty-plus years of experience building fine guitars that certain combinations of wood just seem ‘right.’ And other combinations (that may not always be the obvious ones) bring a transcendent musicality to a guitar’s tonal envelope.

We also place great emphasis on the playability of our guitars, which means, for one thing, getting the neck shape right. Some of the 1929 OM’s had neck shapes we consider timeless. We recognize their quality and, if anything, try to improve upon them.

The Schoenberg Soloist, the 14-fret body style, is based on the 1929 OM. It’s a guitar with great tonal balance, and known for its musical versatility. The pictured Soloist is Madagascar rosewood and red spruce, with snakewood bindings and a belly bridge, built by Bruce Sexauer.

"A recent purchaser of a Soloist said: ‘I played it and loved it... It’s made for my hands and it’s a living, breathing organism when played.’"

The Schoenberg Soloist 00 is a new concept: a 00-sized Orchestra Model. You’d be very surprised by the big, full sound that comes out of this smaller box. We also believe that the Soloist 00 offers exceptional balance between the bass and treble; the result is a tonal clarity unusual in other size bodies. This guitar’s back & sides are Indian rosewood, the top is Engelmann spruce, the finish is French polish. Decoration here is based on a 1929 style 21, with rosette herringbone style and pyramid bridge. The neck is a slim, perfectly shaped OM style neck. The builder is Robert Anderson, from Victoria, BC.

We do the Schoenberg Standard because of the unique quality of sound that resides only in the 12-fret body. There’s a throaty, rich tone that combines with an openness, a freeing-up of tone that is very exciting. Combined with a cutaway, this guitar offers the best of both worlds: easy access to the upper frets and the classic signature tone of the 12-fret guitar. The photographed guitar is a 000 of European spruce and Brazilian rosewood, the standard rosewood of the classic guitars.

The Schoenberg OM-45 Deluxe is our unabashed emulation of one of the most beautiful guitars in the world. We base ours on the amazing 1930 OM-45 Deluxe that was Eric’s personal guitar for over 20 years, so it’s as close to the original as possible. C.F. Martin & Co. made fourteen in 1930, their top catalogued model of all time; we are well on our way to having made the same number. As in the original, we use only the highest grade Brazilian rosewood, and, for topwoods, the best spruce available.
Options specific to this model include:
- Old style bar frets
- Ebony rod in neck (instead of adjustable rod)
- Gold engraved banjo tuners
- Special Calton case

The Schoenberg OM-45 Deluxe Cutaway is a more recent iteration of our Deluxe model. This particular guitar was made with the finest materials available, old growth Brazilian rosewood with particularly straight grain, and with the owner's name inlaid on the last fret. It has the same specs as the above Deluxe except for a different pearl treatment around the neck heel/cutaway join. The builder was Bruce Sexauer. There is a second Schoenberg Deluxe Cutaway, a left-handed example, constructed by Alan Perlman.

Luthiers

The roster of Schoenberg luthiers from over the years is a 'modern Golden Age' who's-who: C.F. Martin & Co., Dana Bourgeois, T.J. Thompson, Julius Borges. Today the premiere luthiers still collaborate with Eric to create great guitars: Bruce Sexauer, who has built the greatest number of modern Schoenbergs, joined by Robert Anderson and James Russell, along with Alan Perlman, John Slobod and Stewart Port. Each builder brings unique strengths to the process to help us tailor guitars to each potential player's tastes and musical needs.

Prices

Prices for Schoenberg Guitars start at $7,995, for a base model with all basic woods chosen for their superior acoustic properties. Options are always possible and worked out with each customer, as is the final cost of each instrument.

How To Order Your Schoenberg Guitar

At Schoenberg Guitars we believe in collaboration – each superb luthier works directly with Eric, who is known for his world-class musical mind and expertise in acoustic guitars, qualities he brings to the building of each guitar. Together, we are able to build guitars that are "the last word" in tone and responsiveness.

We invite you to call us to see how we can find the right guitar for you. Working with Eric, you can investigate the various combinations of wood available. With his deep knowledge of vintage guitars and his wide-ranging experience as a performing musician, Eric can also discuss your playing style and preferences in body shape and size.

A superior instrument can make us better guitarists and also help us make music that best expresses who we are.

With us to guide you, we at Schoenberg Guitars can put a superior guitar in your hands – and maybe the guitar that will best match your deepest musical self.

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(415) 789-0846 • www.om28.com
Eric Schoenberg

Eric’s love affair with the guitar began in 1959. He started teaching in the early Sixties and before long became the second-half of a duo with his cousin, Dave Laibman, helping Dave perform his amazing, ground-breaking arrangements of classical ragtime. Their album, Contemporary Ragtime Guitar, on Folkways Records, is considered a classic and remains a benchmark for today’s fingerstyle players. In the early Seventies Eric began touring the United States, Europe and Japan playing his innovative arrangements of the classical rags, traditional folk and Celtic music, the blues, country, and The Beatles, and making a lasting contribution to the fingerstyle repertoire. Eric also released two solo albums, Acoustic Guitar and Steel Strings, on Rounder Records. He continues to perform (Australia, in 2005) and record, most recently with Richard Schlottz on Late Night Conversations, and has written a book, Fingerpicking Beatles. He runs a concert series out of his Tiburon guitar shop, where, as an acknowledged expert in vintage instruments, Eric appraises old Martins, Gibsons, Stellas, and the like. The shop, Eric Schoenberg Guitars, was recently called one of the ten best in the U.S. to visit to learn about vintage guitars.

The Schoenberg Guitars Story

As a professional fingerstyle guitarist Eric learned through experience that all guitars are not created equal. He discovered in the Sixties that the Martin Orchestra Model (OM), produced only from late 1929 through 1933, had qualities possessed by no other guitars. “The tonal wonder of the 1929-30 guitars to me is the explosive response, the full, complete tone from bare fingers. It’s a magic thing, like the guitar is alive and kicking, giving back to the musician as much as he [or] she is putting in,” he says. The balance, projection, and responsiveness of these guitars really stood out to him—and he heard something in these guitars no one else did. Eric’s strengths as a guitarist led him to these qualities in the first place—especially his superb touch and his near-obsession with creating great tone as he plays. Later, Eric would pioneer the revival of the OM, almost single-handedly. Also, the seeds were planted—Eric had found the archetype for the guitars that would follow—his guitars.
It was so difficult to find these original guitars in good condition—or any new guitars like them. He went to talk to Martin. He wanted to see them again build these fine instruments. "It took years of cajoling to get them to make OMs," Eric reports. In 1969 Eric was finally able to order a batch of six OM-28s through the Folklore Center in Manhattan. They were the first OMs Martin had made since 1933. Then, later, Eric ordered more OMs from Martin through his Massachusetts shop—six "Special" OM-45s from Martin’s Custom Shop in 1977.

Eric was still playing the early guitars in performance when, in the early Eighties, after builder and repairman Dana Bourgeois had worked on "some two dozen" of the early pre-war Martin Orchestra Models for Eric, he had an impulse to build an OM for Eric with the one non-traditional design element Eric was hungry for—a cutaway.

Schoenberg Guitars, then, started with one guitar. Eric would work with Dana to develop the specs. They would base much of this new guitar on a specific Martin OM from 1931, attempting to replicate the same neck shape, and the lightness of the bridge plate and bracing (Martin stopped using scalloped braces from 1944 through the mid-Seventies). They would attempt to voice this new guitar in a way that would improve upon the original by applying hand-building techniques to the original factory specs. This involved hand-splitting the braces and ‘tap-tuning’ the top, back and assembled box. Then they would add the cutaway.

This would become the prototype they took to Chris Martin, who got the project going—a partnership to create multiples of this design that improved upon something Martin had abandoned in 1933. Dana’s "hand-voiced" tops would be integrated into Martin’s production line: guitar parts would be fabricated by Dana in Maine, according to specifications developed by Eric and Dana, in order to meet Eric’s notion of what a great guitar would feel like and sound like. These "kits" would then be assembled and finished with lacquer by Martin. This would be Martin’s first experience in 65 years of building guitars for another company; from 1986 to 1994, Schoenberg guitars would emerge from Nazareth, PA, with Martin serial numbers and "Schoenberg" on the headstock.

But the nearly 500 Schoenberg guitars that exist today are not mere imitations of earlier designs. As Eric has said, "We’re not doing vintage reproductions. We’re taking what’s special from the old ones. We’re trying to take the next step." One subtle yet crucial distinction is that the Schoenbergs have the advantage of being designed in light of Eric’s perception of the qualities of the great vintage guitars. If 1929 and 1930 were the years in which Martin Guitars, for one, created its enduring monuments, its peerless instruments, then Eric would draw on his knowledge of those designs and pull out only the elements that would lead to great guitars.
Finally, the impact of the Schoenberg Soloists on the Martin Guitar Company (and, by their influence, on other makers such as Collings and Santa Cruz) cannot be underestimated. Dick Boak himself put it best when he said, "Martin owes a great thanks to Eric Schoenberg for almost single-handedly bringing back the OM. We owe to the Schoenberg project the cutaway shape (which is now used on several Martin models), as well as the fact that Eric raised everyone’s understanding of the ‘value’ of Martin’s old guitars, which eventually became instrumental in inspiring our Golden Era and Vintage Series. By the way, I love the Soloists. I own one!"

Dick Boak is the director of artist relations and publicity for C.F. Martin. From the independent web site by David Gans, "Schoenberg Guitars," an excellent resource for information about the Schoenberg Guitar Company.

The hand-built Schoenbergs could be individually voiced to generate beautiful tone and capture some essence of the patina of the earlier guitars. Plus the functionality of recent designs—the cutaway, the adjustable truss rod, plus the knowledge of how guitars can be set up to play at their absolute best—could be added to the mix. And with the more varied tonewoods available today, a wider palette of voices is available in the guitars that are made. In these ways, Eric is attempting to create the ultimate finger-style guitar.

The Schoenberg guitars from the Martin days are generally acknowledged to be superior guitars. Since the days of the partnership with Martin there have been many hand-builders who have worked with Eric to create guitars with exceptional tone and responsiveness. With each successive builder Eric has fine-tuned his perception of what construction elements result in a superb guitar. And like a great archer whose arrows seem naturally to find the bull’s-eye Eric’s innate ability to hear and feel the subtle attributes that create a guitar’s aliveness has combined with his talented partners’ gifts to yield guitars that hit the mark, time after time.

The consistent quality of these guitars over time is the best testament to Eric’s success. Although he is the first to praise the wonderful partners he has worked with—all amazing luthiers in their own right—, it is the pleasure which each successive guitar is able to give its player that should make us notice the one variable that hasn’t changed in twenty years. And Eric says he’s still learning.

Eric has followed his own muse, guided by an implacable desire to play great instruments. His gift is his ability to imagine what kind of guitar would be a great one and to guide its creation. Yet he has also provided a service. As Eric has said, “I’m not just building a guitar that gets me excited.” He may have begun looking for his own ideal guitar, one that would give him the means to achieve his own deepest musical satisfaction. But his search has created opportunities for every player who has hungered for the perfect guitar (nearly 500 opportunities, in fact). And if Eric’s guitars are capable of producing great tone, exquisite tone, then they have the potential to bring those of us who play closer to a beauty that satisfies. Could it be…? With Eric’s guitars we might just get to that music beyond longing.

Today, the Schoenberg Guitars are built one at a time by the capable hands of world-class luthiers Bruce Sexauer, Robert Anderson, Alan Pertman, James Russell and John Slobod.