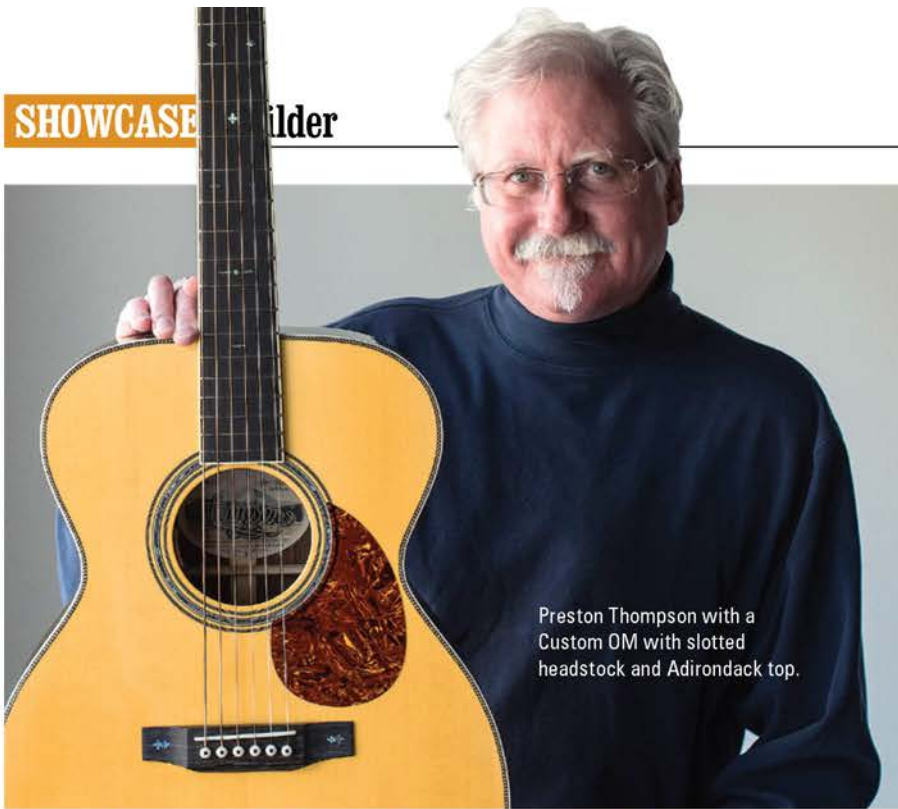


SHOWCASE + Builder



Preston Thompson with a Custom OM with slotted headstock and Adirondack top.

PRESTON THOMPSON

Sisters, Oregon
pktguitars.com

Whether you were a guitar picker, horn player, or did your thing behind a trap kit, Texas in the 1970s was a great place to be a musician – rife with jams, kids forming bands and finding their groove, maybe sharing venues with emerging Lone Star legends.

One guy who lived it was Preston Thompson, whose formative youth spanned the decade and culminated in college, where he and his friends at Austin College played music “just about every waking moment.”

Being so immersed affected Thompson deeper than it did his peers; beyond strumming and singing, he became fascinated with how instruments were made.

“My interests seemed to always lead back to the great American vintage-guitar sound,” he said. “For me, there was no comparison between it and other guitars. I had many conversations with the likes of Mike Longworth,

THOMPSON GUITARS

By Ward Meeker

Charles Sawtelle, and other interested folks who enjoyed figuring out where that sound came from, which led me to very carefully examine the construction of those guitars.”

Then, someone told him about schools that taught instrument construction. A few days later, the mailman delivered a packet from Charles Fox’s School of Guitar Research and Design, in Vermont. While he enjoyed teaching, Thompson so strongly felt the call to lutherie that as he was taking his first steps in the teaching profession, he enrolled at the Fox school.

We caught up with Thompson to get the full story.

So, in '78 you finished undergrad studies and were preparing for life as a teacher... but then heard a different calling?

Yeah (laughs). I moved to take a teaching job in Boulder, Colorado – and also began saving money for tuition at Guitar Research and Design. The bluegrass band Hot Rize was just getting going about that time around Boulder, and I was fortunate to become friends with Charles Sawtelle, whose knowledge of instruments and music propelled my desire to make the guitars that paid tribute to the best vintage guitars.

After I finished at Guitar Research and Design in the spring of '79, I took a position



(LEFT TO RIGHT) Deluxe Brazilian Dreadnought. The Thompson 12-fret 000 Deluxe.

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at Randy Wood's Old Time Picking Parlor, in Nashville. I was there only a short time when, as luck would have it, I was awarded a fellowship for graduate school. So I spent the next year at school in the Dallas area, then in San Antonio, intern teaching. But I kept my hands in music and guitars at every opportunity.

In '81, I moved to Pampa, Texas, where I taught high school and began building. Pampa is on the high plains in the panhandle, where Woody Guthrie once lived, and it embraced the arts and artists. My guitars gained popularity locally and I eventually had orders coming in with a frequency to where I stopped teaching and built full-time.

Early on, how many models did you offer?

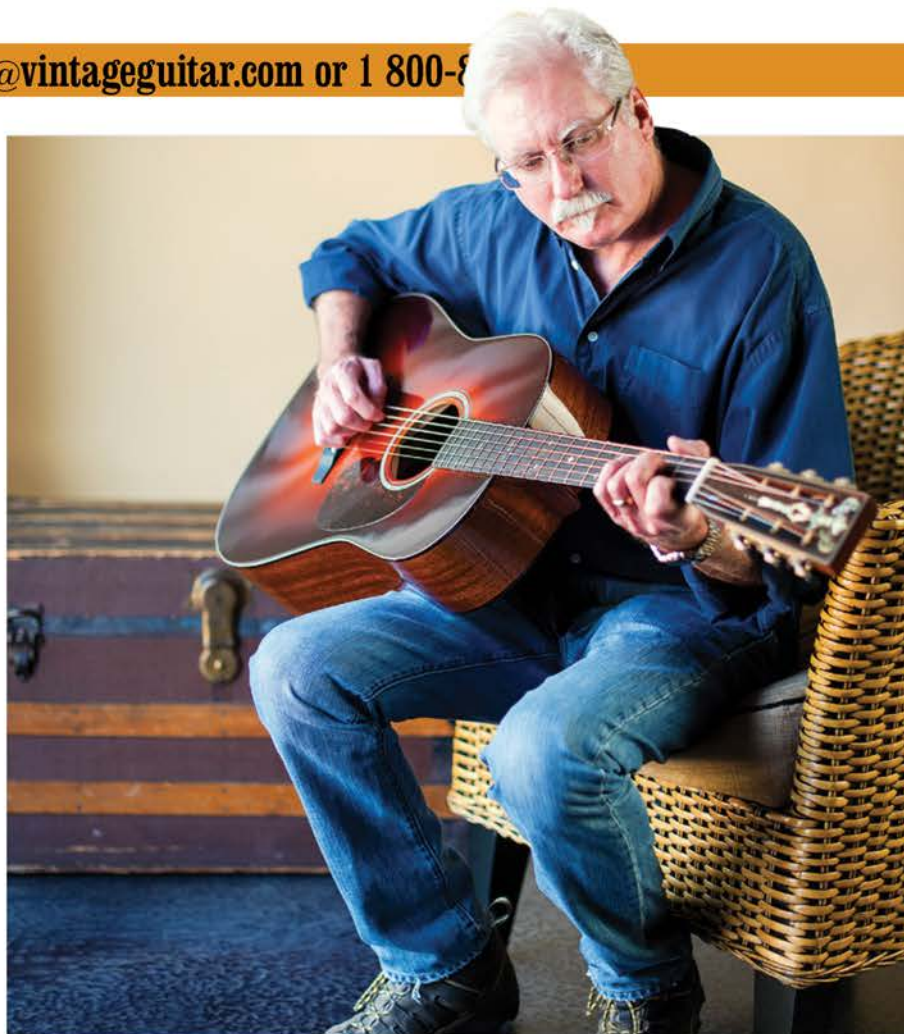
My first was one I began to develop at Guitar Research and Design—a Martin copy. Then, I expanded to dreadnoughts and cutaways and offered abalone trim and custom inlay work.

How did your offerings expand?

I did some print advertising that helped spread the word, in combination with the attention of players. But, the numbers really began to grow in '83, after I became involved with the National Fingerpicking and Flat Picking Championship, in Winfield, Kansas. I was invited to display at the festival and have my guitars in the line of prizes for the championship. Winfield has always drawn talent from all over the world, as well as fans who enjoy the performances. It exposed my instruments to thousands of folks. Plus, I was able to reconnect with Charles Sawtelle and spend time with other builders including Richard Hoover, Charles Hoffman, Don Gallagher, Mike Longworth, Mike Kemnitzer, and more.

By the mid '80s, Hot Rize had become very popular, and Charles liked what I was striving for — trying to get my guitars to sound like instruments from the 1930s. In '84, I moved to Oregon, and over the next couple years Charles made several trips to visit with his '37 D-28, '29 000-45, and '36 D-18. I carefully studied those guitars and came away with design ideas that led to introducing my first 12-fret 000 copies, my OM models, and my 12-fret dreadnoughts.

Shortly before Winfield in 1986, Charles bought one of my Brazilian rosewood dreadnoughts dressed in the tradition of a Style-42 Martin. The specs and neck width and profile were built to be as close as possible to his '37 D-28. He took it to Winfield and showed it to Peter Rowan, who then bought an Adirondack-top 12-fret 000 from me with 42-style trim and appointments. Peter plays it to this day.



“I make guitars most players thought they wouldn't see again, much less find at a relatively affordable price...”

What sets your guitars apart?

I make guitars most players thought they wouldn't see again, much less find at a relatively affordable price— instruments that pay tribute to the most-sought-after guitars ever made, accurate in sound and beauty. They can be plain or fancy, stock or custom, Size 2 parlor or a 12-fret dreadnought. I really strive for consistency in playability and sound. Our approach, from selection of materials to paring of woods and details to each, allows the personality of each instrument to show through.

When did you hire your first employee(s)? And how many do you have now.

I first had someone work with me when the shop moved to Oregon in 1984. We now have seven people employed in the business.

What are your hopes for the future of the industry?

We hope to see demand continue to be strong for high-quality acoustic guitars, as it has been for the last decade. We've seen demand grow not only from the domestic market, but from Asia, Europe, and Australia.

What are your goals for your own line?

We'll continue to strengthen our market position by focusing on doing what we do best— making fine guitars that will provide a lifetime of enjoyment and pride to their owners. **VG**