# SHAPING A NEW SOUND

**Powered by V-Class bracing, our new Grand Pacific reveals an inspiring new Taylor voice that's unlike anything we've ever offered**

By Jim Kirlin

Happy birthday, V-Class.

One year ago we proudly introduced our V-Class bracing architecture to the guitar world. Even with Taylor's track record of innovation, this breakthrough felt special. For one thing, our design guru, Andy Powers, had managed to crack the code on a nagging intonation problem that had plagued steel-string acoustic guitars since the advent of X-bracing. At long last the guitar top and the strings were able to play nice, and the result of their more harmonious relationship was greater in-tuneness along the entire fretboard. Notes were stronger, clearer and more consistent from top to bottom. Guitars produced greater volume, projection and sustain, with enhanced all-around musicality. It was a sonic revelation that seemed to unveil a truer sense of what an acoustic guitar was intended to sound like.

That said, what *really* excited Andy about the V-Class design was its bigger-picture promise as a flexible new platform that freed him to shape an acoustic guitar's tonal character in unprecedented ways. If V-Class marked the beginning of a new chapter of Taylor tone, its rollout with our Grand Auditorium models this past year was merely page one. Welcome to page two, featuring a dramatic turn: a new Taylor body shape that reveals a whole new Taylor sound.

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There were good reasons for debuting V-Class bracing with our Grand Auditorium body style. As our most popular shape, it was the most familiar representation of the signature Taylor sound, which made it the ideal vehicle to demonstrate the sonic improvements of V-Class – providing a context that would be recognizable to most of the musicians we serve. Starting with our flagship shape also underscored our confidence in the virtues of the design, along with our desire to make it broadly accessible to players. Though we began the rollout at the top of the Taylor line, by mid-year V-Class was under the hood of every solid-wood steel-string Grand Auditorium we make in our El Cajon, California, factory (300 Series and up).

But we'll let you in on a little secret: Andy's earliest V-Class guitars weren't Grand Auditoriums. They were dreadnoughts.

*Andy Powers with a Builder's Edition Grand Pacific in his home workshop*

## Expanding the Frontier of Taylor Tone

To get a sense of the new tonal terrain Andy was eager to explore using V-Class, it helps to know that in the broader musical landscape of the acoustic guitar world, our guitars – most notably our Grand Auditorium – are generally known for having a distinctive tonal personality. Andy describes it as a modern sound.

"Think of a quintessential Taylor model like our 814ce," Andy says. "It's clear, vibrant, brilliant, articulate. Sonically, it feels like the equivalent of sunshine at midday – a bright white, pure light. These guitars are welcomed in studios all over the world; a lot of great music has been created with this sound. Together with other modern traits, many borrowed from the electric guitar like slim necks with low action, accurate intonation, cutaways and pickups, the Taylor sound works really well for a lot of music people want to make. I love it for that reason. But that's not the only sound that I love. I like different flavors."

## Inspiration for a New Taylor Sound

One of the hallmarks of Taylor design, tracing back to Bob Taylor's earliest guitars, is that we've always been driven by our musical passions. It has been our North Star in terms of preserving our authenticity as a guitar company.

"We've never made guitars based on what we think people want to buy," Bob says. "We build things we're excited about and put them out there for people to discover and enjoy. No one asked for a better neck or for V-Class bracing. All the cool, innovative companies in the world make what they think is good."

That's why Andy's arrival was important for Taylor. It was essential that as Bob and Kurt consider the future of the company, innovative guitar design remains a driving force in our evolution. Andy, of course, shares Bob's passion-driven approach to guitar making and since joining Taylor has continued to push our designs forward as our chief architect. But following his thorough tone-enhancing overhaul of our 800 Series in 2014, Andy began to wonder how much room was left for tonal improvement using the X-bracing framework.

You might recall that for the redesign of that series, Andy pulled out all the stops in terms of refining the guitar's material components to improve the acoustic sound. While the guitars were critically and commercially embraced, all the work that went into implementing the nuanced design improvements felt like a heroic attempt to wring the last bits of tonal goodness out of an X-braced guitar. As Andy has shared in other V-Class stories, it felt like he'd reached a design cul-de-sac.

Fresh inspiration came a short time later, as Andy was making major renovations to his house. He was working nights and weekends, and listening to a lot of acoustic music. He found himself returning to the bluegrass records he'd first been exposed to while growing up and working alongside his dad, a carpenter.

"My dad grew up in Southern California as a long-haired hippie-surfer guy," Andy shares. "He got into the country-rock music happening in the Los Angeles area back in the late '60s and early '70s. My parents listened to the Eagles and a lot of the songwriters coming out of Laurel Canyon. They heard the Byrds turn into the Flying Burrito Brothers with Chris Hillman. Before too long it led to old-time bluegrass. Those acts were bringing in musicians from a different era, different generation, often from Nashville. You'd see guys like Sneaky Pete Kleinow playing pedal steel in a modern country-rock outfit, and think, wow, that guy is really good; where did he get those melodies? So the acts we listened to soon turned into the Louvin Brothers, Flatt & Scruggs, Doc Watson, and *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* recordings."

In fact, Doc Watson plays into one of Andy's seminal musical memories: his dad took him to see Watson perform at a local venue when Andy was 6. Not only was Andy mesmerized by the sounds of Watson's virtuosic flatpicking, but he had a chance to meet Watson after the show.

"I remember asking him to sign my program, not realizing he was blind," Andy recalls. "He told me he was sorry but that he'd never learned to read or write, and then he rubbed the top of my head and said, 'Maybe some of this guitar picking will wear off on you.'"

Years later, as Andy returned to those familiar bluegrass records while working on his house, he was especially drawn to the character of the guitars.

"Those sounds are not modern," he says. "They don't have the modern personality of an 814ce. I thought, I'd really love to make a guitar with that maturity. It's different than the instruments we make."

Many of the flattop guitars played on those records were some version of a dreadnought, a workhorse guitar distinguished by its relatively wide waist. That extra girth in the midsection creates enough air capacity inside the body to produce strong volume and a pleasing low-end response. Those properties came in handy back in an era before acoustic guitars were amplified.

"Historically, steel-string guitars sounded pretty twangy before that, so I imagine when musicians heard that low-end response and warmer sound out of a bigger guitar body, they found the response appealing," Andy says. "As a result, lots of guitars were made that way. And people have used them for all sorts of things – strumming chords, accompanying themselves while singing, fingerpicking, playing bluegrass. They became popular as all-purpose guitars."

## A Sound Discrepancy

For someone with Andy's talents as a luthier, it would be fair to think he could simply build a guitar, perhaps a dreadnought, that could make those sounds he loves. But back in his pre-Taylor days of repairing and building instruments, he'd made an interesting discovery about the guitars used on those records. He restored older guitars for clients for many years, going back to his teenage years, and from his restoration research, he'd become deeply knowledgeable about the different brands, building techniques, and materials that distinguished the guitars of different eras. He had worked on and played some of the actual guitars used on those recordings he grew up listening to. And the sounds didn't match up.

"When I'd listen to the record and listen to the guitar that made the record, I'd think, this isn't the same sound. What gives here?" he recalls. "I'm playing *that* song, with the guitar that made it, or one just like it. It slowly dawned on me I was listening to those musicians after they had recorded in a studio. I'd been hearing more of a composite acoustic sound – the sound of the guitar with its issues dealt with. It was the sound of a guitar through a signal chain: a microphone, through EQ, onto tape, onto a record."

He began to ponder a design approach that would fix those sonic issues that normally had to be corrected in the studio. As it turned out, his thinking would intersect with the ideas that were already percolating around his V-Class design concept.

## The "Puff of Air" Problem

One problem area with the sound of a dreadnought guitar is in its low-end frequencies. Andy describes the issue as the "puff of air" a guitar produces alongside the low-frequency notes.

"It's that *whoosh* sound that happens with a lot of large guitars," he elaborates. "It's the same air effect that happens when you say the letter P. We've probably all seen a picture or video of a vocalist in a studio with a wind screen or a pop filter in front of a microphone. When you say the letter P or B, an explosion of air rushes out. [To experience this effect firsthand, see our sidebar, "Feel the Puff."] Guitars do the same thing, especially a bigger-body X-braced guitar with a broad waist like a dreadnought. When you play a big E major chord, you might think, that push of air feels cool – people describe it as the low end you feel but don't hear. While it can be a gratifying experience in some respects for the player, it ends up creating problems sonically – you can't mike it, you can't amplify it, you can't tune it, and when you play with other musicians, it gets in the way."

Typically in a recording environment an engineer will roll off those problem frequencies in the low end in an effort to tame the effect.

"They might set up a mike and discover the problem right around 100, 110 hertz, and they'll make that part disappear," Andy says. "That part is interfering with all the notes you're playing; it's throwing off your intonation or stepping on the vocal part, causing feedback when you amplify it, or causing interference with the rest of the guitar's response."

A typical X-braced dreadnought also has a tendency to build its low-end resonance at the expense of the middle and high-register notes.

"To create the puff of air, the dreadnought's body has to focus its effort at a fairly narrow frequency range," Andy says. "As a result, this narrow resonant spot effectively swallows up all the other notes, preventing the body from responding to them equally."

The effect is what people are usually referring to when they describe a dreadnought's low-end response with words like mushy, woofy, muddy, cloudy, fuzzy or squishy.

## V-Class Unlocks New Possibilities

The intent behind what would become Andy's V-Class bracing design was to exert more control over the top movement – specifically independent control over two opposing ingredients that are both necessary to create a pleasing acoustic sound: movement and stillness. The top needed ample flexibility to produce good volume, while also providing enough stiffness to produce long-sustaining notes. If Andy could create a more orderly movement from the top, it was more likely that he could fix the puff-of-air issue by changing the sonic structure of the low end.

So the first guitar he made with his V-Class bracing prototype was one of Taylor's standard dreadnought models.

"I figured this is the closest appropriate Taylor shape I have to start with," Andy says. "So I built that first guitar and thought, wow, this is really interesting. Then I built another guitar with similar results, which really kick-started some serious thought."

Another sonic payoff of the more orderly top movement was greatly improved intonation. The more harmonious relationship between the notes also suggested a greater ability to shape the notes to define their character in different ways. But Andy realized that to achieve the acoustic sound he wanted, he needed to create a new version of the dreadnought shape.

"Our conventional dreadnought shape was good, but curves always have some limitations in the type of sound they'll make," he says. "The guitar I had in mind would produce a response with a broader reach. I knew I wanted to make something with the general width of a conventional dreadnought, but with the more versatile response I could get from subtle, more cohesive curves."

Those curves really matter, Andy says, because they determine the air volume inside the body (together with the body depth). Think of it as giving the guitar its lung capacity. And with their traditionally wider waist areas, dreadnought-style guitars tend to have a large capacity.

## The Grand Pacific Body Style Is Born

The new body shape Andy created is probably best described as a round-shoulder dreadnought. The "dreadnought" classification gives people a familiar reference point, acknowledging the broader waist, while the "round-shoulder" designation helps distinguish it from the squared-shoulder style of dreadnoughts. Nonetheless, Andy feels reluctant to pin the dreadnought label on the guitar due to its differences in both shape and musical identity.

"I started with dreadnought-like dimensions and gave the shape new curves to help produce the sound I wanted," he says. "It has a little of a slope-shoulder look, sort of what Gibson used to call a jumbo. But these curves are not firm interpretations of any exact shape; it's its own thing."

Within the Taylor line, we're calling the new body style the Grand Pacific. "Grand" brings the body style into the shared naming convention with our other "Grand" body styles, while "Pacific" both suggests a big body and ties in with Taylor's California heritage.

## The Shape of a New Sound

The combination of the Grand Pacific's body dimensions and the V-Class bracing structure gave Andy more independent control over different attributes of the guitar notes to shape their tonal character in nuanced ways. The result is a noticeably different tonal personality from the familiar Taylor sound.

Andy demonstrates the sonic distinctions with an A/B demo that compares a V-Class rosewood/spruce Grand Auditorium 814ce – representing the classic, "modern" Taylor sound – with a rosewood/spruce Grand Pacific. He starts with the Grand Auditorium.

"There's a clear, articulate precision in every one of the notes," he says after arpeggiating a few chords. "If I were to draw a shape to represent the note – think of an EQ curve – each note on that guitar would have a triangular shape. When I strum chords, the notes are all in tune with each other, with beautiful harmony, and you can hear each note distinctly. It has a piano-like sound, where every note is well-defined and lives in its place. That's good. It works for a lot of modern music. It works amazingly well for a fingerstyle player or anybody taking cues from a pianist, playing contrapuntal stuff, or for someone fronting a band, doing a lot of rhythmic strumming. It's brilliant and vibrant."

He switches to the Grand Pacific and plays a combination of arpeggios and strummed chords.

"On this guitar, every note sounds and feels round and wide," he says. "The note's shape would look more like a bell curve. If I play a single note [he does], it's broad; it takes up a lot of space. The note is accurately pitched, but the shape of these notes will overlap and blend together with a comforting sort of harmony, creating a warm and seasoned sound. It's something our guitars have never had."

If the Grand Auditorium sound is the equivalent of sunlight at midday, Andy suggests, the Grand Pacific is like the light late in the day, closer to the "golden hour" that photographers love, when there's a warm glow to it.

A more musical analogy would be the difference in sound between a piano and an organ.

"The Grand Auditorium could be described as having a piano-like sound," Andy says. "You hear a distinct collection of individual notes harmonizing, even when you strum a chord. The Grand Pacific is more like the sound of an organ. When you play a chord, the notes blend into each other to create a unified harmony."

## Feel the Puff

Here's a way to palpably experience the "puff of air" effect that can create sonic problems with an acoustic guitar. Hold your hand, fingers together, vertically in front of your face with your palm toward you. With the tip of your middle finger lightly touching the end of your nose and the palm of your hand in front of your mouth, say the words "pop," and then "top," "shop" and "mop." In descending order, you will feel a decreasing amount of explosive air on the first letter. Now try this: With your hand in place, in rapid succession, say "pa-pa-pa-pa-pa." Then, with your hand in place, try humming "ma-ma-ma-ma." Which one sounds more musical?

"This is exactly what happens with a guitar," Andy explains. "The consonant and vowel sounds a singer makes are directly the result of harmonic content shaping a given amount of air. As listeners, sound as we know it can be reduced to pressure variation, usually in air. It's a physical phenomenon. That is true whether originating from a guitar, a loudspeaker, a horn or a human voice."

| Grand Auditorium | | Grand Pacific |
|---|---|---|
| Clear and vibrant | THE OVERALL SOUND | Warm and seasoned |
| Precise and focused (like a triangle) | THE NOTE SHAPE | Broad and round (like a bell curve) |
| Well-defined, with clear separation | THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE NOTES | Overlapping, smoothly blended |

## Clear Low-End Power

Beyond the different shape and relationship between the notes, arguably the boldest distinction of the Grand Pacific to many players will be its clear low-end power. Between the wide-waisted body shape and the role that V-Class architecture plays in controlling the harmonic structure, there's no woofiness. Consequently, that problematic puff-of-air effect is gone, which means the bass frequencies are more musical and more usable.

And that low-end power doesn't take anything away from the rest of the musical register.

"You get smooth, warmly powerful notes, with consistency across the entire frequency spectrum," Andy says. "This guitar has the parts I love about an old guitar, without the uneven areas that need to be fixed in a studio."

Andy is excited to get this guitar into the hands of players for a number of reasons. For one thing, it offers a new flavor of Taylor tone that he feels will appeal to a broad spectrum of players – including those who typically don't care for the modern Taylor sound. And by capturing some of the qualities people love in a dreadnought-style guitar while also eliminating some of the problems, it offers players something uniquely compelling.

"I wasn't interested in building another version of an existing dreadnought," he says. "There are plenty of those guitars already. This guitar makes sounds that are deeply familiar yet unattainable with other guitars. It's the sound of a venerable acoustic guitar, revised to remove some sonic typos with the help of the V-Class framework."

## A More Versatile Guitar

Another player-friendly aspect of Andy's design approach with the Grand Pacific is its sweeping versatility. By using V-Class bracing with the new body dimensions, he created an amalgamation of tonal characteristics that enable this guitar to feel equally at home in a bluegrass setting or a singer-songwriter's hands.

"This has the strength and power to be a great guitar for bluegrass, but it also has the clarity and playing comfort you'd find on a shorter-scale guitar, even though it's a 25-1/2-inch scale," Andy says. (For more on how different scale lengths impact the musical personality of dreadnought-style guitars, see our sidebar.) "This body's shape, size and air capacity land it right in the middle of the size range of acoustic guitars. I bet a lot of fingerstyle players would enjoy this guitar, as well as players strumming chords as a singer-songwriter, or people fronting rock and country bands or their worship teams. Because of its versatility, I think of it as a general purpose guitar."

Andy sees the Grand Pacific as a forward evolution of a dreadnought as a workhorse guitar. Over time, he feels it could prove to have as much all-purpose utility as our Grand Auditorium – possibly even more.

"If you think of the Grand Auditorium as the Swiss Army knife of the modern acoustic guitar world, the Grand Pacific is like the Swiss Army knife of a broader acoustic guitar world," he suggests. "If you're a modern player, you'll probably like it. If you're a traditional player, you'll probably like it. If you're a fingerstyle player, you'll probably still enjoy it. If you're a rock player, or want to play some jazz on it, you'll probably dig it too. I'm curious to see what will happen because this guitar doesn't seem to be confined the way a dreadnought guitar can be."

His perspective is backed by the feedback he's received from the different types of players he has sent prototypes to beta-test over the past few years.

"The response was fascinating," he says. "Initially, I thought the traditional players will dig this. Well, they did, and they wanted to claim it for themselves – 'Finally you built one for me,' they'd say. But at the other end of the stylistic spectrum, the super modern players like Edge from U2 were saying, 'Yeah, I *like* this one.' [The Edge played a Grand Pacific prototype on U2's most recent tour.] And all the modern fingerstyle folks were saying, 'Wow, I don't like dreadnoughts, but I love this guitar. This is great!'"

> **"This is the closest thing to a universally appealing acoustic guitar I think we've ever built."**

## Grand Pacific Models

One of Andy's design specifications for the Grand Pacific was that it be a full-body guitar, without a cutaway. As a new Taylor shape, the Grand Pacific is identified with a different numerical distinction in its model numbering: All models will end in the number 7 (our traditional dreadnought models end in a 0).

With model offerings, we've kept things streamlined. Andy knew he wanted to make mahogany/spruce and rosewood/spruce editions – a nod to two of the most traditional guitar tonewood pairings – so he chose the 500 Series (mahogany 517) and 700 Series (rosewood 717). He also chose to make the two models with a shared appointment scheme.

"I didn't want to create any big distinctions beyond the woods," he says. "These are two wonderful but different flavor profiles – as different as chocolate and vanilla – and I wanted the sound to be the deciding factor for players."

As with the launch of V-Class bracing last year, Andy decided to celebrate the release of the Grand Pacific with a special Builder's Edition version, incorporating exclusive playing features that elevate the playing comfort to match the guitar's sonic virtues. The mahogany and rosewood models were obvious choices, so he designed them as Builder's Edition siblings. While enhanced playing features such as chamfered body edges are borrowed from last year's Builder's Edition offerings, the Grand Pacific editions boast other unique details, including a compound carve neck profile with rolled fretboard edges, a sleek new bridge shape, and more. (For the full rundown, see our Builder's Edition spotlight on page 16.)

Andy also wanted to make the Grand Pacific immediately accessible to a broad segment of players, so he designed a standard model within our 300 Series (the entry point to our U.S.-made, all-solid-wood acoustic guitars and the beginning of our V-Class-braced guitars), made with sapele and spruce (317e).

The Grand Pacific shape will entirely replace our traditional Dreadnought shape in our U.S.-made line. That shape will continue within our 100 Series (110e, 110ce, 150e), Academy Series (Academy 10 and 10e), and Baby Taylor Series.

## A New Guitar Case

To celebrate the new shape, sound and aesthetic of the Grand Pacific, we've also paired it with a new deluxe hardshell case design. Manufactured at our factory complex in nearby Tecate, Mexico, the exterior features a beautifully textured Western floral print in the vein of finely tooled leather. The case will come with every Grand Pacific model.

## A Tale of Two Dreadnoughts: The Scale Length Difference

Historically, the dreadnought is without question an iconic body style in the steel-string acoustic world. In fact, for many people its shape is what they think of when they picture an acoustic guitar. Although its form has evolved and been re-interpreted by different guitar makers over the years (think square-shoulder vs. round-shoulder, for example), the design also can be divided into two separate camps based on differences in scale length. This distinction translates into two different musical personalities, as Andy explains.

"One is what we might call the longer-scale dreadnought," he says. "Think of a classic Martin. Depending on when they were built, they tend to be in the 25.35-inch to 25.4-inch range before string compensation, which is fairly long. For any given set of strings you put on there, there's a high amount of string tension, and it really drives the guitar. There's a lot of inertia in that string. When you get it moving, because it's under such strain, it pushes back, and you can get a powerful response out of it."

By contrast, other dreadnoughts, such as a slope-shoulder Gibson jumbo-style, usually have a shorter string length.

"Most are built with a scale length of what we call 24.75 inches, but in reality, it's more like 24.6, depending on when the guitar was made," Andy says. "That's a good three-quarters of an inch shorter. In the guitar-making world, this difference is enormous. As a result, with the same set of strings on one of those guitars, you have a lot less tension. It has a different preload on the top, and the inertia that the string has when a player articulates it is a lot different. It's not edgy, wound up, or shouting in your face. It has a more laid-back, loose, relaxed kind of sound."

## A Guitar Guru Weighs In

If you're a vintage guitar enthusiast in the U.S., you know who George Gruhn is. If you've been to Nashville, you've probably made a pilgrimage to his store, Gruhn Guitars, one of the largest dealers of vintage instruments in the world. Widely respected as one of the foremost authorities on the history of acoustic guitar design, Gruhn has written several impeccably researched books and countless magazine articles about stringed instruments. Much of Gruhn's writing was soaked up by a young Andy Powers. In fact, by the time Andy was a teenager, he had already developed a reputation as something of a wunderkind in the local music community for his ability to repair vintage instruments, thanks in part to Gruhn's trove of published guitar information.

In recent years, as Andy's new designs for Taylor have made their way into the world and into Gruhn's hands (his store is an authorized Taylor dealer), Gruhn has gotten to know Andy better and expressed his respect for Andy as a builder. As a guitar historian, Gruhn offers a unique appreciation for how Andy's own voracious appetite for guitar history has informed his problem-solving innovations in guitar design, including V-Class.

"Andy understands design," Gruhn says. "He also understands tradition – the pathology of instruments: what doesn't work. When he designs a new guitar, he can look at the evolutionary systems that preceded it."

When Andy shared some of his Grand Pacific prototypes with Gruhn a couple of years ago, Gruhn was deeply impressed.

"They're some of the finest new guitars I've ever played," Gruhn says. "They're right up there with some custom luthier-built instruments that cost $20,000 or more. These are more musical sounding than most luthier-built instruments. They're very special. With V-Class, all those discordant chords sound better."

*George Gruhn plays a Grand Pacific prototype in his store*

Gruhn also called the Grand Pacific the most versatile Taylor he's ever played or listened to.

"Not just one personality, but a collection of characteristics…. You can play jazz on them; you can play blues on them; you can play simple, first-position Carter family or Woody Guthrie stuff. These guitars will do many, many things."

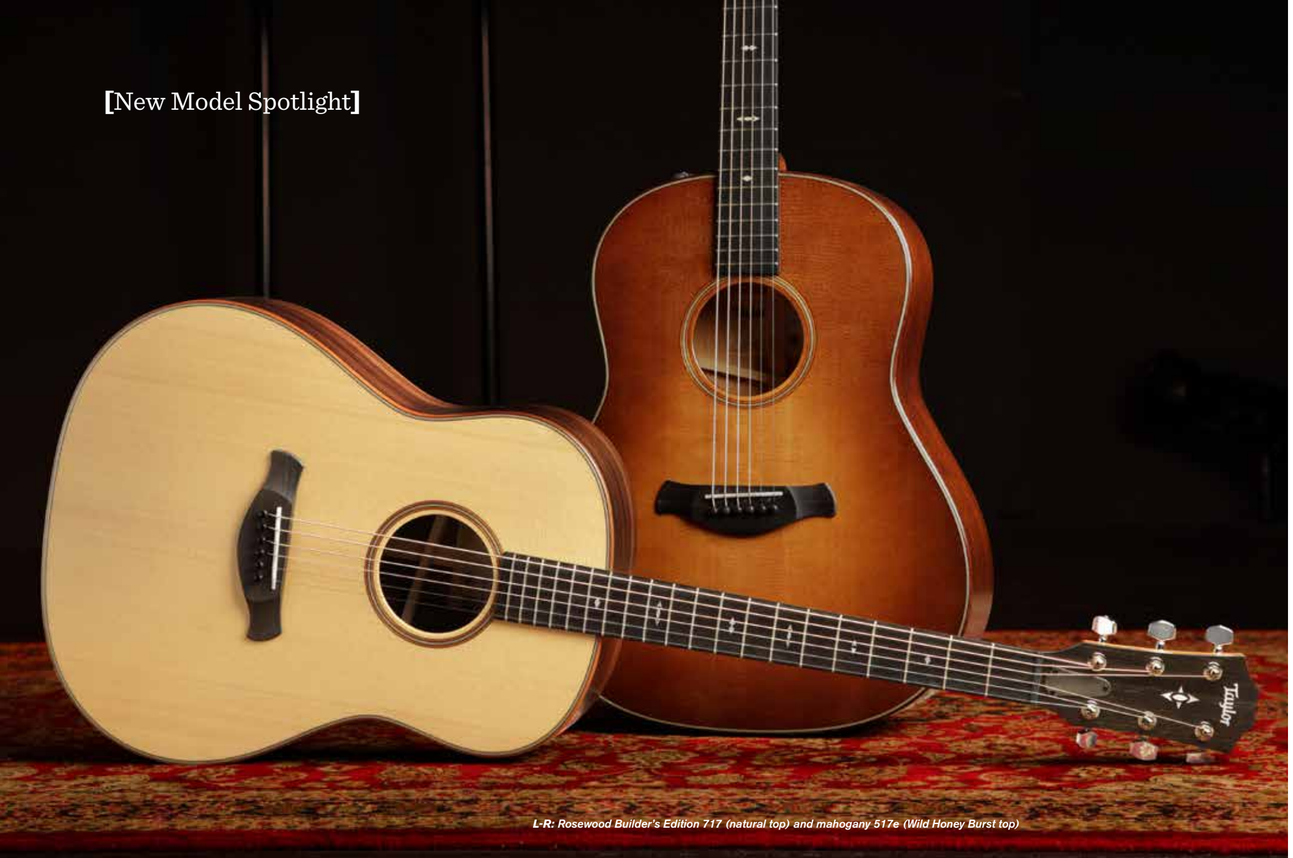
Gruhn liked the guitars so much that he offered to introduce them to some of Nashville's best players. Some weren't typically Taylor players. Then again, these weren't your typical Taylors. And many of the players were pleasantly surprised.


*L-R: Andy Powers and Alison Brown play a song together during a Taylor event at Gruhn's store*

"Virtually every professional musician to whom I have shown the Grand Pacific guitars has said that they are the finest new Taylor guitars they have ever heard and that they are without question very fine quality instruments," Gruhn shares.

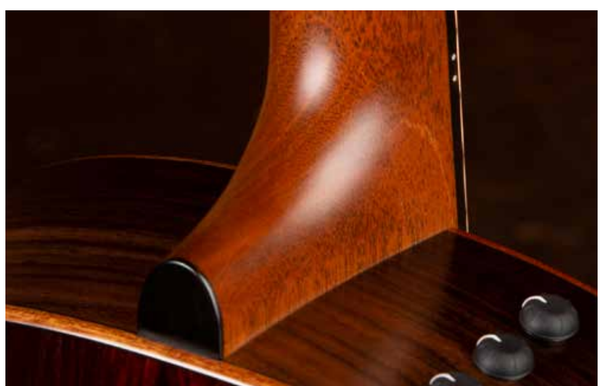
One artist was progressive banjo player and multi-instrumentalist Alison Brown, a Grammy Award-winning musician/composer/producer/entrepreneur and co-founder of Compass Records. Brown says she never really cared for the sound of Taylor guitars – until she played a mahogany/spruce Grand Pacific.

"The guitar felt so alive I thought it was going to jump out of my hands," she says. "You could play this at a bluegrass contest."



*L-R: Rosewood Builder's Edition 717 (natural top) and mahogany 517e (Wild Honey Burst top)*





# BUILDER'S EDITION 517 AND 717

**The Grand Pacific's inspiring new sound is matched by a new level of playing comfort, thanks to a refined neck shape, bridge design and more**

For the Builder's Edition Grand Pacific models, a deluxe-edition 517 and 717, Andy wanted to preserve the full-body design approach, meaning the guitars would not have a cutaway or armrest. But he did incorporate the chamfered body edges featured on Builder's Edition Grand Auditorium models, which adds comfort when the guitar is sitting in the player's lap. A new aspect of playing comfort he wanted to refine with these guitars was the neck profile as it progresses from the nut to the heel. This led to a new compound carve neck profile.

"I've long wondered why we make a neck with a single profile from one end to the other," he explains. "My hand position as a player certainly isn't the same as I move from the nut to the heel; why should the neck be the same? Down by the nut, a player's thumb will wrap around the neck more; that's the way our hands naturally move. To make this comfortable, near the nut you'll notice the most subtle hint of a V you could ever feel. It's just barely there. But it's enough to feel right. As you move toward the higher positions of the fingerboard, your thumb position is closer to the middle of the neck; it's not wrapped as far around. For that reason, a V-shaped neck up toward the body seems uncomfortable. Players like it to be round up there. We call this a compound carve neck because the profile changes in shape as you go up the fingerboard to match the hand's natural playing position."

As part of that transition from a subtle V, players will feel more of a rounded C, which is visually noticeable in the round, ridgeless curve of the heel.

"When my thumb bumps into the heel I don't want to feel a point," Andy says.

Another subtle comfort feature that players will feel on both sides of the neck is a rolled fretboard edge.

"It feels like the guitar has already been played for a while; maybe refretted once or twice," Andy says. "That hard edge is simply gone."

## New Curve Wing Bridge

Continuing the theme of player comfort, Andy refined the distinctive design of the Taylor bridge. In the same way that the edges of the body are chamfered off for comfort, he wanted to enhance the feel of the bridge against the player's picking hand.

"When my hand rubs up against the bridge, I want the sharp edges to be gone," he says. "This bridge is reminiscent of the original design, but it addresses your hand in a different way."

We're calling it the Curve Wing bridge. For now it will be offered exclusively on these two Builder's Edition Grand Pacific models.

## Silent Satin Finish & Wild Honey Burst

Like our other Builder's Edition models, these guitar bodies feature our Silent Satin finish treatment, inspired by the violin world, which blends a muted sheen with a pleasing feel that reduces the sound of player movement against the body (a benefit when recording into a microphone). Our Wild Honey Burst made its debut with our recent Builder's Edition 614ce. A careful color application process (also inspired by the look of violins) allows the color to penetrate the wood in a unique way that heightens the aesthetic appeal, artfully showcasing both the torrefied spruce wood grain and the depth in the color and giving the guitar a distinctively older look. The guitars are also available with a natural top. On those versions, the torrefied spruce displays a pleasing look of an aged patina – the result of the special roasting process. Together with the Silent Satin finish, it lends an attractive sepia-hued warmth to the guitar top.

As for onboard electronics, both Builder's Edition models are available with or without a pickup (our Expression System 2). For Andy, it was important to offer a pure acoustic version of these guitars knowing that some traditionally minded players don't want a pickup. (In fact, one Nashville recording engineer told us if he sees a pickup in an acoustic guitar, he's less inclined to record with it because he views it as a stage guitar.) Players who purchase a Grand Pacific without electronics can always have a pickup installed at a later date. Our Customer Service department will be happy to do the installation or recommend a Taylor-authorized service technician in their area.

## Appointments

Andy chose to honor the traditional heritage of dreadnought-style guitars with elegantly understated appointment details. Rich-grained sapele binding beautifully accentuates the rounded edgeline, with alternating purfling lines of maple and black around the top. A related pattern of sapele, maple and black forms the rosette. One subtle difference between the mahogany and rosewood models is the material selected for the fretboard/peghead inlay; the 517 incorporates grained ivoroid, while the rosewood 717 features mother-of-pearl. Andy designed an Arrowhead motif inspired in part by inlay shapes that are ingrained in the traditional guitar world and by a friend's collection of found American artifacts.

## Mahogany or Rosewood?

When comparing the mahogany and rosewood Builder's Edition models, the good news is that if you don't already have a particular tonewood preference, the distinctive sound profile of each makes it easier to decide. As Andy has pointed out, V-Class bracing helps create an even clearer delineation between the tonal character of each wood. As a basic rule of thumb, rosewood sounds "wet"; mahogany sounds "dry."

"Rosewood produces a unique harmonic complexity because it doesn't damp or mute any of the string's own harmonic content, and even adds some of its own," Andy explains. "As a result, every note you play has a thick, rich, luxurious character. It feels like it has a reverb effect blended into it."

Mahogany lives near the other end of the spectrum. The "dry" attribute can be characterized as clear, woody and fundamental-strong.

"The note you play is the note you get," Andy says. This warm clarity is a wonderful thing for many musical applications. The two guitars have the same characteristics in some ways – they've both got the volume, projection, a fist full of power. But the actual sonority, the personality, is different."

***Clockwise from top left:*** *Chamfered body edges; a rolled fretboard edge; rounded, ridgeless heel contouring; the new Curve Wing bridge*

## Grand Pacific Models

- **Builder's Edition 517 / 517e** (Mahogany/torrefied Sitka spruce)
- **Builder's Edition 717 / 717e** (Rosewood/torrefied Sitka spruce)
- **317 / 317e** (Sapele/Sitka spruce)

## Builder's Edition Design Features at a Glance

- **Compound carve neck profile**: Designed to complement the way a player's hand position shifts as it moves up the neck, the profile subtly transitions from a slight V at the nut to a rounded C, with a rounded, ridgeless heel.
- **Rolled fretboard edge**: This is a subtle comfort feature that players will feel on both sides of the neck.
- **Chamfered body edges**: The rounded body edges enhance the playing comfort and feature traditional binding.
- **Curve Wing bridge shape**: Rounded edges and other refined contouring update our signature aesthetic and make the bridge feel more comfortable against the pick hand.
- **Silent Satin finish & Wild Honey Burst top**: A careful color application process allows the color to penetrate the wood in a unique way that 0 heightens the aesthetic appeal. (A natural top is also available.)
- **New guitar case**: The Taylor-manufactured case features an aesthetic upgrade to a luxurious exterior that resembles tooled leather.

***L-R:*** *317e, Builder's Edition 717e (natural top), Builder's Edition 517e (Wild Honey Burst top)*

### 317e

**Back/Sides**: Sapele
**Top**: Sitka Spruce

Our 300 Series offered the most approachable entry point in the Taylor line to introduce the Grand Pacific, and Andy was eager to make it happen. As a tonewood, sapele's sonic characteristics live comfortably between the dry, clear, woody sound of mahogany and the complex, overtone-rich character of rosewood. Together with a Sitka spruce top, the Grand Pacific body, and V-Class bracing, the 317e makes an incredibly dynamic and versatile guitar. Players can expect all the fundamental virtues of V-Class – power, projection, sustain, consistent tonal output across the tonal spectrum, pleasing in-tuneness – along with a blend of seasoned warmth that comes from Andy's voicing of the bracing with the body dimensions.

"You can do so much with this guitar," Andy says. "You can take it to your open mike night, to club dates and bar gigs, busk on a street corner, and play with friends."

Because of the clarity of the low-end frequencies, the guitar also will be less inclined to feed back in amplified settings. The clear sonic focus of the sound will benefit singer-songwriters playing solo and ensemble scenarios in other ways as well.

"This guitar will support vocals well," Andy says. "With the clearer, more balanced lower register, and without a dominant woof, you can immediately hear the benefit when playing with others – the guitar works really well in a broader musical context with other musicians. Play one of these guitars in a jam with friends and these will come through loud and clear."

The 317e shares the same appointment package with its sapele/spruce 300 Series siblings, including black binding, Italian acrylic Gemstone inlays – featuring a peghead inlay as an emblem of V-Class bracing – satin-finish back and sides with a gloss-finish top, and Taylor Expression System® 2 electronics.

### Model Availability

Our rollout plan features an official in-store date of March 1. Initially our Builder's Edition Grand Pacific models (517, 717) will be sold through a limited number of authorized Taylor dealers worldwide, with broader availability coming later in the year. You can find a complete list of stocking dealers at taylorguitars.com on our Dealer Locator page starting March 1. Participating retailers will be flagged as a Grand Pacific Featured Dealer. We also plan to present Taylor "New Model Showcase" events at many of these stores to introduce our new models during the first half of the year. You'll find all the latest listings on the Events page of our website.

The 317e will be available through our entire dealer network starting March 1.

For more details on the new Grand Pacific models, including photos, videos, specifications and more, visit taylorguitars.com.

## Gruhn on Tone

# 5 Types of Balance

In September, Taylor hosted a media preview event for the Grand Pacific in Nashville, and one of the stops during the day was Gruhn Guitars. The visit was designed as part panel discussion, part guitar demonstration, as George Gruhn, Andy, and banjo/guitar player Alison Brown talked about how the Grand Pacific fits into the musical landscape, with both Gruhn and Brown sharing their perspectives and Andy and Brown playing a few songs together. Along the way, Gruhn shared his litmus test for evaluating the quality of an acoustic guitar, and how the Grand Pacific measures up. As he explains below, he listens for five different types of balance.

### 1 Balance of *Volume*:

"This is what a lot of people think of, that each note and each string should be equal in volume."

### 2 Balance of *Sustain*:

"You hit a chord. Do some strings ring longer than others? If so, then they're not really balanced. They should be equal in sustain, and the notes up and down the board should be fairly equal in sustain so it's controllable."

### 3 Balance of *Dynamic Range*:

"I want to be able to hit the note soft, medium or loud. I want to have an instrument that I can drive really hard but that also sings beautifully medium or softly because the tone is different; not all music is monotone. When people speak or sing, it would be boring if they did everything at exactly the same volume in a complete monotone. So the instrument should have dynamic range."

### 4 Balance of *Complexity of Tone*:

"Every note has a fundamental note, and it has harmonics above and below that fundamental. It's important that you don't have rich, beautiful basses with tinny trebles, or beautiful singing trebles and lackluster basses. So there's a real challenge to have a guitar that's balanced throughout."

### 5 Balance of *Clear Articulation*:

"Some instruments may have crisp, clear trebles and thuddy, thumpy, fuzzy basses, or vice-versa. You can still have different voices – the fact is, an archtop doesn't sound the same as a flattop, and a rosewood guitar doesn't sound the same as a mahogany guitar."

### The Verdict on the *Grand Pacific*:

"If a guitar is lacking any one of those five [types of balance], it's not as good as it could be. These Grand Pacific guitars are among the very few new guitars that truly can perform in all five tests."



### Early Artist Reactions

Last summer in Nashville, award-winning country and rock producer/guitarist/songwriter Dann Huff (Keith Urban, Thomas Rhett) and his brother David (drummer/songwriter/producer) had a chance to test-drive Andy's V-Class guitars for the first time, including a Grand Pacific. They started with a rosewood Grand Auditorium 714ce.

"The intonation is just beautiful," Dann says after strumming a few chords. "You can hear the difference."

Then he picks up the Grand Pacific and strums one chord. The stunned expression on his face is priceless.

"This is incredible," he says.

David agrees.

"The intonation speaks for itself," he says. "This [Grand Pacific] isn't quite as hi-fi as these [V-Class Grand Auditoriums]. It still has that Taylor signature to the sound, but it's a totally different space. It's a little bit more traditional. You came to the right town to show this thing. Wow. My prediction: That's gonna blow the doors open. That's a game changer."

"Yeah, that's a game changer right there," Dann adds.

Singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Sean Watkins, perhaps best known for his tenure with the Grammy Award-winning progressive bluegrass act Nickel Creek, has been playing a rosewood Grand Pacific and loves the sound.

"It's really, really fun to play," he says. "And it records insanely well."

Watkins, who has been friends with Andy since they were kids, first had a chance to play the guitar at a songwriters-in-the-round event at Nashville's legendary Bluebird Café back in September (as part of a media event sponsored by Taylor), and was smitten. Since then he's played it at other live shows.

"You've probably been hearing this a lot from people, but it is really quite a breakthrough guitar," he says. "I've showed it to a bunch of people and everyone has kind of freaked out about it. Jackson Browne really liked it, and Glen Phillips really loved it. He said he's been hearing a lot about them and was so excited to get to try mine at a show we did together the other night up in Santa Barbara."

Phillips, of Toad the Wet Sprocket fame, confirmed his appreciation with Taylor artist relations director Tim Godwin. It's worth noting that in the past the Taylor sound hasn't been Phillips' cup of tea.

"I have played two of the new guitars now," he shared. "They are amazing. Sean had one at the show we played last night. They're beautiful."

In October we sent producer Marshall Altman (Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Frankie Ballard, Will Hoge) a 517 and 717 to use on a recording project with the Josh Abbott Band. They tracked at Sonic Ranch, an in-demand multi-studio/residential complex located near El Paso, Texas, that's loaded with an amazing collection of music gear.

"In a studio full of amazing vintage acoustics, the guitars we couldn't beat and kept going back to were the new Taylor 717 and 517," he says. "Absolutely amazing. Full of life and magic from the moment we pulled them out of their cases."

Songwriter/producer/guitarist David Saw (Natasha Bedingfield), a Taylor player who's been working with producer Linda Perry on a recording project with Dolly Parton, has enjoyed getting acquainted with a Wild Honey Burst 517.

"First of all, it looks stunning and has lovely smoothed edges," he says. "I've fallen in love with how easy it is to play. The sound is balanced and vintage sounding, and the intonation is perfect – it holds its tuning like no other acoustic guitar I've played. When I take this guitar out of its beautiful case around other guitar players I've been asked many times, 'What is that guitar?' When I say it's a Taylor, most people's reaction is, 'Really? That looks nothing like a Taylor guitar.' This is a guitar that attracts players who wouldn't normally lean towards Taylors. I absolutely love this guitar."

The 517 also made a great first impression on Michael League, a Grammy Award-winning composer, producer, arranger, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist, bandleader of the New York based instrumental band Snarky Puppy and the international music ensemble Bokante, and owner and founder of the record label GroundUP Music. League was out on tour with David Crosby when he got his first taste of the Builder's Edition during a tour stop in San Diego.

"I've never felt as connected to a Taylor as when I played the 517 for the first time," he said afterward. "The sound has all the brilliance of the brand's history but with a rich, dark color that inspires you to play in way that most guitars don't."

He also loved the feel of the neck.

"I was struck by how the guitar felt in my left hand, as if someone had carved the neck according to my own physiology. It's a remarkable instrument." W&S