



From left, Evan Ellis builds a D100; John Kornau in the spray booth; Thane Shearon buffs a Crossroads.

He says, "Can you tell me a little about the job?" So I told him what we're doing, and I talked to him about Nashville. It's a big move from Southern California to Tennessee. Later, he accepted the position, and I'm tickled pink to have him. He ties into the artist thing so well, because he has so much experience building for artists. I mean, the shop is Marty Stuart's favorite hangout now. He comes down all the time to hang with Mark."

Kendrick grew up both with guitar building and country music. His uncle, Buddy Kendrick, traded time between playing with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys and working at the Fender factory. Himself an eight-year veteran of Fender R&D and the Fender Custom Shop, Mark has built custom guitars for everyone from Eric Clapton and Courtney Love to Merle Haggard and Marty Stuart.

Energetic and intense, Kendrick often wonders how long it will take a SoCal guy raised on frenetic traffic to get used to the pace of a sleepy Tennessee town, but he's abuzz with excitement for the growing Nashville music scene.

"There's more music going on in Nashville now than in New York and LA put together," he says. "I mean, you've even got major rock stars looking at real estate here now. Larry Carlton lives here. Peter Frampton, too. It's really like the third coast."

The Crossroads Doubleneck

One of Kendrick's first challenges at the Guild Custom Shop involved putting the Crossroads doubleneck into production. The Crossroads was commissioned from Guild by Slash of Guns'N'Roses in the early '90s. Slash had gone first to a few other manufacturers, all of whom turned the project down, believing that Slash's desire for a double-neck incorporating a hollow acoustic 12-string and a solidbody six-string was untenable.

After working with Slash, the Guild factory was able to build prototypes which exceeded Slash's expectations in tone and playability. The one-offs went to Slash, but no guitars were put into production. When the Guild Custom Shop was opened in 1997, Guild now had a facility which, with assistance from the Westerly factory, was capable of building an instrument as intricate and specialized as the Crossroads. The task of bringing the doubleneck online would fall to Kendrick.

"When I started working on the Crossroads at first," says Kendrick, "I was like 'agh!'"

"Now he likes them," interjects Bolen.

"Now that I got it figured out," Kendrick replies. "I tore the prototype apart. The biggest problem was that it had to be fixtured. All the routing templates had to be made. In order to do that, you have to reverse engineer the guitar. You just don't pop the thing out.

"But it came along pretty quickly once I got into it and started doing the fixtures and saw that it would work. The other guys in the shop were

like 'nah, we're not gonna build those, we won't be able to build those,' but when I started making fixtures and things, everybody chimed in, 'oh yeah, I see how that works.'"

Kendrick made the additional innovations of refining a few of the Crossroads' lines, and senior builder John Kornau designed the stunning AAA maple-topped versions. The results have been tremendous and point to a bright future for guitar design in the Guild Custom Shop, but designing speciality instruments is only one part of the Shop's mission.

The Future's Wide Open

"Our primary mission here," explains Kendrick, "is to raise the general awareness of the quality of Guild guitars, whether they're made in Westerly or in Nashville. With that said, there's room for all kinds of projects, and that's what's so fun about it. When someone asks me, 'What is the direction,' I say the possibilities are endless. It can be whatever you want."

The Custom Shop in Nashville works closely with the Guild factory in Westerly, Rhode Island, assisting Westerly in various R&D areas, and receiving generous assistance from Westerly in production-related areas.

With its wide-open agenda, the Custom Shop in Nashville thrives on the variety of projects it receives and its own flexibility. A talented staff and well-equipped facility give the Shop the ability to handle everything from warranty repairs, to custom orders like George Strait's vine-inlaid D100 (as seen on the recent CMA Awards), to line pieces like the new F30R-LS, to the designing and

building of custom Guild guitars.

On an average day in the Shop, you'll find a hive of industry. Fender amplifier tech Ronnie Anderson is busy handling custom amp modifications and warranty repairs. Guitar repairman Mark Piper handles Guild warranty repairs. Master builder Evan Ellis delicately hand-scallops the bracing for the Deco and Finesse acoustics. Builder Thane Shearon installs the intricate electronics on a Crossroads doubleneck. Senior builder John Kornau crafts the abalone inlay of the Deco and, as the Shop's ace finishing man, creates stunning sunbursts and custom color finishes.

So, what can we look for in the way of future products?

"We're working on several new concepts," says Bolen, "like a thinner jazz box, lighter weight, more responsive, different electronics, maybe a piezo in the bridge, combined with different humbuckers. My dream is to come in and see a rack of fabulous jazz boxes ready to go out the door."

Drawing on Guild's rich heritage of guitar-building, and infusing it with the spirit of the Music City, the Guild Custom Shop is the guitar industry's best kept secret. For more information on ordering a Guild Custom Shop guitar, check out the "Custom Shop Dream Sheet" on the next page or write to Guild Custom Shop, 516 Rundle Avenue, Nashville, TN 37210. 🍀

