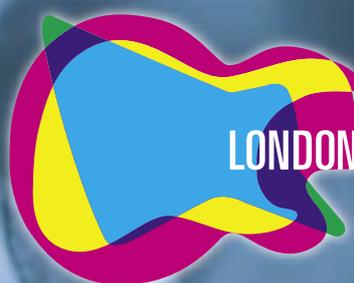


# FINISHING TOUCHES



LONDON GUITAR SHOW 2006

WE'RE ON THE HOME STRETCH NOW: NEXT MONTH WE'LL BE REVIEWING EVERYBODY'S DREAM GUITAR, SO THIS ISSUE WE'LL WATCH AS THE GUITAR IS FRETTED, FINISHED AND SET UP WITH ITS HARDWARE. YOU MAY COMMENCE YOUR DROOLING...

Over the previous two issues we've seen the amazing London Guitar Show Organic prize guitar take shape. A superb design, followed by a little CNC magic kicked the whole thing off, before the neck joint was shaped to fit so tightly that the guitar can be tuned to pitch without even a trace of glue. We're nearly there, and in a month, this special instrument

created specifically for The London Guitar Show 2006, hand built by Organic Guitars' Duncan Wales, will be won by one lucky attendee!

Sorry to sound quite so reverent, but watching the care and attention that Organic Guitars has put into this particular guitar's construction has been an education. When we

## FRETENING BEHAVIOUR

"Lining up the fingerboard perfectly can be tricky," says Duncan. "Let's say that it's only *slightly* misaligned at the nut: by the time your strings are on and they're travelling down to the bridge, it's a much bigger misalignment at that end. The strings will be hitting the frets

**"LINING UP THE FRETBOARD CAN BE TRICKY, BUT IT HAS TO BE PERFECT, OR YOU'LL NEVER BE IN TUNE"**

arrive at his workshop for the third time, it's laying on the bench, and Duncan is ready to begin work on the neck and fingerboard. He'll also be working on the guitar's finish and adding the hardware. Because it's just too much to pack in to one feature, we'll deal with the ins and outs of the latter as we usually would in next month's full review of the axe. Some may want to reserve their judgement until we've cast our expert eye over it, but until then...

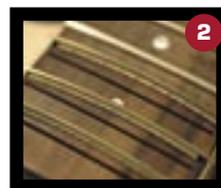
at an angle. There's no way you'll ever have perfect intonation; even if you adjust the bridge to perfection you'll never get it in tune. So it has to be perfect." Duncan leaves nothing to chance, then. He's so careful to align the fingerboard, in fact, that he deliberately leaves more wood on the neck than he needs before fitting it, to give himself a little more play should adjustments need to be made. Once the fingerboard has been



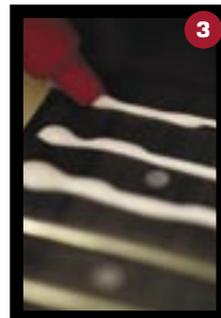
Coiled fret wire awaits its destiny on the fretboard



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- 1 The frets are cut with a tang cutter
- 2 Frets soon to be set
- 3 Glue is applied as a sealant to the fret pockets...
- 4 ...and pushed in, filling it completely
- 5 The set-in frets are filed down to perfection...
- 6 ...and crowned, rounding off the edges
- 7 Tru Oil is applied to the stained guitar body
- 8 The bookmatched headstock is finished identically to the body

set in place, he can shave and sand off whatever is left over, ensuring a perfect fit.

To cut the frets, Duncan reveals what is to all intents and purposes a block of wood with holes in. Each hole, though, is a precise depth, and there're as many as there are frets on a guitar's neck. He takes the Dunlop medium fretwire, and slots it into each hole in turn; once he's made cuts at the relevant point, he's left with a full set of near-as-damnit correctly sized frets. Obviously there's a little left over, but as you'll see, he'll take care of that with some careful filing down later on.

Setting the frets into the fingerboard takes a little more care. First, Duncan must make cuts at either end of the fret, using a fret tang cutter. This tool only snips at the lower half of the metal, leaving an overhang on each end. With the fret cut and ready to be fitted, Duncan makes use of some... woodglue?

"There's actually no reason for me to use the glue in terms of sticking it down," explains Duncan. "Once I've used the fret press, these have all been cut to a tight fit, so there'll be no chance of them coming loose. The problem with using strong glue on frets is that, obviously, these guitars are built to last. So assuming someone plays this one on a regular basis, somewhere down the line it'll eventually need a fret job. When that happens, with guitars that use powerful glue to



The frets are pressed into the board one by one

## "THE GLUE I USE ISN'T TO STICK ANYTHING DOWN, IT'S TO ACT AS A SEALANT TO PREVENT DAMAGE"

compensate for a not-so perfect fit, you end up ripping off half the wood trying to separate the frets from the board." So, what's the point in using a weaker glue at all then, Duncan? "The glue I use was never intended for sticking anything down: it acts as a sealant. That way, there's no chance of any moisture getting in under the frets and causing damage." To set them in place, Duncan uses a form of fret press – in this case a drilling machine with a modified end.

Duncan can now begin to file down the frets, both to make sure they don't over-reach the fret-board, and also to make sure that the top of each is the correct shape. "What you printed about Parker Guitars (GB 55 – The Southern Nitefly) and fret shapes is exactly right. If you don't round off the edges properly, then your strings don't make contact with the center of the fret. Again, your intonation will be terrible."

Another tool comes into play here: Duncan uses a fret crowner



The black stain is applied to the body, only to be sanded down moments later

to round the frets, leaving no undesirable edges. He gradually uses finer files on each one, going that extra mile and mirror-polishing them for good measure. As the review will show, it really does make all the difference; the smoothness of the frets is perfect for bends.

### STAINS MASSIVE

The guitar is almost ready for hardware to be added. Before that happens, however, Duncan needs to apply a suitable finish to the body and headstock. After some deliberation, GB plumped for a classic tobacco colouring. Aesthetics aside, the process of finishing the guitar is a wonder to behold in itself. Achieving the right colours in the maple is a lengthy process, but a relatively simple one to understand. Duncan begins with his

workshop-made black dye, covering the body and headstock to an equal level. Some of the maple will soak this up more, some less (see boxout). Once he's left it to soak, sandpaper is applied to the body. By taking off just enough wood, patterns are left in the grain where the stain has soaked in deeper. The whole process is carried out multiple times, but using various shades graduating to brown. As each layer is applied and sanded off, more patterns gradually begin to emerge in the body of the guitar. This layering process really begins to shine through after the first few layers are applied, and the range of inks and shades give some real depth to the maple. To keep the electronics properly shielded, he also gives the pickup pockets a coat of graphite-based screening paint. ➔

## 'WARE ITS AT NOT JUST A PRETTY BODY

It would be all too easy to gaze lovingly at the construction of this guitar, but to do so would mean you'd miss out on the excellent collection of hardware installed here.

Every part of this guitar has been handpicked for the best possible playing experience, and to complement the vibe that Duncan has sought with the body design and choice of woods, he's chosen only the best pieces of hardware. Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle has personally wound a couple of pickups for the project, named the Organic BKP humbucker, both of which can be coil-tapped via a push-pull underneath the tone knob. The Rockford reviewed this issue also carries the brand, and in fact a great deal of British electric builders are finding themselves using these excellent UK humbuckers, P90s and single coils – long live the British industries! Master volume and tone are all you need, alongside a standard three-way toggle switch.

The bridge is a Nashville tune-o-matic Schaller model, and along with back-locking tuners and straplocks made by the same company, the whole setup is a guitar that really will blow you away.



Schaller tuners keep the guitar properly intonated



The bridge is put in place carefully



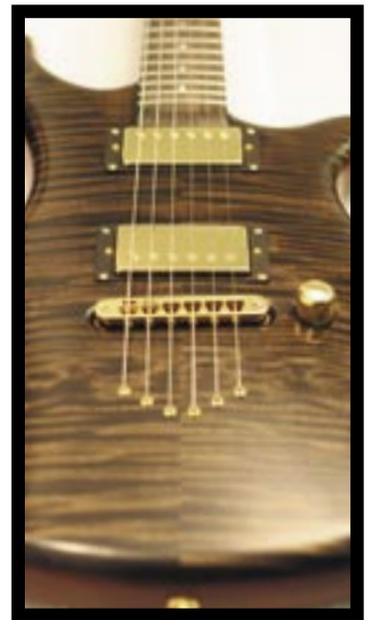
The pickup covers are firmly screwed in



■ Stained wood, in the process of being gradually layered

**"THE JOINT IS SO SNUG THAT BARELY ANY FORCE IS NEEDED TO HOLD IT IN PLACE"**

Once he's satisfied with the staining Duncan will apply an oil finish, which brings out that '3D effect' in the maple a treat. He isn't a fan of gloss, and oiling the guitars is a far more, well, Organic process. Once the body and headstock have been stained and oiled, they both look great; its shocking quite how much the final finish picks out the darker-stained areas. Again, attention to detail is the watchword here, and the finish has been applied perfectly to the maple without spilling over onto any of the wood on the sides. To the touch, the final finish is smooth, and certainly a lot less smothering than a gloss finish. What with the stunning gold hardware, the whole axe just looks every bit the expensive, custom project that you'd usually find yourself paying heaps for.



■ Duncan applies the screening paint, shielding the pickups



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**NEXT MONTH: FINALLY, THE REVIEW!**

This baby looks nothing short of amazing – turn to page 163 for an advance glimpse. While we didn't have the room to comprehensively cover all of the hardware's nuances in this issue, next month we'll be putting the guitar through its paces in a standard *GB* review. We'll hear from Tim Mills from Bare Knuckle on the pickups he's chosen to wire for the project, and will be finally plugging this baby in to see what it can really do. Read it, love it, maybe even win it! **GB**

**WHAT'S IN IT & HOW TO WIN IT!**

**... If you're reading this after 7 May 2006, you're too late! If it's before, you simply can't afford to miss out on the chance of winning this beauty. To update those of you who may have missed the last issues of *Guitar Buyer*, here's Duncan Wales' synopsis of the prize guitar...**

"This guitar is going to have fantastic sustain and a really resonant tone, with lots of overtones. The bridge will be a Schaller Nashville tune-o-matic style, with through-body stringing. There'll be the Bare Knuckle pickups, Schaller back-locking tuners and Schaller strap locks. There'll be a lot going on in the sound, but it will be a very organic – of course! – woody-sounding guitar. We've developed the pickups with Tim Mills from Bare Knuckle Pickups specifically for these guitars, and the brief that Tim was given was

that we wanted to hear the guitars rather than the pickups, so I wanted them as transparent-sounding a pickup as possible."

Remember that in addition to the guitar, the prize will also include a hard-shell case, certificate of authenticity, Organic guitar strap and picks, and a specially engraved control plate inscribed with the winner's name and 'London Guitar Show 2006'.

**TO WIN THIS FABULOUS GUITAR, HERE'S WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO**

The prize guitar will be on display at The London Guitar Show 2006 (5-6-7 May, Wembley Exhibition Centre). The competition will be offered **ONLY AT THE SHOW**, meaning only show visitors will be able to enter. So, simply fill out a form, available from Organic Guitars or the Guitar Buyer stand **AT THE**

**SHOW**, and post it in one of the provided boxes. We will make the draw on Sunday afternoon at 4pm, and the lucky winner's phone will ring. Full review next month...



**THE RULES**

Entries accepted only at The London Guitar Show 2006. Entries must be completed in full and posted into a designated box no later than 3.45 on Sunday 7 May **AT THE SHOW ONLY**. The winner will be picked at random and will be notified immediately. If the winner is at the show, they can collect the guitar from Organic Guitars stand at The London Guitar Show. Employees of MB Media or Organic Guitars may not enter. There is no cash alternative, the editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. No multiple entries.