

GBINFO



RUSS HAYWOOD SIRICOTE

Price: £2,300
 Built In: UK
 Scale Length: 645mm (25.4 inches)
 Nut Width: 45mm (1 3/4 inches)
 Top: Solid European spruce
 Back & Sides: Solid siricote

Neck: Mahogany, set
 Fingerboard: Ebony
 Frets: 20 medium
 Bridge: Ebony
 Machineheads: Schaller w/Ebony buttons
 Case: Hiscox Case supplied
 Finishes: Natural
 Left-handers: Custom order

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FINE TUNING

THIS HAND-MADE GUITAR FROM BRITISH GUITAR BUILDER RUSS HAYWOOD PAYS TRIBUTE TO ONE OF MARTIN'S BEST-LOVED DESIGNS, BUT ADDS A FEW SUBTLE TWISTS. **TIM SLATER** SWAPS HIS PICKS FOR ACOUSTIC LICKS

Russ Haywood is an accomplished luthier and folk guitarist based in Hastings, near the English South coast. As a gigging guitarist, Russ gets plenty of opportunities to road test his instruments and, most importantly, attract the attention of potential customers.

Being a skilled guitarist himself, Russ enjoys making a wide variety of acoustic and electro-acoustic guitars, but he also applies his considerable talents to many other fine traditional

stringed instruments, including bouzoukis, mandolins and electric violins. For sure, in the face of such phenomenal big-name competition, the world of private custom luthiery is a brave endeavour for any builder, so what does Mr Haywood have to offer, to separate him from the crowd?

BODY & NECK

This guitar has a distinctive and very elegant body styling based on a Martin 000 model, but with a deeper body that measures 120mm at its

deepest: the standard dreadnought-style body depth. Russ owns a rare mahogany Martin J-18M and his deep affection for the old Martin originally inspired this guitar, which took almost two years to complete due to existing customer orders.

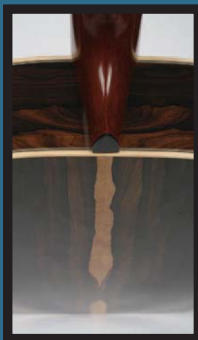
The solid European spruce top is finished with a thin coat of water-based gloss lacquer, just thick enough to protect the top from 'ordinary' wear, but not thick enough to threaten the top's sensitivity to playing dynamics. If you are a vigorous

WOOD ON YER, MATE

ENDANGERED SPECIES ARE SAFE WITH MR H

■ Russ Haywood doesn't use timbers listed on CITIES list website, detailing endangered species of timber.

Traditional guitar building timbers such as Honduras mahogany and Brazilian rosewood are protected, but there are perfectly good alternatives available. "Siricote (Latin name: cordin dodecandra) is tonally in the same ballpark as Indian rosewood," explains Russ. "It has roughly the same characteristics, even though it is a little harder to work and is more expensive. I choose Siricote in this case because I wanted to show an example of what is available if you want to pay a bit extra."



heavy player, it might be worth fitting a pickguard, as there's not one as standard. The top's aesthetic trimmings reveal a strong Martin influence, while not falling into direct copy territory; the featheredge herringbone binding that trims the spruce top is lighter and less 'blocky' than the herringbone binding often used by Martin, for example. The soundhole features some very impressive inlay work too, with a 2mm ring of abalone resting between concentric rings of ultra-thin black pinstripes; the overall effect is subtle but very beautiful and reveals truly impressive skills.

The guitar's solid back and sides are made from highly figured Siricote, trimmed with maple and black/white/black pinstripe binding. Siricote is a commonly grown

throughout the southern USA, Mexico and South America. Its attractive, dark chocolate colour looks similar to rosewood, but Siricote has a far more dramatic-looking, widely-spaced grain; something clearly found on the guitar's back, which features an extraordinary book-matched grain structure.

The internal bracing is modelled after a standard Martin X pattern, and Russ also tap tunes the internal front and back bracing using a strobe tuner to set the pitch of each individual brace to specific musical notes. Different

luthiers offer varying opinions about the value of tuning the internal bracing, but most seem to admit that they employ tap tuning as part of the overall process to a greater or lesser degree, because it improves the guitar's overall resonance and tone.

The Haywood Siricote's chunky mahogany neck has a comfy 'C' shape that feels more like a traditional Martin acoustic guitar neck compared to the slimmer, more electric guitar influenced neck shapes preferred by companies like Taylor or even some of Martin's recent models, which are slimmer and more speedy, compared with most older Martin guitars. The 645mm scale length is shared by Martin's OM and dreadnought guitars; longer than most Gibsons and indeed Martin's OM which results in fairly taugth string tension. Thankfully, the action is fairly low, enabling lengthy playing sessions to float by with no hint of fatigue. In fact this guitar feels so easy and rewarding to play that you just don't want to put it down.

Ebony features quite heavily on this guitar, being used for the fingerboard the bridge, truss rod cover and the veneer on the headstock facing. The bridge is a standard, pinned type with

an uncompensated bone saddle; it's staunchly traditional and works just fine. Bone is also used for the top nut and the overall finishing and attention to detail are excellent. The myriad bone-substitutes around work well enough, but as far as many guitarists are concerned, bone equals tone, having in our opinion a better fundamental sound than the somewhat more zingy-sounding man-made substitutes.



Expert wooden binding underlines the finery on offer from Haywood

"IT'S A SONIC STUNNER THAT VEERS INTO COLLINGS TERRITORY, AND THAT IS HIGH PRAISE INDEED"

MIND THE GAP

TINY GAPS

■ The guitar's top, back and sides are gloss finish while the neck is satin finish, which is in step with current trends. This requires that the body and neck are finished separately before being glued together.

This enables a much cleaner neck/body join by avoiding a build up of lacquer around the area between the edges of the fingerboard and the top. Consequently, the Haywood has a microscopic gap between the spruce top and the bass side of the fingerboard where the top was masked off during the finishing process to prevent lacquer creeping into the area of the joint.

This tiny gap doesn't spoil the guitar's performance in any way but it does raise an eyebrow. Russ Haywood was quick to confess that is a one-off, stating, that if he were making the guitar for a customer, the problem would rectified before it ended up with its eventual owner.



DETAILS

EXCEPTIONALLY WELL MADE AND UNIQUE. THIS IS A BEAUTY



Sharp edges have echoes of Collings in the headstock department



Again, taste is the order of the day here. Inlays are pretty, but not ostentatious



The beautiful truss-rod cover is just one example of the attention to detail here



CONCLUSION

EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY AND FAB TONE. WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?

The true measure of a guitar is people's reactions to its tone, and whenever the Haywood Siricote is played around these parts, it attracts nothing but admiring comments.

Russ Haywood is clearly a very talented guitar maker and his skills don't come cheap, albeit highly competitive when compared with similar spec from the likes of Martin, Taylor, Collings or Santa Cruz. This example of his art costs £2,300, which compared with a good-quality, mass-produced acoustic guitar looks like a lot. The Haywood's value is due to the intensive labour time invested in details such as the internally tuned struts, not forgetting the top quality tone woods and that every component is either hand made or custom finished to match the guitar. Moreover, it's the tone that's worth the money.

Haywood has come through with flying colours. We look forward to seeing more from this guy before too long. **GB**

OPINION

RUSS HAYWOOD SIRICOTE

GOLD STARS

- ★ Beautiful tone and playability
- ★ Looks great

BLACK MARKS

- Tiny gap between top and fingerboard caused by masking part of the spruce top during finishing.
- No pickguard

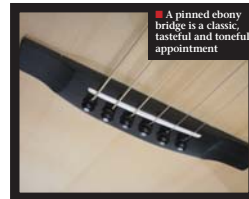
IDEAL FOR...

Serious acoustic players seeking a unique, ultra high quality, brilliant sounding guitar

SOUNDS

Acoustic guitars don't set absolutely everybody alight with excitement, but you'd have to be a pretty cold fish not to get wrapped up in the sound of this guitar. Firstly, it has the most incredible projection; even softly picked or strummed notes carry across the room as though they have wings, but the tone remains sweet and doesn't sound overly compressed or distorted when the intensity suddenly picks up a couple of gears. This impressive dynamic range is matched by a sonorous depth and an uncluttered voice that gives every note plenty of room to breathe; even complex fingerpicking patterns sound incredibly spacious as each and every note rings out clearly. This alone makes the Haywood Siricote ideal for busy playing styles, like ragtime or bluegrass for example, where clear separation between the bass, midrange and treble frequencies is vital.

The ebony fingerboard graces the notes with a distinctive percussive 'ping' but the Haywood doesn't sound thin or tinny, it simply cuts through with a clear authoritative tone that's



A pinned ebony bridge is a classic, tasteful and toneful appointment

almost sounds piano-like; it really is that strident and powerful. This is probably down to the Siricote back and sides, whose punchy-yet-mellow character seems to work brilliantly, and the longer scale length plays an important role too by giving the strings extra room to really vibrate and ring out. It's a sonic stunner that veers into Collings territory, and that is high praise indeed.

RATINGS

RUSS HAYWOOD SIRICOTE

BODY & NECK	★★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
GBVERDICT	★★★★★