

MARTIN BUILDS ITS 2,000,000TH GUITAR!

Commemorating an extraordinary milestone, Martin teams with famed watch maker to create a showpiece guitar that showcases craftsmanship and celebrates a 184-year focus on quality

There is a centuries-old tradition of artisans crafting impossibly ornate musical instruments to showcase their skills. These “presentation pieces,” defined by exotic materials and elaborate inlay work, served as a pre-industrial age form of ad-

vertising, loudly proclaiming, “Look at what I can do.” At this year’s NAMM show, the Martin Guitar Company will take the wraps off a 21st century interpretation of the “presentation piece,” with an extraordinary guitar that celebrates the completion of the two-millionth Martin instrument. Designed in conjunction with acclaimed watch maker Roland G. Murphy, founder of RGM, Martin serial number 2,000,000 is defined by a watch motif, complete with decorative cut gears in the back and top and an exquisite, working timepiece embedded in the headstock. Why the watch theme? For one, it signifies the passage of time, offering up a subtle tribute to Martin’s longevity: 184 uninterrupted years of building superb instruments. A fine watch also embodies the same devotion to craft and tradition that has defined the Martin guitar.



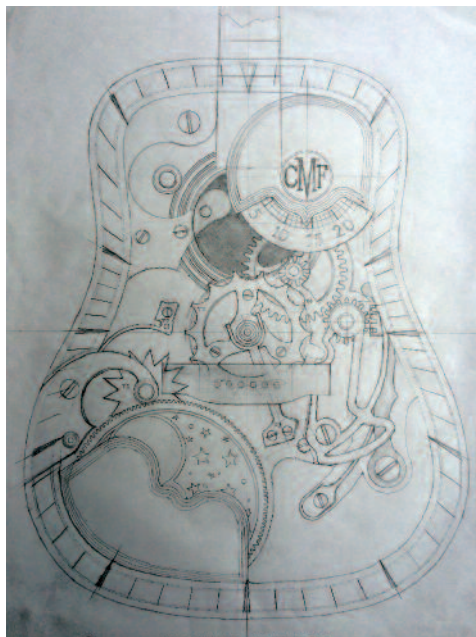
Attention to detail: Closeup of the RGM timepiece built into the headstock.





The partnership with Roland Murphy for a special guitar was a fortuitous union of companies with shared values: deep Pennsylvania roots and a steadfast adherence to high standards. Like the original Christian Frederick Martin, Murphy found his calling early in life. As a teenager, he initially studied watch making at the now defunct Bowman technical school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, about an hour west of Martin's operations in Nazareth. Later, he refined his skills at the Institute of Swiss Watchmaking in Neuchatel, Switzerland. In 1992, he returned to his native Lancaster to launch RGM Watches. These days, he and a skilled team handcraft about 200 RGM watches a year that are prized by collectors worldwide. The dials of RGM watches are distinguished by guilloché, a process that involves hand-cutting geometric patterns into the dial. While most companies stamp the dial to achieve a similar impact, Murphy says traditional guilloché creates sharper peaks and valleys, better reflecting light. This attention to detail prompted watch aficionado Michael Clerizo to call Murphy "America's preeminent master watchmaker" in a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*.

About two years ago, Murphy reached out to Tim Teel, Martin's director of product design, and Scott Sasser, director of the custom shop, to discuss a possible collaboration. When they presented the idea to Martin CEO Chris Martin they got an immediate and enthusiastic green light. Chris explains today, "RGM was a perfect fit because they're in Pennsylvania and still make fine handcrafted watches in Pennsylvania."



Martin serial number 2,000,000 was based on a concept drawing by artist Robert Goetzl, a cousin of Martin CEO Chris Martin. Inlaying the metal gears took months and involved a lengthy "trial and error" process.



They're not just a branded company sourcing products in Asia." He adds, "Like Martin, Roland Murphy has a love of American watchmaking, and he's probably one of the only people still carrying on that tradition. Among watch aficionados, people recognize his dedication and skill."

The Martin Guitar Company has historically approached ornate guitars with a degree of ambivalence. Although museums and collections are filled with vintage Martins that feature ivory fingerboards and intricate inlay work, founder C.F. Martin was always concerned that ornamentation would compromise musical performance. His natural preference was for instruments with a more austere style. On those occasions when he did build what was termed a "fancy" guitar, he took great pains to make sure that it still delivered musically. Over a century later, Teal and Sasser channeled the same approach in developing the two millionth guitar. They obviously wanted a visually striking instrument that would stop traffic and draw stares. But they also wanted it to play and sound like a Martin.

The result is a guitar with the classic dreadnought body style, made with Brazilian rosewood back and sides and an Engelmann spruce top. Paper-thin metal gears that resemble a watch mechanism are inlaid in the top under a thin layer of lacquer. A koa and ebony strip with hour markings around the perimeter completes the watch motif. The steel rosette has the same guilloche pattern found on RGM watches. Although the finished instrument is a tad heavier than a standard dreadnought, players say it maintains the unmistakable Martin tonality.

While Teel and Sasser can take credit for the original design concept, the finished product owes a debt to Robert Goetzl, a noted artist and cousin to Chris Martin. Goetzl has had a long and productive career as a book illustrator, and also created the impressive mural that graces the lobby of the Martin visitor center in Nazareth. When he was asked to collaborate on the project, he took inspiration from the classic angles of RGM's flagship Caliber 20 watch, developing the gear inlay patterns. Murphy modified the original drawing from a watchmaker's perspective, ensuring that the gears were correctly sized and placed. "If you know and understand watches," says Teel, "you'll immediately recognize that the inlay is a pretty accurate depiction of a working watch."

The project presented a series of engineering challenges that required the skills of both Martin and RGM. "We had to figure out how to incorporate a tuning gear design into the mounting piece that would hold the clock in the headstock while simultaneously looking good and functioning well," says Teel. "The solution we arrived at was integrating two of the six tuners into the watch case itself." The metal work was done at the RGM facility. Inlaying the metal into the wood soundboard and achieving a flawless, glasslike finish also required new and untested techniques. Teel adds, "There was a lot of trial and error involved, which is one reason the project took as long as it did."

While the two millionth Martin is destined for a place of honor at the Martin Museum in Nazareth, a handful of well-heeled buyers will be able to acquire a slightly less elaborate facsimile in the form of the D-200. Also a joint effort between RGM and Martin, the limited edition instrument features the same watch inlay motif with the guilloche turned rosette crafted at the RGM workshop. Unlike the anniversary guitar with its clock-face headstock, the D-200 will come with an RGM-designed wrist watch that will round out the time motif while adding a personal feel. Explains Tim Teel, "For the D-200, we wanted to make it so that whoever owns it will cherish it and play it, so we made sure it kept the weight of a regular guitar. We changed the inlays—primarily wood and pearl—and there will be less potting, except for the rosette area." The ring for the soundhole, as well as other choice parts, will also be crafted by the watchmakers at RGM. "We're designing a very special watch for the D-200," Murphy explains. "Projects like these don't come around every day. It's a wonderful opportunity, but it is expensive to design something this special while also making it here in Pennsylvania. For our part, we're proud to make anything that highlights homegrown craftsmanship."

Frank Henry Martin, grandson of the founder, adopted "Non Multa Sed Multum," as a company motto. The literal translation from the Latin is "not many but much," which is another way of saying, "quality before quantity." Producing two million anything in an industry defined by limited unit volumes at first glance seems to contradict the Martin slogan. Only a handful of music companies can claim a similarly large output. Yet, Martin has never strayed from its focus on quality. It's just that 184 years of crafting consistently excellent instruments has stoked demand worldwide, necessitating a steady increase in output. The company's sequential serial numbering system, which has been consistently applied since 1898, graphically illustrates the rising trend line.

It took Martin 65 years to build its first 8,000 guitars. It took another 49 years to pass the 100,000 marks. In the last three decades, though, output has dramatically increased. The 500,000th guitar was produced in 1990; ten years later the 750,000 milestone was passed. Martin guitar serial number 1,000,000 was made in 2004. And, in the past 12 years, more Martins have been built than in the previous 172.

The growth and global acceptance of Martin guitars have been gratifying for everyone at the tightly knit organization, but Chris Martin says it presents new and unanticipated challenges. "All of us who make fine musical instruments are facing shortages of the exotic materials we have come to depend on. We have to be very aware of asking what we are doing to foster sustainability, while talking to our customers about alternatives to the traditional rosewood, mahogany, and spruce," he says.

But, if quality has been a defining attribute of the Martin company, so has resilience. The company has successfully navigated economic strife (1893 was a particularly trying year); numerous wars, both at home and abroad; changing musical states, like when ukulele sales abruptly came to a halt in the 1920s; and a few self-inflicted wounds, like an ill-fated diversification plan in the late 1960s. Yet, adhering to the dictum of building great instruments suggests that there will be no shortage of future milestones to be marked with an appropriate presentation piece.

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