

Ian Dickinson's craft demands huge patience but his creations are heritage pieces he hopes will provide music for generations to come

GUITAR man

By Angela McManus

IN A CONSUMER world of must have, buy it now, instant gratification there is something wonderfully archaic about the way Ian Dickinson runs his business.

If someone wants to place an order with the Glasgow-based luthier, there are no samples to browse or promises of immediate delivery, simply an honest faith in the fact the artisan craftsman will produce a beautiful handmade guitar many, many months down the line that will meet their specifications exactly.

"You're basically asking people to give you a £500 deposit for an idea you're describing to them, and they're probably not going to see it for 18 months. So, it's not the easiest sell," he muses after downing tools and taking a break at the Guitar Workshop in Argyle Street.

"It's a huge privilege for someone to put their faith into you, to trust you, when they have nothing to go on."

Ian's customers are keeping the faith, he's currently making instruments for four people, and each will take between 200 and 300 hours. They include three guitars and a ukulele.

"The ukulele is for a guy I made a guitar for when we first opened and it's going to be an exact miniature replica of that guitar. The other three are for retired people – one is an ex professional musician, another is retired and likes the finer things in life. So, the silver pound is strong," he considers.

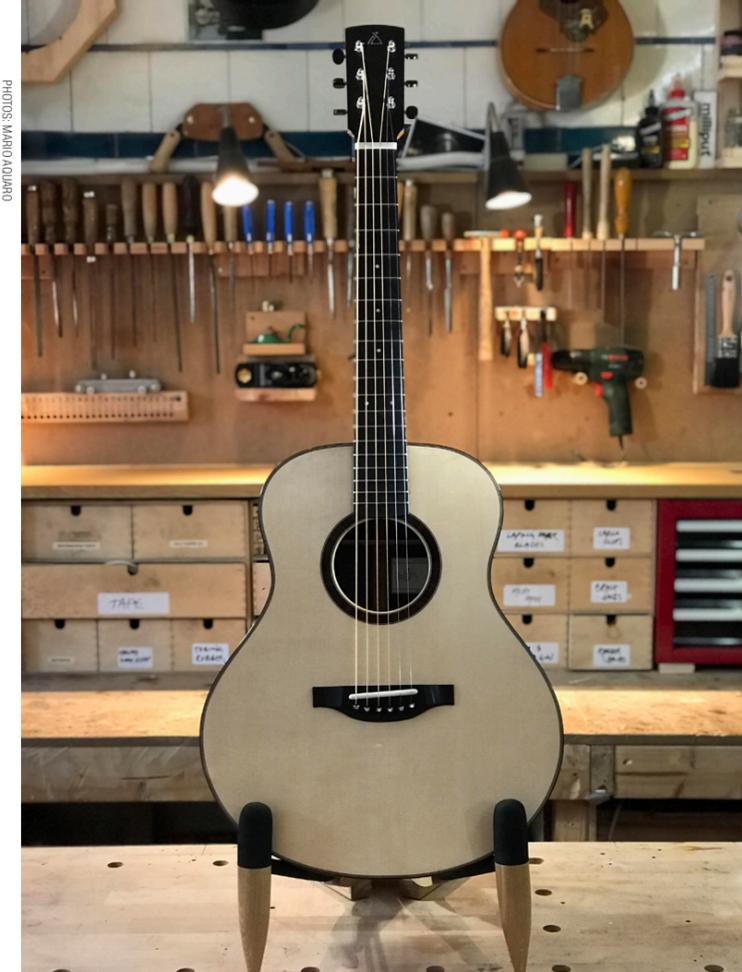
"The guitars will be six months from start to finish but they've been on order for seven or eight months."

With prices starting at £2,000 per guitar, Ian makes heirloom pieces he hopes will be passed on down through the generations. These are guitars to be played, not sit on a

stand in the corner of a room. Meanwhile, a steady flow of guitar repairs has kept the workshop busy since it opened in 2015.

"I do a lot of work for the folk scene. These guys tour the world and make a good living," explains Ian.

"I did a guitar repair for Mogwai recently. The neck was broken off in Brazil and they were going out on tour again a week after they came back. So, they let me know they needed it done quickly. You always try and do that if you can because without them, people don't learn to play the guitar. Professional musicians feed your client



FINGER PICKIN' GOOD: Ian Dickinson is currently making instruments for four people. Each will take between 200 and 300 hours to complete.



'Professional guitar players feed your client base as they're inspiring the young'

base because they're inspiring younger players to start."

There is no average customer for repairs, from complete beginners to professional touring musicians to schoolkids and

retired people. "It's tough, it's not an easy living and it's not massively financially rewarding. It's only been in the last year I've had a level of business that allows me to say, 'It's going to be this long', and if that's OK with the customer, that's great," he says.

While business is growing steadily at the one-man Guitar Workshop, where did it all go wrong for iconic US guitar makers Gibson, who filed for bankruptcy in May this year?

The writing was on the wall for some time, according to Ian. Buying electronics

brand Philips and diversifying into making stereos and headphones meant the guitar makers took their eyes off the ball, or maybe that should be the strings.

Ian adds: "Their building practices are questionable and they cost a fortune, I just don't think it's value for money. Broken necks on Gibsons keep every guitar repair shop in business. But they're probably the most well-known brand of guitar and they're an icon, if they get back to doing what they did do well then that's a great thing." ■

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