

NASHVILLE

LIFESTYLES

Real Heroes

celebrities and citizens raise the bar

+ RASCAL FLATTS

give back in a *BIG* way

The HISTORY

ISSUE a dynamic look at our city's storied past

HOLIDAY GUIDE
amazing gifts from the hottest stores



One ROCKIN' Business

*The founders of Rock Royalty
set a new standard for luxury
guitars and accessories*

BY STACIE STANDIFER • PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER KOUTSIS

What do you get when you combine two young men with very different backgrounds and interests? Most often, it's acquaintance at best, but in the case of Brian Shore and David King, their varied backgrounds and passions have resulted in the launch of a potentially award-winning product—based in Nashville.

Although the two knew each other casually, it wasn't until a December 2009 networking lunch with a group of other young male business leaders that their friendship blossomed. Shore, a serious businessman, had dreamed of creating the ultimate guitar for quite some time. A guitarist since the age of 13, he aspired to make the world's most opulent musical instrument.

"I loved engineering and design concepts and most of all, music, but didn't have the expertise to make it happen," Shore admits. After telling King about his idea, he quickly had a new best friend—it was an instant "hook" for his creative side. King says the initial conversation was the start of a fire that would consume him from that day on. By the New Year, they were in serious talks and within two weeks, they'd started on three guitars. Rock Royalty was officially born.

They've just launched their first collection of nine amazing guitars and are already receiving national attention for their creation—and finished products. While the progress has been a labor of love, it hasn't come without obstacles and hurdles.

"We wanted first and foremost for the guitars to be purely, uniquely Nashville—innovative and modern, but with an appreciation of the past," King says. He was so excited about the project that he bought his first guitar Jan. 7—only to return it the next day. There was a rush of excitement, but the process and their choices were extremely important: Shore, being the guitarist, felt that many factors were to be considered.

Choosing guitars with the strongest market share and the most popularity with musicians was crucial, so they opted to start with Fender and Paul Reed Smith, with their main showpiece being Gibson. Because Gibson is based here, this was a conscious decision to focus on a truly local product.

Other hurdles included everything from ordering thousands of dollars worth of sterling silver wrapping material to then discovering that it didn't work—then countless trial-and-error experiments with processing, engineering and, of course, differences of opinion. Heated arguments haven't been uncommon in the past year, according to the two visionaries, but their passion about the project kept them focused on the overall goal—creating incredibly beautiful, functional pieces.

"One of the biggest challenges was there being no playbook for this project," Shore says. Partnering with King, whose family has been in the jewelry business for many years, did create advantages—master designers

and craftsmen on hand to help with the jewels was a big bonus—and necessary to create gorgeous guitars. But instead of stopping with simple accessories and a bit of bling, they wanted to take it to the next level—leading to another discovery, one of the most fascinating aspects of their designs.

At first, Shore was against the idea to wrap the guitars in alligator skin, but King's strong interest in high fashion and the material caused him to push. With all a guitar's angles, getting the material to not just look good, but to be seamless was a hurdle that had them trying dozens of different approaches for months on end. The first try was a bust—so they kept working.

The big break came when King met local artist Keith Merry, who was onsite for some finish work while King was remodeling his home. After sharing the project with Merry in casual conversation, a solution followed courtesy of Merry's creative mind. Merry's business, Herndon & Merry, put their team to work on building cages (which resulted in Rock Royalty's patent pending KAGED collection) for the instruments. The details of this 10-month touch-and-go process are too many to list—but finally, King and Shore were on the right track. In fact, their wrapping procedures have evolved so much that now they are working with the highly desirable skins of giant stingrays in addition to the alligator belly. (And these aren't just any skins—they've chosen only varieties proven to get darker and finer with time.)

Then, there are the fine jewels in all kinds of colors. Rare stones and precious metals are the definitive touches. All of the finish work is done by hand by local craftsmen. They discovered a master stitching talent who relocated to the area from New York City, and with his experience, have added high-fashion details like luxurious red stitching. They also added chroming details done by a gifted motorcycle detailer in Madison, Tenn. The marketing is also done here—much of that from King's constantly gathering feedback from customers and stylists (many with music industry related backgrounds) that shop his family's fine jewelry store in Green Hills.

They are focused on the Nashville factor, but it isn't their only advantage. A strong belief in having faith and pushing boundaries is a big reason that they have come so far in such a short time. It's also why they've managed to do it without killing each other—instead, they trust one another more and more as they proceed. Failure isn't an option for either business partner, as they share common work ethics and the ability to find innovations through technology along the way.

Another positive on their side is the pricing (with custom guitars starting at around \$20,000), which is low compared with what some other luxury goods of this caliber might run, thanks to their elimination of any "middleman" or retailer. By dealing with clients directly, they've taken out the mark-up factor. This allows them to keep costs more than fair, and also keeps service on a local level. They handle everything, both before and after the sale, which is a rare find these days and an especially attractive trait for collectors and musicians.

One question I had to ask them was who was at the top of their "wish list" to potentially buy and play their guitars. Brian's list included Steve Vai, Eddie Van Halen and Warren DeMartini. David hopes that both Linkin Park and Kirk Hammett of Metallica will become members of Rock Royalty. But when pressed to mention a few fellow Nashvillians, they mentioned Jack White and Brad Paisley. They unanimously agreed that Keith Urban would be the front-runner—because of his amazing talent and appreciation for fine guitars. Actually, Urban was the inspiration when they designed the Fender Telecaster in their launch prototype collection.

What makes them so confident that some of the best guitarists in the world will be interested? Not only are they beautiful, one-of-a-kind pieces of art, but they are also the best instruments in the business,



designed to handle the rigors of performing on stage and on the road. The commitment to uncompromising quality of the partners and their craftspeople ensure that these guitars will be timeless—and that they can take a beating while still looking and sounding incredible.

Another factor that comes into play is that this first group only serves as an example of what is to come. The focus is going to be on customizing each guitar to fit the personality, playing style and tastes of the owner. Just like the original nine that appeal to different genres of music, various fashion preferences and even sexes, future models will be even more individualized. An example might be diamond encrusted four-leaf clovers for an Irish rock band or pink diamonds with a favorite number or symbol (for example, like Taylor Swift's love for the number 13). According to King, the only limit really is the buyer's imagination—as their track record thus far proves, their team will tackle anything that a player wants to imagine.

So what's next? They plan on creating guitars for branding—for businesses in Music City or anywhere in the world that want to use the guitars as wall art with their own corporate logos or messages, or to create specialized body shapes—which is something that is definitely being considered for the near future.

Other goals? According to both Shore and King, rest isn't on the horizon. They have an endless list of designs not yet realized. They are going to limit production to 12-18 guitars per year, so the focus isn't on volume, but instead on fine-tuning each piece. If you think that one of these would make a great gift for the musician who has everything, it's likely best to get on Rock Royalty's list now, as the demand is definitely going to be bigger than the supply and they are purposely keeping it exclusive.

One interesting nod that Shore wants to gain in 2011 is recognition from the *Guinness Book of World Records*—in a newly created category for the most opulent performance guitar in the world. Well, the motto of Rock Royalty is “Live 1 Louder.” With their energy, all they need is to keep turning it up!

To see more of their designs, check out our website slideshow at NashvilleLifestyles.com including photos from their launch or go directly to RockRoyaltyguitars.com