



TAYLOR 317E £2099

GRAND PACIFIC



New design but a vintage voice

There is no single *ultimate* guitar: that be-all-and-end-all instrument that will end our search for perfection. And yet we chase the idea, an idea that will change as our tastes as players change. The quest is all part of the fun, of course, but sometimes innovative guitars come along that change our perception of what we want and need, and they actually bring new things out of us. We think Taylor's new Grand Pacific is one of them.

Taylor have already been busy innovating with last year's V-Class bracing (see p92), a genuinely fresh take on acoustic construction from Master Builder and design maverick Andy Powers. This Grand Pacific is a V-Class guitar, but it's a brand-new shape for the company

vintage drop-shouldered take is a hint at the tonal character. If you're nonplussed by gloss finishes, this guitar should give you serious pause for thought; a shimmery top finish over pale flawless Sitka spruce with warm satin sapele back and sides, it's a winning combination of traditional and clean contemporary that just works. The 317 is a looker, but it's not showy – more a player's guitar, ready to get down to work.

We read a lot of specs from brands about 'rolled' fingerboard edges built for player comfort, but this feels like premium territory. The satin finish and organic streaks of the ebony 'board further enhance a smooth and classy experience that feels like home very quickly, especially for

“ IT CHANGES THE PERCEPTION OF WHAT A TAYLOR SOUNDS LIKE ”

that goes even further in changing the perception of what a Taylor acoustic can sound like.

This 317E represents the most affordable of the Grand Pacific launch line, the other two models being rosewood 717 and mahogany 517 b&s 'Builder's Editions', starting at £2,999 for the non-electro natural-finish version of the latter. According to Powers, this sapele back and sides model is pitched somewhere between them in terms of tonal character. At street prices of around £1,749 (and £1,600 for the non-electro), this still represents a serious investment, but it's also a potential guitar for life.

We wager this is the closest Taylor will ever get to a traditional dreadnought shape, and the

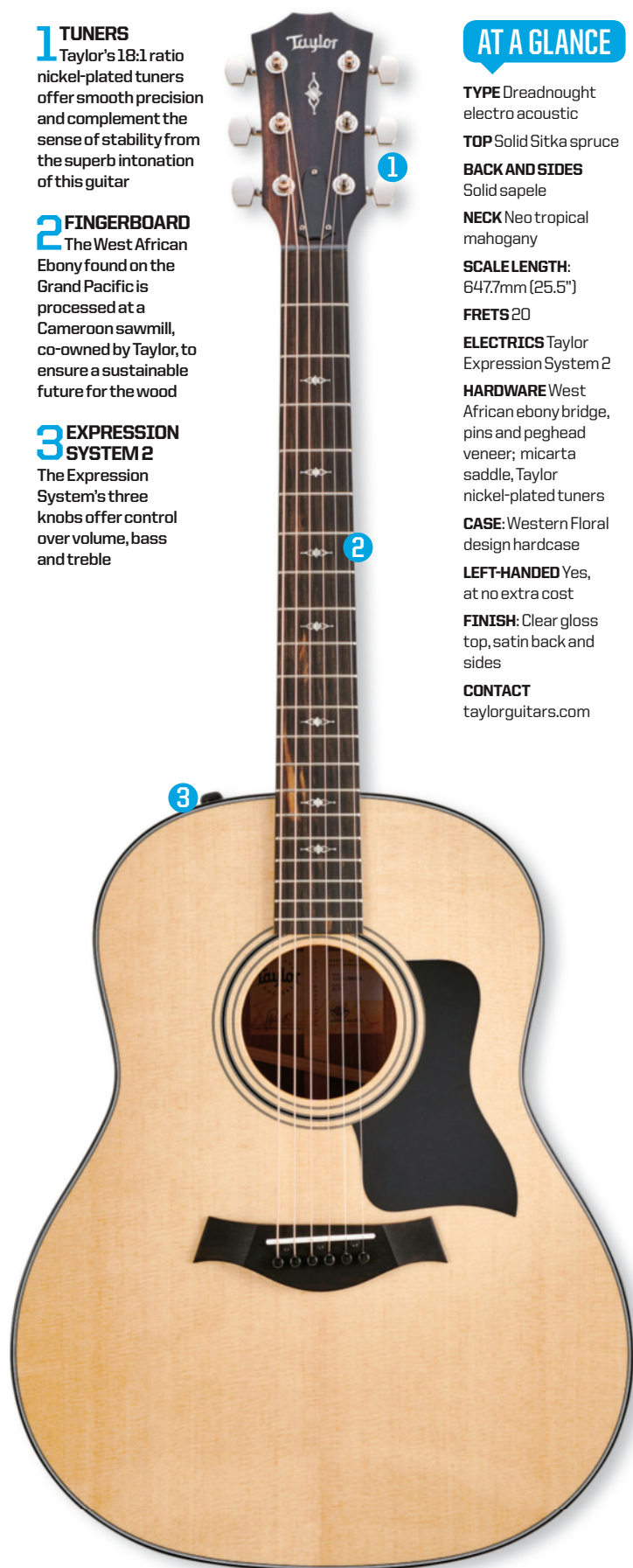
fingerstyle. But, of course, feel is only part of the equation...

This is a different kind of acoustic tone, even for V-Class modernists Taylor. The initial politeness might actually throw anyone used to muscular mids and a boomy bottom end. But give this guitar time with an open mind, and it will shine. There's a softer vintage character, and that means subtlety here. The V-Class helps give notes across the board equal sustain and projection, and there are delights to be found, which will coax players into melodic territory at the dusty end. The usual choked compromises of the higher frets don't exist here: there's presence and body, you don't need to dig in to make gains. It encourages a more measured approach, and we

1 TUNERS
Taylor's 18:1 ratio nickel-plated tuners offer smooth precision and complement the sense of stability from the superb intonation of this guitar

2 FINGERBOARD
The West African Ebony found on the Grand Pacific is processed at a Cameroon sawmill, co-owned by Taylor, to ensure a sustainable future for the wood

3 EXPRESSION SYSTEM 2
The Expression System's three knobs offer control over volume, bass and treble



AT A GLANCE

TYPE Dreadnought electro acoustic

TOP Solid Sitka spruce

BACK AND SIDES Solid sapele

NECK Neo tropical mahogany

SCALE LENGTH: 647.7mm (25.5")

FRETS 20

ELECTRICS Taylor Expression System 2

HARDWARE West African ebony bridge, pins and peghead veneer; micarta saddle, Taylor nickel-plated tuners

CASE: Western Floral design hardcase

LEFT-HANDED Yes, at no extra cost

FINISH: Clear gloss top, satin back and sides

CONTACT taylorguitars.com



A Different Class

What is V-Class bracing?

The most common type of internal bracing for acoustic is X-bracing, named because of the shape it makes inside the top of the guitar. But Andy Powers' design uses two longitudinal braces in an inverted V-shape. With the braces either side of the soundhole, it adds the necessary stiffness to the length of the guitar top, but also enhances balance. "I end up with a guitar that has good volume," says Andy, "with notes that last longer than they should. [The guitar] gets to be loud everywhere, it gets to have a nice dynamic range; and it gets to have a voice that flat-top guitars don't usually get because it's just working in a whole different way." Taylor's faith in it is clear; it has begun to replace X-bracing across lines from the 300 to 800 series.

found ourselves playing in a freer way. The downside is that consistency of sound means this guitar doesn't respond quite as dynamically as other Taylors when you open it up to harder strumming. But there's an understated strength to that, and it's linked to a quality in the Grand Pacific that's central.

An acoustic recorded sound post-EQ and compression is often quite different to what you hear from it in the room, being tracked. This guitar feels EQ'd in that way already. The pre-fitted medium phosphor bronze Elixirs already



Plugged in, this electro-acoustic shines, although you may find yourself turning the bass up a touch



help eliminate unwanted finger noise, but the warm balance across the board feels more forgiving to your playing. It gives confidence. And in chordwork with singing, it feels like a very natural and complimentary companion.

Our previous experiences with Taylor's Expression System 2 mean we're not surprised to hear those qualities reflected plugged in. Although we did find ourselves wanting to turn up the bass control more than we expected to maintain richness, it's an overall performance we'd hope for at this price-point, and we would imagine

plenty of sound engineers smiling when they hear the 317E.

While the Grand Pacific isn't being marketed as any ultimate statement, it is a distinct one that proves Taylor are true innovators in providing new choices. And that choice could well become your longterm workhorse guitar.

Rob Laing

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	PLAYABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

ALSO TRY...

TAYLOR 314CE £2219

If you'd prefer a V-Class electro in Taylor's smaller-bodied Grand Auditorium cutaway shape, this model also offers solid sapele back and sides with Sitka spruce top.



MARTIN DSS-17 £1645

The Nazareth crew's new slope-shoulder dreadnought has a striking Whisky Sunset finish and mahogany back and sides, but it's not currently available as an electro, so you'd need to get a system fitted.



GIBSON MONTANA J-45 STANDARD £2249

Gibson's Standard version of its iconic round-shoulder dread' with mahogany back and sides is only available in the classic vintage sunburst. It comes with LR Baggs VTC pickup.





GRAND DESIGN

We get the inside perspective on the Grand Pacific from its designer, Taylor master builder Andy Powers

Can you explain the relationship between developing the Grand Pacific guitar design and the V-Class bracing system?

“The timing is interesting: right after we launched the [redesigned] 800 series in early 2014 I was thinking about what we do next. And we had just built the most Taylor of Taylor guitars; our iconic guitar. And so I had this idea about building instruments using this V-Class architecture, and this was actually the first guitar I had in mind with it.

“So I built one using a conventional dreadnought shape, and that really lit me up and got me thinking. I built another one and I thought, ‘Well obviously this isn’t a fluke: there’s something here. So let me make a shape that will do what I want this to do.’ What I was trying to get was a little more independent control of how the guitar would sound.

“Typically when we’re using an X-brace architecture in the guitar,

you can make some changes and you can voice it the way you want, but it’s almost always a balancing act. If you add something in one place, you’re taking it away from something else; if you add a little more volume, you’re taking away a little sustain. It’s kind of this push and pull.

“The V idea allowed us to get a lot more independent control for those aspects of the instrument’s sound; so we could have more sustain, we could have better balance, we could have more volume and projection. But what’s fascinating to me is it gives us a huge amount of control over what the guitar *feels* like, what the personality of the instrument is by even just making tiny little changes.

“So this guitar is definitely a different sound for Taylor guitars. It’s not the real modern, vibrant character we’ve come to know that I love very much. But this is a sound I love as well. So it’s a real interesting thing.”

ABOVE

Taylor’s Andy Powers doesn’t think great instruments should just belong to those with deep pockets

Was there any apprehension about a guitar that changes the perception of Taylor?

“Yeah, when I first built this guitar a couple of years ago, there was some apprehension of, ‘What is this thing?’ It’s not just a new bracing system inside a guitar, it’s not just a new flavour: it’s like an entirely different thing than what we’re known for. It was pretty far removed from who we are, what we’ve done and the kind of instruments we make. So I thought about it and went, ‘Well OK, maybe I’ve been spending a little too much time in the workshop. I might need to go back and drop a few breadcrumbs along the way!’

“So I took the V idea and adapted it, kind of re flavoured it, in a modern Taylor way. The guitars that we’ve introduced over the last year – the Grand Auditoriums and the Builder’s Edition – those are very familiar Taylor sound; a modern sound, very vibrant. A lively and precise, clean, articulated sound. So now we get to expand the sort of instruments we’re building, and build these characters; in this case, a kind of warm and mature personality.”

There are the two Builder’s Edition launch models, but why was it important for you to offer the 317 model alongside them?

“I knew I wanted to make a rosewood flavour, I knew I wanted to make a mahogany one – but I also wanted to make the 317 because, frankly, I don’t want it to cost too much. A lot of my musician friends look at a beautiful guitar and say, ‘Great – that must be nice. I’d love to play one of those; are you gonna cut me a deal or what?’

“I look at the 317, and I want musicians to have this as an accessible instrument. Granted, it’s not an inexpensive guitar by any means. I get that; however it’s within the reality of a lot of musicians. And to me that’s important, because I don’t think a great instrument should along belong to someone with deep pockets.

“I look at the 317, and it has a lot of really great attributes. It has this incredible voice, it’s all solid woods. It’s sapele, it’s spruce – great woods to make a guitar out of. It has this real broad, warm voice. It doesn’t have to cost an arm and a leg. That is what that guitar is all about – I want somebody to be able to access this voice at a more modest package.”