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WOOD & STEEL

pure acoustic

THE GS SERIES TAKES SHAPE



GS
S E R I E S

pure acoustic

THE GS SERIES TAKES SHAPE

The T5's sterling rookie season in 2005 has prompted no shortage of frothy speculation regarding fresh developments for 2006. In the broader context of Taylor's electronics advances over the past several years, from the Expression System to the K4, from the T5's versatile pickup system to a pair of new stomp boxes (see page 8), the momentum certainly seems to be surging along the lines of amplified tone.

What might be next on Taylor's design frontier?

Rewind to May of last year. In the immediate wake of the T5's official spring launch, a fresh wave of excitement was spreading as T5 models began arriving at (and quickly exiting) dealers' stores. The factory was steadily increasing production to fulfill the demand. The company's product development group was already actively exploring the second generation of T5 ideas, from different pickup configurations to new color options (see page 6).

Bob Taylor, as the guiding hand of development, had been assessing the T5's trajectory and pondering the R&D focus and possible tooling efforts that would be necessary to lead the company into 2006. A realization came one weekend, and early the following week Bob convened his design team for a product development meeting at which they would begin charting the course for the coming year.

Bob's top priority: to make a strong *acoustic* statement.

"We certainly were riding high on the T5's success, and a lot of people in our product development group were trying stuff," Bob recalls, "but the next direction wasn't clear. And it occurred to me that there was a whole lifetime to make new iterations and let the T5 develop."

Bob told his design group that Taylor owed it to customers to let them know that the company's head was still very much in the acoustic game.

"We weren't going to go away and become the electric guitar company that used to make acoustics," he continues. "Besides, there were still a lot of ideas that we had yet to express with acoustic guitars."

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BY JIM KIRLIN

PHOTOS BY

PPM / PAT BOEMER &

RITA FUNK-HOFFMAN

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Bob's comments provide an update to the *Wood&Steel* cover story from the Summer 2002 issue ("New Frontiers in Tone", archived on the Taylor website), which illuminated a similar mindset of tonal exploration. That period would lead to the revoicing of the Taylor Dreadnought and our other steel-string models; the expansion of the Nylon Series, the development of the Expression System, and experimentation with scale length, which would come to fruition with Taylor's 30th Anniversary model, short-scale L9s, and eventually, the DDSM.

For 2006, the renewed focus on acoustic guitar has spawned an even more dramatic breakthrough, in the form of a brand new body shape, a bold new Taylor acoustic sound, and ultimately, a new way of thinking about the Taylor line.

SHAPING THE SOUND

"There was a sound I had in mind, and a shape that I thought would yield that sound," Bob says of the initial inspiration for the new body. "The shape centered on the concept of the Grand Auditorium [Bob's first original guitar shape, introduced in 1994 to celebrate our 20th Anniversary] and how it could be modified, in a way."

Bob shared his ideas with senior guitar designers Larry Breedlove and Ed Granero, giving them some basic design direction.

"I asked Larry to take the waist and move it up toward the neck, and then make the lower bout a little more 'pregnant,'" he elaborates. "What that does is add a little bit of real estate in an area of the lower bout where every little bit can pay back big dividends. It's really all geometry. People don't realize that a 14-inch pizza is actually twice the size of a 10-inch pizza. But do the math. You make the guitar a

little bit bigger, and in reality, it's a lot bigger."

Larry Breedlove says that although the new body shape does bear some similarities in shape to the Grand Auditorium, he never approached it simply in terms of re-working the GA shape.

"We worked from certain dimensions, but we really drew a whole new guitar. In fact, I even used some T5 lines, initially."

In addition to pushing the waist up, Breedlove widened it 3/8 of an inch, lessening the "pinching" effect that can diminish the tonal output of the guitar. Coupled with the bigger, rounder lower bout, the new body geometry was now capable of producing a more powerful sound.

"There's so much energy going into a guitar via the strings," Bob explains. "It's what I call 'fixed overhead'. The question is what happens with that energy? With something like the GA, all of the sound is produced and then stops at the edge of that guitar; we just pushed the fence out a little bit on this new body, so you get a bigger payback with it."

Bob feels that the new shape offers players a truly fresh acous-



GS

INDIAN ROSEWOOD
WESTERN RED CEDAR

"THE GOAL WAS TO DESIGN A GUITAR THAT HAS A DEEPER, PIANO-LIKE BASS, WAY MORE VOLUME, AND A GOOD LOW-END SUSTAIN, WITHOUT RUINING THE CLARITY OF THE MIDS AND THE HIGHS."

— BOB TAYLOR



tic voice, much like the Grand Auditorium did when it was introduced.

“The GA is the hands-down winner of that particular shape and tone. Nobody even comes close to the success of that model in a non-dreadnought guitar. It’s great for fingerstyle and all-around light rhythm, but it’s not a bluegrass guitar — a thunderous, low-E and -A-string kind of a flatpicker’s

GS

BIG LEAF MAPLE
SITKA SPRUCE

delight, with that low-end, traditional thump.

“So the goal was to design a guitar that has a deeper, piano-like bass, way more volume, and a good low-end sustain, without ruining the clarity of the mids and the highs. The idea was to start with the concept of the GA and make it more boisterous. And it made sense to go there by changing the body shape.

“It’s got a great mid-range — if you want, you can get a little bit of that ‘low-fi’ mid-range *chunk* that people like to hear in recording, but you also can play it more clearly if you want. And if you just want to strum or play fingerstyle, it’s loud and really bright.”

GS

The new shape was officially christened the Grand Symphony, or GS. In addition to the body’s modified dimen-

INDIAN ROSEWOOD
SITKA SPRUCE

sions, other shape refinements, such as a more sloped shoulder, were incorporated to give the GS unique aesthetic appeal.

Inside the guitar, as Larry Breedlove and Ed Granero note, the GS bracing isn’t a significant component of the new sound at all. It’s essentially a standard Taylor bracing scheme, which includes the forward-shifted X-bracing and the relief rout around the outer edge of the soundboard. A few other very subtle structural changes were made in top, back, and side thickness, but the distinctive tonal properties remain predominantly shape-driven.

GS

TROPICAL
AMERICAN MAHOGANY
WESTERN RED CEDAR

NO SIX-STRING BLING

From the outset, Bob and his team assumed a back-to-basics design approach with the GS, focusing purely on tone. In returning to an acoustic roots concept, he took into account that for better or for worse, over the last 12-15 years, Taylor has come to be perceived by some as the “CE” (cutaway-electric) company.

“Part of it is that we did such a good job of it that everybody said, ‘I want a cutaway with electronics on my guitar,’” Bob says. “Pretty soon the guitar is the ‘c and e’, and in some ways people forget about the rest of the guitar.”

The decision was made not to make a cutaway version of the GS, at least initially. An option for electronics is available, but all standard models will be made without them.

Another major distinction of the GS body shape is that, rather than simply being inserted into each Taylor series up the line, it’s being grouped as its own separate series, consisting of four different tonewood combinations — mahogany/cedar, maple/Sitka spruce, rosewood/cedar, and rosewood/Sitka spruce.

Because the emphasis is on tone, all four models feature the same simple, understated appointments, including ivoroid binding, an abalone rosette, and abalone microdot fretboard inlays. Three of the models are priced the same (\$2,698), while the mahogany/cedar version is \$2,598. Without trying to deconstruct the existing Taylor line, the pricing parity



of the GS Series represents an opportunity to break free of some of the conventions that have come to govern the other steel-string series. The GS also reflects shifting realities both in wood supply and market preferences.

“Everything tends to run through a cycle, and people’s tastes are changing in terms of what they want in a guitar,” Bob says. “For a long time, it’s been a paradigm where, ‘here’s the plain-Jane mahogany guitar, and here’s the expensive rosewood guitar, which has to

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get fancier to help justify the cost. The statement we're making with the GS Series is that *all* woods are getting rare. Mahogany is becoming more rare and harder to get than rosewood.

"So one reason we've compressed those prices is to let people know that it really is all about the tone with these guitars. We're not going to say one guitar is way more valuable than another guitar based on the wood. We've broken down the lines of the decoration, so it's not like you have to buy into the idea of a fancy guitar to get the rosewood.

"These are just guitars; they're very workmanlike, they're elegant with ivory binding and nice little abalone rosette and microdots on them. Pick the one that you think sounds the best. You don't really have to pick the one in the line that you can afford, because if you can afford one, you can afford all four. It's really about getting back to basics, yet it's a guitar that needs to be played, because it's a sweet-sounding guitar."

BIG VOICE, PURE JOY

"This is a real *player's* guitar", assesses Taylor product specialist Brian Swerdfeger, whom many readers may recognize from his T5 demonstration videos on the Taylor website. Swerdfeger is a busy gigging guitarist who worked on the T5 with Taylor Special Projects Manager David Hosler and Bob Taylor, and on the prototype refinement of the GS over the last several months. He's also a self-confessed gear hound who owns numerous acoustic and electric guitars. As a discerning player, he recounts his first impressions of the GS.

"It felt like the Taylors I'm used to, and it played great, but it was a completely different sound. I mean, I'm usually surrounded by different guitars, but every once in a while I pick one up, start playing, and later realize, this is the first time I've played

for a half an hour straight just for the pure joy of it.

"Something about the GS struck me on the emotional side and just made me want to play. It has such a big voice, plus a fun aspect. I would play it one way, grab a different pick, play a little harder, play a little softer, finger-

pick it, de-tune it. Before I knew it, I was probably an hour and a half into an evening of discovery, which was a lot of fun.

"The GS is the first guitar in a long, long time, probably since the GA in the acoustic guitar world, that says, 'Here's a new voice that's inspiring,'"

GIRTHY AND GIVING

Last fall, Taylor product specialist Brian Swerdfeger took a few GS prototypes out to music stores in Orange County, California.

Below are some initial impressions from players.

COREY WITT, BREA, CALIFORNIA

"'Girthy' is definitely the word I would use to describe the GS. I own a 25th Anniversary, all-mahogany 314-MCE, which to me is just the perfect Taylor. I casually play Taylors at stores all the time, and while they're all beautiful guitars, none compares to mine. This was the first time I played a Taylor and felt like it really resonated and had the girth and the warmth that I feel my all-mahogany one does. And what's notable is that my wife, who doesn't know anything about guitars except for the fact that they're the 'other woman', heard it, too. It actually felt louder than my all-mahogany, but it didn't feel boomy like a Jumbo. The GS has that sweet spot in the lower-mids; they just felt so round."

IAN WILLIAMS, OWNER, ROCKIT MUSIC, BREA, CALIFORNIA

"For me, the beauty of Taylors is the articulation; you hear those notes and all of that pretty upper end as well. I thought the GS had a nice way of marrying that nice clarity with bottom end."

BRIAN TONG, COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA

"I've owned other Taylors, but to be perfectly honest, I've never really liked the Taylor tone. I love their playability, but to my ear, they just never gave me that deep, visceral, 'bone-resonating' feel. But with the GS, the way the top moves...I felt an instantaneous feedback in the way it vibrated. What I like the most is the natural compression of the wood to where there's no sort of dead feeling when you hit it harder. It felt a lot like my favorite OM in terms of how it projected; it gave me that initial push, but compressed really nicely to where, when I laid into it, everything smoothed out. It kept giving me more the harder I played it, and it kept giving me more the softer I played it. I never felt like it let me down."



BODY TYPE:	6-STRING GS
STRINGS:	ELIXIR MEDIUM
CUTAWAY:	NONE
ELECTRONICS:	NONE
BODY:	WIDTH: 16 1/4" DEPTH: 4 5/8" LENGTH: 20" WIDTH AT WAIST: 10" OVERALL LENGTH: 41"
NECK:	WIDTH: 1-3/4" HEEL LENGTH: 3 1/2" SCALE LENGTH: 25 1/2" NO. OF FRETS: 20
BINDING:	MATERIAL: IVOROID BODY: IVOROID FRETBOARD: IVOROID PEGHEAD: NONE HEEL CAP: IVOROID SOUNDHOLE: NONE
PURFLING ROSETTE:	MATERIAL: PLASTIC SIZE: 3-RING MATERIAL: ABALONE
INLAYS:	PEGHEAD LOGO: MOTHER-OF-PEARL FRETBOARD: 4 MM ABALONE DOTS
FINISH:	BACK/SIDES: GLOSS TOP: GLOSS NECK: SATIN
TUNERS:	TAYLOR GOLD
BUTTONS:	GOLD
NUT/SADDLE:	TUSQ
BRIDGE PINS:	EBONY W/AB DOT

he adds. "And when you run across a sound you've never heard before, it inspires new songs. Now I have this instrument that can articulate what I hear in my head."

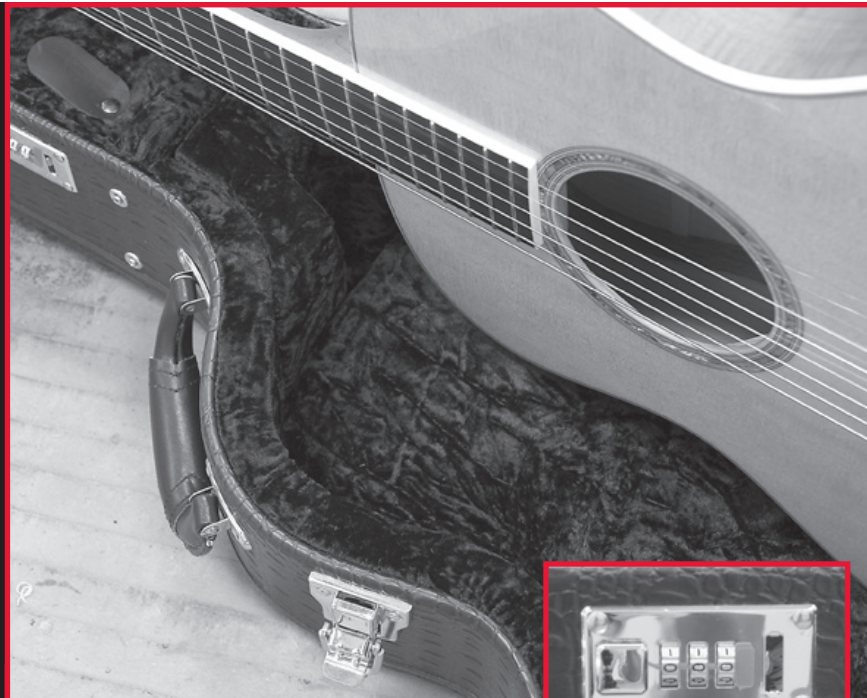
Swerdfeger's feelings were validated when he started taking GS prototypes out on gigs (see "Girthy and Giving" sidebar).

"People would hear it and say, 'What's *that*?' — not because they visually recognized it as a new shape, but because it had a voice they hadn't heard from other Taylors. A lot of people didn't expect it from a Taylor. That's another fun thing about the GS. It's a sound that Taylor isn't known for, yet it's not someone else's sound. It's a very distinguished, complex sound. If you're a connoisseur, when you play this guitar you'll find things in it that you would expect from the most boutique-y specialty builders — yet at an amazing price."

Returning to the notion of the GS as a "player's guitar", Swerdfeger points out that it's an instrument that can really be driven dynamically with one's picking/strumming hand.

"I've noticed that really good guitarists who've played a long time can get all kinds of amazing voices out of one acoustic guitar, because they know how to lean into it or back off, or move their hand closer to the bridge or neck. I think the GS guitar is so dynamic in that sense, from really quiet to blistering loud. There are so many subtle nuances and complexities in there."

While both Swerdfeger and David Hosler can talk at length about their personal impressions of the GS, both stress that rather than trying to define the tone themselves, people should play and



A guitar of the caliber of the Taylor GS Series deserves a case of equal distinction. A rugged yet elegant chocolate brown, alligator-inspired, polyvinyl exterior wraps the sturdy 6mm, 5-ply archtop shell. Inside, the rich texture of crushed velvet covers thick layers of open and closed cell foam for a tailored, glove-like fit. Custom touches include a removable, formed heel pad, an adjustable, padded headstock wedge, a wooden belly band, gold-plated hardware, a combination lock, and hand-stitched leather handles.

PRICING:

GS / TROPICAL AMERICAN
MAHOGANY
WESTERN RED CEDAR
\$ 2,598

GS / INDIAN ROSEWOOD
SITKA SPRUCE
\$ 2,698

GS / INDIAN ROSEWOOD
WESTERN RED CEDAR
\$ 2,698

GS / BIG LEAF MAPLE
SITKA SPRUCE
\$ 2,698

listen to them on their own. And they encourage people to play all four models, because each one really responds uniquely to an individual player.

"I think we proved that in-house," Swerdfeger says, "where I'd be playing or David would be playing the cedar/mahogany model and getting great sound from it. Then Bob Taylor would pick it and it just wouldn't sound the same. But then Bob would pick up the spruce/rosewood guitar and sound spectacular on it because he has a really light touch, and for the way he plays, that's his sound. Almost the opposite is true for me — I sound clunky on the spruce/rosewood guitar."

"So, that's what led us to the idea that these are all going to be priced the same, because we can't say one is better; depending on your playing style, it might not be. It's like having four different flavors, each of which is completely valid and yet totally subjective."

In reflecting on the GS project, Bob Taylor sums up the merits of reaching forward and designing a guitar that truly offers something new.

"The GS has allowed us to refresh ourselves, and to refresh the experience with players. It's important for us to continue to develop some new frontier. We need it. Customers need it. The industry needs it. This is all an ecosystem, and our role in that is to take a cool idea and turn it into something a person can find in a store and take home and play. I try to never forget that role. It's our contribution to inspiring new music, by giving players a new, great sound." ■

LOOK FOR GS SERIES GUITARS IN STORES STARTING APRIL 1, 2006. VISIT TAYLORGUITARS.COM FOR MORE DETAILS.