



Robert Baker pencils a mark (above) and then makes cuts to the body (top) of one of his custom guitars.



MORE INFO
HiTone Guitars
Rob Baker takes requests for quotes for custom guitars.
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In tune with design

By TAYLOR ADAMS
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As a child, Robert Baker had the same dream that many had growing up — to play guitar.

Today, the Richardson resident strums the strings every so often. But most of the time, he's stretching them over freshly cut wood that has taken the shape of a guitar.

Baker has been making custom guitars — many of which he donates to the city's WildFlower! Art and Music Festival — through his business, HiTone Guitars, for the past 10 years, and it all started with a slight disappointment.

After Baker decided to renew his guitar playing in 2003, he ordered a guitar off eBay.

That guitar showed up on his Richardson doorstep looking less than something that would help him succeed in his anticipated new hobby.

"When I got it, someone had kind of stripped it down and sprayed it down with spray paint," said Baker, now 40. His next step led him to his next hobby that happily overwhelms his nights. Baker went online and found a way to refinish his guitar, and it turned out better than he thought.

That's when he realized he could make his own.

Baker started building guitars with his friend Chris High, whose name inspired the business name HiTone.

"I built two guitars that looked really good," Baker said. "The next thing, you're 50 guitars into it."

Although Baker can build a "typical" guitar that looks like a Stratocaster or other standards, his customers usually go to him for something a little different.

"You can go buy one off the shelf, but having one made. ... it can really be what you want," he said.

He's made guitars to fit most anyone's needs, including a body shaped like a gun barrel, a "bat" guitar and 13 guitars that looked like Slurpees for Slurpee's Battle of the Bands.

With the types and designs of Baker's guitars varying, his prices for the custom guitars differ. He does provide quotes for prospective customers, based on what creation they have in mind for their handmade, HiTone guitars.

Getting artistic with aesthetics came naturally to Baker, a graphic designer who, along with his family, always enjoyed going to the city of Richardson's WildFlower! Art and Music Festivals.

Since 2007, he has been donating guitars to the festival, which Suzanne Etman, community events manager for the city, oversees.

"His guitars alone generate almost \$2,000 of the auction total each year, with all proceeds going to the Network of Community Ministries and a secondary art program in RISD," Etman said. "To me, they [the Baker family] are the new face and future of Richardson."

Rob isn't the only artistic one in the family. Amy, his wife, is heavily involved in Richardson ISD events, on the board of the PTA, leading projects and helping in any way she can.

"Every event at school, I do," said Amy, a Berkner High School alumna.

That includes helping their two daughters with various projects, including miniature derby cars.

"People see the cars and know the Bakers are here!" she said, pointing to a pink car less than a foot long and shaped like a butterfly.

Riley, 10, is a dancer, while Troy, 12, plays trumpet in the band. He's "trying to get them to play guitar," Rob admitted.

Despite his full-time job as a graphic designer, Rob manages to make guitars (which typically take him about three months each) and still spend time with his family.

"He'll get up, go to work, come home, be with the family, have dinner, put the girls to bed, then be working until two in the morning," said Amy, 41. "My only complaint is the wood shavings that come in my house."

HiTone guitars are made in the garage of the Baker home, taking up every square foot of the space that can hold two cars.

"I haven't



Robert Baker turns love of riffs into guitar-making business

parked my car in the garage since he started," Amy said.

As Rob has worked on various guitars, he has found ways to make it more efficient. He even created a small room he assembled, made of wood holding up plastic "walls" so he can paint.

With guitars being donated to WildFlower! and to auctions for RISD events, the evening-guitar making has been a success, one that the family appreciates as a hobby.

"It's definitely for the love of it," Amy said.

Richardson neighborsgo editor Taylor Adams can be reached at 214-977-8058.

Amy and Robert Baker, and their two daughters, Riley (left) and Troy, all have a knack for the arts.