

The Living Arts

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Style Makers

Roger Sadowsky

GUITAR MAKER

From the Broadway orchestra pits to Los Angeles music studios to the tours of Paul Simon, Prince and the Rolling Stones, one name stands out: Sadowsky.

That's as in Roger Sadowsky, a top American producer of handmade electric guitars. From a crowded warren above Times Square, Mr. Sadowsky and his assistants turn out maybe 250 instruments a year.

Most of his customers are professional musicians, but anybody willing to spend \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a guitar or a bass guitar can buy one.

"Every instrument has its own personality," Mr. Sadowsky said. "I like to put a musician in the back room with four or five instruments and let him find one that speaks to him."

The smell of finishing compounds and sawdust fills his office. On the floor is a stack of maple boards that he goes through, tapping and feeling, tossing out all but the best. "Each guitar is different because each piece of wood has its own personality," he said.

Mr. Sadowsky was an amateur musician who, as a graduate student in psychobiology, found in 1972 that he was playing guitar more and more and studying less and



John Sotomayor/The New York Times

Roger Sadowsky in his guitar warren.

less. Eventually, he became obsessed with the instruments themselves and began studying the craft of guitar-making.

"I was looking for what we used to call an alternative lifestyle," said Mr. Sadowsky, who is 41 years old. "I thought if I made guitars I could live anywhere I wanted."

Anywhere turned out to be New York, because "this is where the musicians are."

Mr. Sadowsky re-

ceives a stream of occasionally outlandish requests from touring musicians for emergency repairs, modifications and custom work.

"I once got a request from Billy Idol to make a guitar that looked like the Starship Enterprise," he said. "I passed on that one."

Sadowsky Guitars, 1600 Broadway (48th Street), Room 1000B, is open Tuesday to Friday, 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.; (212) 586-3960.

ERIC ASIMOV