

## About

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Gene Baker Where it all started ("77")

I, Gene Baker, seriously started playing guitar at age 11 (born "66") received my first guitar on my 7th birthday although didn't know what to do with it besides try to serenade a girlfriend that lived on the same block as I. Took group lessons at the local hockey rink in the Detroit, Michigan area (Southgate), when guitar took over my hockey career as a goalie went out the window. When junior high school came about so did woodshop, in 7th grade I built my first guitar using parts from a junker making a solid maple SG style body. Teachers all the way through high school allowed me to build guitars alongside my class projects. I always stayed active in local bands playing at schools, halls or house parties. Then came the move to Santa Maria, California in "82". In 11th grade I made my first actual neck, truss rod and fretboard. At this time early BC Rich Bitches and Mockingbirds were some of my favorite to emulate, laminated woods and wilder shapes. Still all the while playing in garage bands, taking jazz band in school and prepping for G.I.T. through an excellent teacher by the name of "Jerry Coelho" who attended G.I.T. the first year it opened, being taught by Pat Hicks, Howard Roberts, Joe Pass and many more. He still teaches and operates a music store/academy of music in the Santa Maria, California area. For info call (805) 925-0464 or go to 325 E. Betteravia Rd. Suite B-4. GIT

I graduated from G.I.T. in May of "86" and moved off to Huntsville, Alabama with fellow GIT roommate Timothy Saunders, to try and become rock stars, ha! Met some great people and experienced real life on my own for the first time. Gave a lot of private guitar lessons, built a small hand full of my early brand of "Mean Gene" guitars while also doing retail sales at Robbins Music. Mean Gene Guitars (88"-90")

A year later and I'm back in Santa Maria, California working part time at Ernie Ball and learning the fine art of detail sanding a guitar before paint. These guys were GOOD! That lasted about 3 months and they fired me for being too slow. I was hurt, but never the less still determined to learn how to build guitars the right way from industry standards. At this time I am at an age of 20. So I set up shop in my parent's garage and I start building guitars under the Mean Gene name again and carrying on with repairs as well. At this time I am really into the Jackson/Charvel heavy metal Strat 's and Randy V's. This turned into a partner ship with a friend named Eric Zoellner, which lasted about 1-1/2 years. We actually moved out of my parent's garage and into our first building where we did retail sales, lessons, rehearsal rooms, repairs, and built about 30 custom guitars over this time period. We had a local cable commercial that ran for a while plugging into MTV. I would love to get it on our site for a joke because its kind of cheesy and captures the time period. Insane Lead Guitar ("90") See more at <http://www.meangene.org>

After the business dissolved I took time off and wrote an instructional book and video entitled "Mean Gene's Insane Lead Guitar". This was a 100 page book, 2 hour video giving the viewer a hands on basic theory lesson, written tests, playing tests, flash cards, exercises, chords, etc... It was produced and edited by Computer Cafe of Santa Maria. During this time I gave lessons at 3 stores belonging to Owens Music in Lompoc, Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo. At night I played in various cover bands on the local club circuit. Meanwhile still repairing and building a few guitars out of mom and dad's garage. Even took a trip one week and hunted for guitar building or sales related jobs in the Los Angeles area in hope to pursue playing more seriously. This ended up in no job but made some good connections that would later pan out. Gibson Custom Shop ("91"-93")

By this time I'm about 24 when I get a call from Master Builder Roger Giffin of the "Gibson West Custom Shop" in North Hollywood, California whom I had met 1-1/2 later on a job hunt excursion. So I auditioned for the job to be his only apprentice aside 7 other guys. 6 months goes by and no word about a job but he says to stay in touch. One day I get a call and he has the opening available, so I pack my bags and it's off to North Hollywood. Roger and I operated this shop together for nearly 2 years building about 30 guitars and performing repairs, restorations and Gibson warranty work. We repaired anything, which was a great learning experience getting to work on Martin, Gretsch, Gibson, Fender, Rickenbaker and many others, so I learned a lot of vintage knowledge/history that I cherish to this day, giving insight on other methods of construction, hardware, finishes, electronics, cosmetics, etc... We worked alongside Gibson artist relations maintaining many local and touring musicians' instruments on a regular basis. Roger Giffin was a major influence in the rest of my building career helping to hone my eye for details in all aspects and he'll remain my mentor for the remainder of my life. He also still builds beautiful guitars for those who may be interested. See <http://www.giffinguitars.com> Fender Custom Shop ("93"-99")

Gibson was destined to close the place down so I found a future at the Fender Custom Shop in Corona, California in June of "93". Fender started me off buffing the set neck models being produced, this lasted for a few months until the Robben Ford model was introduced into the Custom Shop. Being use to building Les Paul's and a bit of hollow body experience they offered me the position. I worked closely with Robben Ford and Jeff Rivera (his guitar tech at the time) for about 6 months making a batch of pre-production prototypes using various woods, chambers and hardware to release them for the January "94" NAMM show. We released 3 models with Robben's collaboration, a solid body (Elite), a chambered body (Ultra SP) and a more semi hollow body (Ultra FM).

Another 6 months after Robben's Signature Model release, Fender appointed me an apprentice to train "Greg Fessler" (now current Robben Ford Master Builder) so I could be moved up to a Master apprentice. There I worked alongside Fred Stuart and Jay Black gaining more vintage Tele and Strat knowledge while building decaled "Gene Baker" 1 off guitars. January "95" they appointed me to Master Builder. Also at this time I prototyped and built the first "Contemporary Carve Top Strats" for the January "95" trade show. I kept building 1 offs and became more involved with production sides of the shop, training, scheduling, even took on 2 apprentices to bring up through the ranks, Mike Bump and Mike Ponce.

There were always so many new ideas and different ways to approach the same job. Builders would share their new

techniques, past problems or triumphs, which could help you on your current project. There were so many other good builders, only a few which are still there and many have escaped; John Page, Alan Hamel, John English, Art Esparza, Jason Davis, George Amicay, Todd Krause, John Suhr, Steve Stern, Kenny Gin, Mark Kendrick, Larry Brooks, Yasuhiko Iwanade, Alex Perez, not to mention a lot of the guys coming up through the ranks.

Other projects I became heavily involved in was the Re-issue of the mid to late sixties big peg head Strats, production of round-lam necks, twelve strings, double necks, bajo sexto's, the Showmaster Strat and the John Jorgenson signature model which were both released at the NAMM "98" show. I loved working at Fender, it was a very creative environment with a lot of great talent around to share ideas and always have some to push you to bring the quality level higher with every instrument as we developed new techniques and ideas. My learning came to a new plateau seeing manufacturing, marketing and management on a grand scale. Baker Guitars USA Started Jan "97" and closed in May of "03". A company dedicated to raising the bar on quality and customer service bar none. Founded by Gene Baker and right hand man Gil Vasquez. The company grew to a max size of 14 employees building up to 40 guitars per month at the peak of production creating roughly 1000 amazing instruments from day one to the end of the companies reign. Specializing in custom ordered instruments based on a vast array of customer selected options.