

Handmade in North Carolina: Art Guitars

Peter Geiger takes artistic license with salvaged plates



LEFT: An art piece from license plates
RIGHT: Peter and his works



Peter Geiger's designs, fashioned from old license plates, strike a chord with customers seeking wall art for their man caves. "Seeing people's faces light up when they see my work is enough ego boost to last for a year." That's why he spends so many nights and weekends holed up in a workshop on the ground floor of his Cary home, cutting and grinding, bending and filing, turning discarded pieces of everyday life into folk art. The works are 3-D collages, formed by tacking together old plates from around the country—the bright blue of Michigan, a bold gold one from Arkansas, and now that he's a Tar Heel transplant, lots of blue and red from North Carolina. Using his grandfather's handtools, Peter makes original and custom renditions of acoustics, Stratocasters, Gibsons, and Les Pauls. He adds a decorative touch by cutting letters and numbers from other plates to spell words such as "love," "rebel" and "tar heel" on the neck or in or around the sound hole, giving the

rearranged letters, numbers, and images a Southern crazy-quilt feel.

The guitar-turned-art chapter began around 2005 when he was rooting around in his garage on Long Island and decided to turn a pile of old license plates into an instrument. "It just came to me," he says. Peter hung that first guitar on the living room wall and friends encouraged him to make more. He continued as the family moved South two years later.

North Carolinians have proved to be big fans. They also like the fact that Peter encourages their input. (Buyers supply plates with sentimental meaning—birth dates, wedding anniversaries, states they've lived in, etc.)

Despite his success, the artist still has two dreams: seeing his work in the Smithsonian collection and getting an art guitar in the hands of country music star Brad Paisley, a car buff. Until then, Peter will be in his basement workshop, turning motor vehicle detritus into creative folk art, one rescued plate at a time. **SL**

petergeigerart.com; average wait: three to five weeks for a custom guitar. Prices start at \$420.

PORTRAIT: GARY CLARK; GUITAR: VAN CHAPLIN

