



1942 C.F. MARTIN & CO. HERRINGBONE D-28

For the inaugural feature from Kent's Replay Acoustics, Tony Werneke starts with an industry icon and a guitar by which all others are judged – the pre-war herringbone D-28 or the “Holy Grail” guitar...

Having had the privilege of handling a great number of Martin and Gibson acoustics, it's clear that the herringbone D-28 is the king of the dreadnought and the guitar that is, and always will be, emulated by past, current and future guitar builders.

The dreadnought was born of a need for a more powerful 14-fret instrument not only to accompany large bands, but also as a stand-alone instrument with power at the bass end and with crystalline clarity – something that was an orchestra in itself. 1931 saw the birth of the dreadnought under the C.F. Martin logo and it has grown in popularity since to become the most popular style of acoustic guitar ever

since. The first dreadnought guitars were manufactured by Martin for the Oliver Ditson Company, a publishing firm based in Boston. The guitars weren't sold with the Martin name on them, but rather were marketed in Boston and New York under the Oliver Ditson brand name, beginning in 1916 – so one can trace the dreadnought's history back 100 years in 2016!

That background lays the framework for the pre-war D-28. It was built at a time when commercial pressures were evident as in any business, but were not the driving force behind the decisions Martin made in designing their guitars. During the pre-war era, there was a purity to the art and a vision

at Martin to produce the best guitars that they possibly could and of the finest materials the earth could provide. This meant superb tonewoods aged in a natural environment for many years along with construction features and dimensions that walked the edge of viability. Martin created guitars in this era that were thin, light and beautifully shaped and braced. They aimed to produce the thinnest bracing one could create yet still hold the top together and use the finest tonewoods available honed to the thinnest dimensions. This brings us to the 1942 C.F. Martin & Co. herringbone D-28.

We start with solid, straight-grained “luthier's choice” Brazilian rosewood for the



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rims and the two-piece back. A luscious nut-brown pervades this guitar visually, giving it the appearance of a ruddy, Georgian bureau in colour – eye candy, huh?

The top is of solid Adirondack red spruce which would have been tap tested for sound capability before being chosen for use – and there’s a lovely, wide grain running to a tighter pattern at the outside edges with wafer thinness and scalloped bracing. The bridgeplate is a thin and small maple example. The back strip is the renowned zigzag design and the inlay at the strap button is a beautifully shaped tapered piece of cellulose.

The 25.4-inch scale, 14-fret neck is solid mahogany with a carved volute at the nut. It is mounted with a snowflake inlaid ebony board, most likely covering an ebony neck rod. (A 1940s example that I also have is much heavier than this example which bodes well for a steel T-bar rod in that earlier example). The headstock has a lovely thinness to it and sharp shoulders. It is mounted with original “Yoda-head” open back unmarked tuners with a 6:1 ratio. The heel of the neck is a sculpted French heel capped with a bit of white celluloid. From a playing perspective, the radius is a true C shape with a shallow profile which pulls your hand into the neck, giving you an easy and welcoming feel.

Everything about this guitar is thin and

it all vibrates and reverberates in ways nothing else does. We all love that feel in the chest when your playing lights up a guitar in your lap and this has that feeling in spades because of its light construction and venerable age.

The Adirondack top is bound with a very fine and delicate herringbone inlay that was imported from Germany and ultimately disappeared from use after the war until it was reintroduced with the “new” Herringbone HD-28 in 1976, which was the first time Martin “looked back” to capture the essence of their earlier success. The soundhole has the now-standard D-28 purfling and is accompanied by a lovely, ruby red faux-tortoise teardrop pickguard and slotted ebony bridge.

Now to the hard part: the sound. How do you describe a guitar that is so complex that it belies your experiences with acoustic guitars? The herringbone does that and, once played, changes your musical perspectives. Having had the privilege of having four of these guitars here at the gallery at one time, I had the opportunity to play them back to back – and to have others play them back to back. What I found out during that exercise was an enlightening experience. All of the guitars sounded different – and felt different – but they were all better than any other guitar I’d played in my time doing

this. The depth of dimension, the complexity of the harmonics and the willingness of the rosewood all combine to create a voice that will enrich your experience to the end of your playing days. You will find a complexity that you will never truly master and a haunting sound that is often compared to only that of a cathedral. The herringbone D-28 is a guitar few will be able to afford, but one that all should have the opportunity to play.

A client of mine was in the gallery one day when a 1943 herringbone D-28 was here and he spent around two hours noodling around in the harmonics. Eventually he stopped, obviously rather perplexed yet a little sanguine. Looking at me, he uttered an expletive that I wouldn’t dare print, and at which point he proceeded to the door and left. Latterly, I received an email to tell me that he was really upset because none of his guitars at home would ever sound anything like they once did after hearing the ‘42 D-28 – and, trust me, he has some great guitars! It took him around a month to push the ‘bone out of his head and to return to his stable of stringed instruments with a forgiving attitude. So, that is the power of the great and deservedly celebrated C.F. Martin & Co. herringbone D-28 – the daddy of them all! **For more information on the 1942 C.F. Martin & Co. D-28, visit the [Replay Acoustics website](http://www.replayacoustics.co.uk).**