



1967 DANIEL FRIEDERICH

By **R.E. Bruné**

Recently retired, many consider Daniel Friederich (b. January 16, 1932) to be the greatest living contemporary guitar maker. From a line of cabinet makers on both sides of his family, he grew up in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine district of Paris, where all of the city's cabinet making shops were located. Apprenticing at age 13, he completed a rigorous four-year course where he ranked 11th out of 400 students, studying not only the technical aspects of woodworking, but art history, drafting, and related subjects required to be certified as a master cabinet maker in those days.

In 1948, Friederich bought his first guitar and was studying with Christian Aubin, one of the leading figures in the Paris scene. Aubin was not only a player and teacher, but had

made a guitar patterned after an Antonio de Torres he owned. Inspired by Aubin, Friederich made his first guitar in 1955. In the '50s, the Parisian guitar maker Robert Bouchet was enjoying worldwide acclaim and making inroads to the Spanish guitar market as a pioneer non-Spanish maker.

In '59, Friederich showed his 15th guitar to Bouchet, asking his advice. Bouchet's profession was artist and professor of graphic arts, and he was making guitars as a quasi-hobby, being very selective about who he would build for. He developed a friendship with Friederich, who would often assist the older Bouchet with more-energetic operations such as planing wood. Bouchet was never formally trained in woodworking, so he benefitted



Full Friederich: Felix Salazar.



Fan braces



(ABOVE) Friederich in his shop; many of the hand tools were made by him.

immensely from Friederich's expertise, while Friederich benefitted from Bouchet's unorthodox approach to guitar making.

Much to his father's disapproval, Friederich opened his first shop at rue Ramponneau No. 21. As business grew and his skill improved, though, his father's attitude changed. Young Friederich made three models—the Ar-pege, Recital, and Concert—along with a few Flamenco models. Only the Concerts were numbered starting with 100. However, early on, he assigned lower numbers to some, and himself admits that his numbering system was at first arbitrary and capricious.

In 1966, he moved to rue Sergent Bauchat, where he remained until his recent retirement; this shop is also located in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine cabinet maker's district of Paris. 1967 was a banner year for Friederich, as he entered a guitar-making competition in Liege, Belgium, judged by luthiers Robert Bouchet and Ignacio Fleta along with the blind Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo ("Concerto de Aranjuez") and virtuoso Venezuelan player

Alirio Diaz. Friederich was awarded the gold medal for craftsmanship and the silver medal for sound. Friederich was introduced to Fleta, and later supplied the Fleta family with woods

luthier Masaru Kohno took the gold medal for sound in this competition, having earlier studied under Spanish maker Arcangel Fernandez. In Japan, this honor was parlayed by the astute Kohno into a multi-million dollar empire that includes guitar making, publishing, and concert promotion.

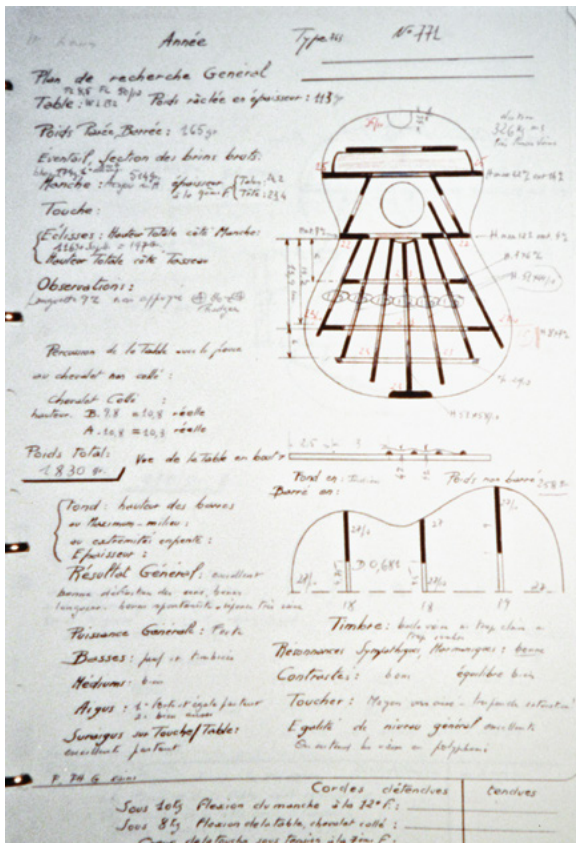
From 1970 onward, Friederich made only numbered Concert models, which are distinguished by carved heads that became his signature design. That year he also began laminating the sides, usually with mahogany or light-colored rosewood on the inside, later Sapele ("African mahogany"), which is very similar to genuine mahogany. In '74, he began using cedar for the

tops, beginning with guitar No. 378 made for the South American virtuoso Turibio Santos.

Friederich's list of clients reads like a who's who of the classical guitar world, and every instrument has been documented in his notebooks with detailed notes on construction



and varnish-making supplies which were hard to come by in those days in Spain, but readily available in Paris. This type of collegial assistance is very common in the lutherie world, and is one of the things that makes our world so delightful. Coincidentally, Japanese



(LEFT) The notebook page for instrument No. 776 with detailed technical and musical annotations. Friederich has recorded most of his guitars in this notebook. (RIGHT) Two pages from his early catalog listing the specifications of his Recital



and Arpege models, with Friederich's personal commentary. (BELOW) Friederich sitting in the corner of his shop in the exact spot he tests every guitar in order to control the acoustic variables when assessing the tonal characteristics.

and tonal characteristics. He always tries out instruments sitting in the same spot in his tiny shop, an area where he is intimately familiar the acoustics and can assess each creation.

RATIONAL APPROACH

Friederich is a very analytical, rational maker who carefully and honestly assesses each instrument. Beginning in the early '60s, he was introduced to the Acoustics Laboratory at Paris IV University, where he conducted extensive testing over time with the motive of improving the guitar using more-scientific principles rather than instinct and luck – the method since time immemorial.

Consequently, Friederich conducts careful tests and measurements of the woods used in each instrument to determine their long grain and cross grain stiffness, correlating this information with recorded impressions of each instrument so he was able to gradually refine and improve his instruments. As he continued,

his instrument became heavier and more robustly constructed compared to his earlier guitars, which is more closely based on the traditional Spanish models of the early 20th century. The “sound” of the Friederich instrument has evolved considerably along with his designs, confirming that sound is primarily a manifestation of design.

THE INSTRUMENT

Our example this month was made in 1967, the same year Friederich won the medals in Belgium. Like the earlier Recital models, this one is very Spanish in concept and sound, having seven beautifully sculpted fan struts and two closing V fans by the tail – a simple and traditional Torres-based design. The spruce top and Indian rosewood sides and back are worked to delicate thinness, and the top and sides are joined with individual triangular glue blocks, with the cross struts only slightly scalloped on the ends, which are supported by longer, sturdy pillars. Some earlier Friederich instruments were made



with Brazilian rosewood, later models were usually Indian rosewood.

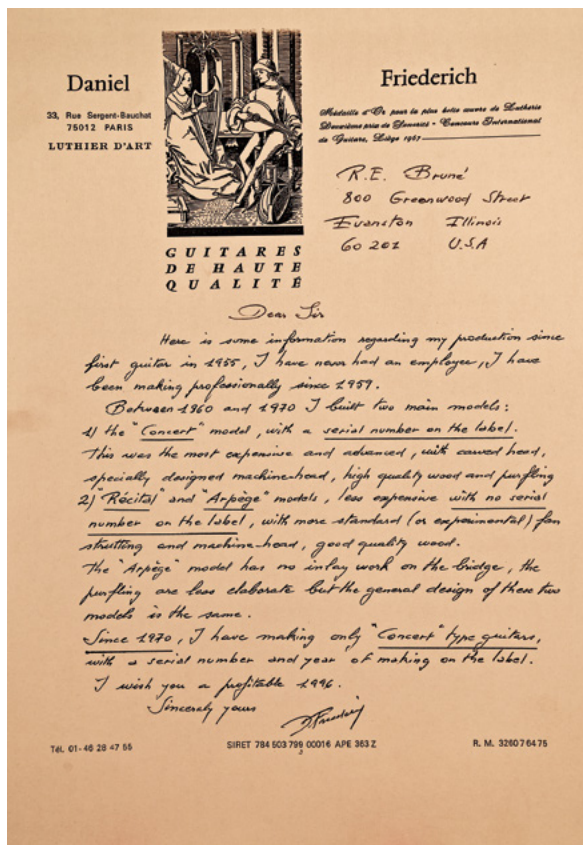
Externally, the rosette and inlays are perfectly executed and the light original French polish is thin, transparent, and well-preserved, with minimal fading of the pumice fill. The rosette is slightly simplified from the Concert model, with outer borders of tiny checkers of black and white rather than the fiendishly difficult “wheat arrows” which are a Friederich Concert model hallmark.

The neck is made of Spanish cedar with a grafted head and stacked heel, and the machines are basic German engraved and anodized black with imitation mother-of-pearl buttons. It’s an instrument intended, as the name suggests, for the player who requires maximum sound for the minimum outlay of cash.

Like most early Friederich guitars, this has a voice most accurately described as “Spanish,” with an immediacy and quickness that is almost flamenco in character – very colorful, with round, throaty basses and a focused treble that is almost operatic. His later instruments have a more-piano-like character noted for their uniformity and calm clarity. These earlier instruments are much like the girl you dated who your mom never approved of.

CONCLUSION

Now 84 years old, Daniel has retired. When I visited Paris many years ago, I sensed he was weary of the business of making guitars for a living, but still animated about the process. Personal difficulties and the vagaries of dealing with talented (but destitute) musicians takes a toll on luthiers, and Daniel admirably maintained his honor and facilities throughout his career. His instruments, which are highly sought today are veritable gems of the lutherie world, remarkable ex-



(TOP LEFT CLICKWISE) Personal letter from Friederich to the author describing his model history. His letters in English were written by his French-Canadian wife, who was fluent in English which Friederich did not speak. His Spanish however, is excellent. 1969 Letter from Julian Bream to Friederich. Bream apparently never owned a Friederich, however. 1964 letter from Sophocles Papas, inquiring to represent Friederich’s instruments in the U.S., with an additional handwritten note (in French) by Alexandre Lagoya and Ida Presti, a famous classical-guitar duet.

amples of the finest lutherie of our time.

Special thanks to Daniel Friederich for sharing his personal files, and also to Dr. David Levin and Ray Mueller.

Richard Bruné began making guitars in 1966 and is a former professional flamenco guitarist. He has published many articles and contributed to many books, the most recent being the second edition of the Sheldon Urlik book, *A Collection of Fine Spanish Guitars From Torres to the Present*. His clients have included Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, Sabicas, Juan Serrano, Earl Klugh, the Romeros, and many other artists. You can write him at 800 Greenwood Street, Evanston IL 60201 or visit rebrune.com.

