

- > **Sam Ash Music**  
Gives back to aspiring musicians  
PAGE 22
- > **Custom Sound Instruments**  
Switches focus from retail to repairs  
PAGE 24
- > **Guitar Center**  
Relaunches the Guitar Center Music Foundation nonprofit  
PAGE 26

# RETAIL

RETROFRET VINTAGE GUITARS | BY ALEX HARRELL

## FRETTED FINDS, REVIVED

It's early afternoon on a Thursday and Steve Uhrik is driving back to Gowanus, Brooklyn, empty-handed.

The owner of Retrofret Vintage Guitars had spent about 1½ hours browsing through a retired traveling musician's basement in search of particularly noteworthy fretted finds. The previous player had contacted Uhrik via his contractor to see if he had any interest in purchasing her 1930s, Hawaiian-style instruments.

And though Uhrik didn't buy anything to add to his shop's growing inventory, the trip — which was only three blocks away from his home — was well worth it.

"I'm always out there hunting for stuff," Uhrik said. "If it's a good instrument, we'll look for it."

### GUITAR SAFARI

These types of outings — what he calls "going on a guitar safari" — are the norm for Uhrik and his business, though this wasn't always the case. The former violin repair apprentice actually began in the 1970s with a restoration store, New York String Service.

"People used to come to me and ask, 'I'm selling this pre-war Martin, do you know anybody in your clientele who may want it?'" So to have three



Steve Uhrik

## How Retrofret's Steve Uhrik and his crew select, service and sell vintage guitars

or four instruments for sale was a big deal," Uhrik recalled. "It got somewhat out of control; we have somewhere around 500 instruments now in our shop that are for sale."

As his collection grew, Retrofret Vintage Guitars was established in 1983. The repair shop evolved into a destination-

location of sorts for guitarists and other fretted instrumentalists.

It's why — partially, at least — Retrofret is leaving behind its current home — which happens to be the first American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals headquarters — for a larger location.

The prevailing shop is

around 4,000 square feet with three separate spaces. There's a large, open area on the second floor connected via an outdoor walkway; it used to be apart of the dog run for the ASPCA.

"You don't really want to be dragging some Gibson Lloyd Loar Mandolin across an open walkway when it's pouring out, you know," Uhrik said with a laugh.

So Retrofret is moving into a similar, nearby facility — just one that's a bit more planned out and includes about 1,700 more square feet.

"We're really going to expand the repair shop," Uhrik continued. "The staff is super cramped and we're so backlogged; it might be possible to bring yet another technician."

### REPAIRS & RESTORATIONS

Currently, the repair team consists of four full-time technicians who tackle neck sets, refrets, structural repairs, touch-ups, cosmetic work, set-ups, fretwork and fabrication.

"We're all pretty passionate, it's a super crew of people," Uhrik said of his team — which is made up of eight individuals in total. "It's one thing as a business owner to attract interesting guitars; it's another thing to attract interesting employees."

While Retrofret isn't the place to do intricate electronic modi-

