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# Peter Kellett Custom

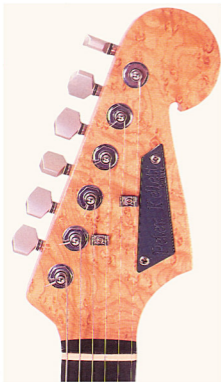
Dominic Hilton  
reaches Point Break  
with a work of art  
built like a jet plane



**M**aking functional objects beautiful is a philosophy that has long smudged the line between engineers and artists; architects and luthiers, Chippendale chairs and Cadillac wings. Peter Kellett is in fact an established Californian artist acknowledged for his pioneering work with dye colours on anodised aluminium. Some of you may find this guitar a little familiar, as Peter applied the artwork to the Fender Custom Shop Aloha Stratocaster, combined with engraving by Ron Chacy, which received a fair amount of publicity at NAMM 94. Peter is now producing similar instruments of his own featuring a series of one-off designs and custom orders. This is one of the first guitars made and features a psychedelic sunset over a tropical sea, as seen from within the canopy of a forest. Coo-ell, pass my rum punch and brush the sand from my toes.

## Construction

The least unusual aspect of this instrument is the overall design; the influence of the Custom Shop project obviously runs deep, but this classic style provides a suitable canvas for the more unorthodox features. The most unusual aspect must be the body. These are apparently made in South America by some Hell's Angel type characters who copped their technique from making motorcycle parts. They also



but is in fact very different. The design is applied to the polished aluminium using dyes, with various combinations of wet and dry techniques giving rise to the bleeding, washed, dusted and solid visual textures. The process of anodising involves passing an electric current through the body, thereby irreversibly bonding the pigments to the metal itself. This means the colours are held within the surface structure of the aluminium, making them permanent and resilient to sweat, sunlight and Special Brew. That said, it is not indestructible, so if your audience opens fire on you, scratches will occur.

The metal plates are held to the body by small hex screws. While these have a hi-tech look I would prefer normal Philips screws for all the practical reasons. The screw holes on the backplate need to be more deeply countersunk too, as the screws are sticking out every which way – metal is a lot less forgiving in this sense than plastic and wood.

The neck-to-body joint is a traditional four bolt system and is as snug as a bug. The neck is one piece maple with tasty birdseye and flame figuring and a comfortably chunky 'D' profile which tapers gently towards the nut. The slightly modified, classic style headstock suits the guitar well, although I am not so sure about the coloured metal logo, but this is apparently undergoing a cosmetic redesign. The locking Sperzel machineheads have proved to be reliable and are very *de rigueur*. They are also height staggered to eliminate the need for

string trees which, confusingly, this guitar has.

The rosewood fingerboard has 22 thin but high frets and traditional dot markers, and unfortunately this is the area which lets the guitar down a little. The inlays are clumsy in places, as is some of the woodwork at the body end of the neck. Also the frets would really benefit from a dressing – their ends especially, as they are quite sharp in places. These niggles, combined with a fairly high but buzzy action, do little to befriend this guitar to potential buyers. Even though these points are easy to rectify, the neck is the most important interface on a guitar and dictates the whole feel of the instrument. A little more time spent on finishing and setup here would strike this guitar into the ball park of perfection.

Whammy wiggling is facilitated by the Wilkinson system which, backed by the Sperzel heads, keeps major tuning terrors at bay. The three pickups are Joe Barden single coil-sized humbuckers. These run into a master volume, an active Cornell boost circuit with its own level control replacing the traditional middle tone control, and a master tone.

## In Use

Strumming around before plugging in you are struck with a sound like a bathtub; big, resonant and really twanky, somewhat similar to that of a metal resonator guitar. These attributes thankfully don't disappear when you hook up with an amp, and what you hear is a very unusual sound with heaps of resonance and sustain. Held notes really sing, especially in the higher register, and while this guitar seems prone to feedback it is largely of the pleasant, harmonic variety. Slide sounds dead good too.

The Barden pickups are surprisingly poky for their size and sounded very full; however these, and all the hardware, are available in a variety of options if you order a Peter Kellett guitar. The Cornell circuit is formidable and

supply bodies to the Fender Custom Shop for models such as the chrome-plated Stratocaster. Cast in two halves and welded together, they are largely hollow with internal strengthening ribs and the appropriate cavities. Consequently the guitar's weight is kept low. The scratchplate, backplate and knobs are all machined aluminium and incorporated into the graphic design.

The finish may look like lacquered paint



Peter's anodising on the 'Aloha' Fender Stratocaster from their Custom Shop