



THE GUITAR BARREL
PROJECT





OUR PROJECT

It all started with what is the most magical of discoveries for a guitar maker:
a bunch of old, interesting wood.

On his search for quality Mahogany wood for his guitars Portuguese luthier Adriano Sergio discovered a pile of just that in the back of a warehouse. It turned out that the wood came from old wine barrels, stored in a disassembled state, dusty and still caked with the essence of the wine they had contained. But a few strokes with the hand planer revealed the rich hue of Mahogany beneath the grime – ripe for guitar making. Adriano told his friend and colleague Ulrich Teuffel about this discovery and the opportunity to purchase this wood.

Researching the history of the barrels Adriano discovered that they had belonged to the estate of the Marquês de Pombal, a significant figure in the history of Lisbon.

«I quickly came to realize that this wasn't just great wood for guitars but a symbol of our history and a great opportunity to share it with others I greatly admire.»

Adriano Sergio, 2018



ALL SAINTS DAY NOVEMBER 1ST, 1755

On the morning of this fateful day almost all of Lisboa's deeply religious population had congregated in the many churches to celebrate the high holy day, when a devastating earthquake struck a path of destruction through the city, levelling buildings and collapsing churches onto the masses of worshippers. The subsequent tsunami and a firestorm, sparked by the toppled candles of All Saints day, completed the destruction of what at the time was one of the richest cities and busiest trading ports in Europe.

The economic repercussions of this calamity were felt throughout the world, but even more so it impacted the current world views. Religious believers across Europe were quick to pronounce this as God's punishment for the lavish lifestyle of the people of Lisboa, but that failed to account for the survival of the gambling and prostitution centres of the city. How could a «good» God unleash such a terrible event and total devastation on especially Lisboa, the supremely pious center of orthodox catholicism,

bastion of the church and the inquisition? Was it God's angry hand or simply a natural disaster that toppled cathedrals and monasteries, while sparing the brothels and other dens of sin?

A turning point in the intellectual history of the world, this event in its unexplainable magnitude undermined the foundations of church orthodoxy and the validity of absolutism. It cast doubt on the authority and rule of divinely anointed kings, and heralded the coming of the Age of Enlightenment, the triumph of scientific thinking and of political revolutions.



THE MARQUES DE POMBAL

Appointed by King D. Jose I to oversee the reconstruction of Lisboa after the devastating earthquake, the diplomat and politician Marques the Pombal eventually assumed quasi-dictatorial powers and reigned with the King's blessing, trying to bring Portugal out of the medieval ecclesiastical darkness and transform it into a modern state, weakening the hold of the Jesuits on the state.

Industrious, cunning and forward-thinking, Pombal amassed great power and wealth, which he invested heavily into wine production, growing the stature of Carcavelos Wine around the world. It was a favoured tippie of Thomas Jefferson, who kept a few bottles in his private cellar, and King D. Jose I of Portugal would give bottles as gifts to his most esteemed guests. In England, as the supply of French wine dried up during periods of war between the two countries, Carcavelos Wine become a favourite, alongside Port.

But Pombal's influence went far beyond the world of wine. With this power, he did more than rebuild Lisbon and modernise the nation as a whole; the earthquake and the subsequent revolutionary changes in Lisbon and Portugal, largely overseen by Pombal and directed by his vision, are sometimes pointed to as kickstarting key developments in the Age of Enlightenment.

Banished from power upon the King's death by the King's supremely pious widow, he has remained a somewhat controversial figure. Today, the rebuilt city of Lisboa remains a legacy of his vision.



THE GUITAR BARREL PROJECT

Inspired by the historical context of the wood Adriano and Ulrich had the idea of a project, which would honor the story of this wood by placing it in the hands of a group of select artisan luthiers, reviving it and giving it a new purpose and life.

Six select luthiers would apply their inspiration and craft to this unique 250+ years old Carcavelos Mahogany and create six unique guitars.

In 2018 Adriano Sérgio, Andy Manson, Claudio & Claudia Pagelli, Michael & Tania Spalt, Nik Huber, and Ulrich Teuffel, met in Lisbon to discover the wood for themselves and to share it among them. The guitars would be built in the secrecy of the luthiers' workshops, not to be shown to each other until they would be completed.

From left to right:

Andy Manson, Ulrich Teuffel, Adriano Sérgio, Nik Huber, Claudia & Claudio Pagelli, Michael & Tania Spalt

Thus, *The Guitar Barrel Project* was born. It grew even more when Alexandre Lisboa from Villa Oeiras, the winery that still continues to this date on the former estate of the palace of the Marques de Pombal, contacted Adriano and expressed their desire to get involved in the project. Villa Oeiras received enough pieces to recreate two barrels to develop a very special wine.

The making of the guitars was documented by a film crew, who visited each luthier's workshop during the building process and recorded unique footage and interviews.

The collection of completed instruments will be presented in an exhibition together with the now bottled wine at the winery and played live to accompany the premiere of the documentary on Sunday, May 14, 2023 at the Villa Oeiras.



THE WOOD

Wood: it is the basic working material for guitar makers.

When one is very lucky, sometimes a very special piece of wood that has aged and matured, that has witnessed history and that has a story to tell, can become a magical ingredient as it captivates the guitar maker, fires his imagination and pushes him to go beyond the limits of his craft. It will resonate in the music imagined and played on the instruments carved from this wood, the Carcavelos Mahogany. This treasure was a stack of old disassembled wine barrels which had held a few thousand litres each. Mahogany, Vinhatico, Rosewood, seasoned for two and a half centuries.



The Carcavelos Wood Seal

«I'm always in search of woods for my guitars, but this was different, I didn't find the wood, the wood found me. The characteristic of this wood is hard to explain because of the enormous emotional charge it has due to its history.»

Adriano Sergio, 2018

«The Carcavelos Mahagoni is not only steeped in history and rare, it is also stubborn. But you will be rewarded with a special variety of overtones that you rarely find. Its shimmering, simple elegance is accompanied by a distinctive scent of wood and wine. Wood for all senses!»

Claudio Pagelli, 2023

«This 250 year old material in its stability is a rare and valuable resource for musical instrument construction. The workability is a pleasure. There is a sonic response from a mere touch and the colour of this aged wood is a feast for the eye.»

Andy Manson, 2023



THE LUTHIERS

«It's an absolute privilege to be involved in such a unique project. Not only has this been an opportunity to collaborate with my friends – some of the most skilled and imaginative instrument builders in the world – but also a chance to be challenged and inspired like never before in my own guitar making. From the history behind the wood to our partnership with the Villa Oeiras winery, every element of the project has added layers of meaning. Just like the wood taken from Pombal's wine barrels, these guitars each carry a story themselves, with roots that stretch back to the 18th century.»

Nik Huber, Germany

One of the most respected guitar builders in Europe, Nik looks back on a long career of building first-class instruments that consistently rank among the best boutique guitars available today. He sees guitar making more as a calling than a profession, and he and his team continue to hand-craft all instruments. Carrying on a more than 100 year old family tradition, Nik's work is solidly rooted in the traditional building techniques, his instruments display the highest levels of craftsmanship and sound qualities.



THE LUTHIERS

«Being invited to join a group of some of the best guitar builders in Europe to participate in the regeneration of this extraordinary trove of rare and beautiful material was more than a little exciting. The story connected to the wood, the history of the momentous event and all that it encompassed has been a wondrous inspiration.»

Andy Manson, UK and Portugal

Andy finds poetry in the making of beautiful artefacts from the raw materials of the ruined barrels. For a craftsman like him to be able to use this material, is a bonus beyond measure. The story connected to the wood, the history of the momentous event and all that it encompassed has been a wondrous inspiration to him.

Using his craft to allow the magic of the voice lurking inside the wood to be liberated by vibrating strings Andy is looking back on a long and satisfying career. He started building acoustic instruments in 1967. His work is firmly based in the classic methods, using hand tools wherever possible, along with hide glue and natural finishes. Over the years he has achieved a reputation as one of England's finest luthiers, with a client list that includes a slew of England's top guitarists. He is now located in Portugal representing the close historical ties between England and his new home country.

www.andymanson.com



THE LUTHIERS

«There are not many opportunities in a luthier's life like the one that arose with the Carcavelos story. You don't get almost 300 year old Mahogany every day. And the story behind it is equally valuable. The only thing more exciting is the idea of starting a joint venture with some of the best guitar builder colleagues. Amazing to see what has become of it!»

Claudia & Claudio Pagelli, Switzerland

Artists, artisans – the line blurs. Powerhouse lutherie duo Claudia and Claudio Pagelli have been pushing the leading edge of guitarbuilding for decades now, yielding a fiercely independent and inventive body of work that completely stands apart from the crowd. Some of the most interesting instruments in the history of the guitar have come from their workshop. You could use a thousand words to describe them... at the end it is simple: they are unique.



THE LUTHIERS

«I am very humbled to be part of this project. Having been able to bring together this historical material and artisans I greatly admire to create something very special is tremendously rewarding. Even more so due to the deep satisfaction I find in working with the different kinds of Mahogany, all of which retain the fragrant smell of the century old wine they held. I am quite sure I'm going to save this wood only for special projects.»

Adriano Sérgio, Portugal

Together with Ulrich Teuffel Adriano became the initiator of *The Guitar Barrel Project*. As the only Portugese by birth he has a special connection to the history of the barrels and is the spokesperson of the group in Portugal.

Almost born with tools in his hands Adriano's background as musician and guitar tech as well as his life long love for art greatly enriches his approach to his work. As a guitar maker Adriano has already made a mark in the guitar world with his unique designs and the quality of his craft. His carvings are most often reflections on nature, especially the sea, and his instruments are made to be a beautiful extension of the musician's body, granting a more fluid channel through which expression can be manifested. Every guitar is different and an evolution of the previous, and they always strive to achieve a balanced harmony of shapes and lines to promote not only the ergonomics of the physical, but of the mind and emotion as well.

www.ergonguitars.com



THE LUTHIERS

«In my work I have always looked for things that have a history, incorporating and repurposing discarded objects and materials and with that giving them a new life. This wood reveals its long life and history as one works through the layers; surrounded by its heavy fragrance, from the mineral deposits on top and the wine-soaked grain giving way to pristine old-growth Mahogany.»

Michael & Tania Spalt, Austria and Portugal

Michael started his career as guitarbuilder in Los Angeles and later relocated to Vienna, Austria. His designs have always reflected his background in fine arts. Michael's overall approach to the craft of guitar building is rather omnivorous, combining various artistic, technical and aesthetic approaches into his creations. Materials bearing the marks and scuffs of an authentic existence are reborn in the totality of the new story of the instrument. Participating in this project allowed him to also integrate aspects of his love of history and philosophy in his build.

With many years of experience as Michael's partner in the business and in getting things organized for guitar makers Tania is the heart of managing the project details. Becoming part of this project has ultimately led Tania and Michael to relocate their life and workshop from Austria to Portugal.

www.michaelspalt.com

www.spaltinstruments.com



THE LUTHIERS

«As a result of the enlightenment the person as an individual was set into the focus of cultural production. While in baroque music musicians were synchronised members in a group performance, now the musician as an individual genius was born: the god-like soloist. The space for the prodigy became bigger and bigger from Giuseppe Tartini to Niccolò Paganini to eventually Jimi Hendrix. The path to the genius required louder instruments instead of multiple orchestral parts and this finally lead to the electric guitar with its almost infinite aural resources and power.»

Ulrich Teuffel, Germany

Ulrich is best known for his «BirdFish» guitar, a radical deconstruction of the electric guitar. Similar to the historical enlightenment period, this instrument opened up possibilities away from the prevailing orthodoxy and reframed the discussion of what constitutes a guitar. Overall, Ulrich sets out to explore what else a guitar can be other than what we are used to see and he approaches guitar building as a cultural exploration of the guitar. His instruments do their job in several museums, as well as in the hands of artists such as David Torn, Kirk Hammet, Billy Gibbons or Hans Zimmer.



THE WINE & VILLA OEIRAS

«Wine, art, heritage, music and finally friendship give unity and uniqueness to this grandiose and unique project.»

Alexandre Eurico Lisboa, 2023

The winery becoming part of the project closed the circle. Using all necessary procedures their share of the old, dusty blanks was crafted into a 7000 l and a 1000 l barrel, starting an experiment of discovering the effect of this wood on the fortified wine. Would the 250 year old aroma infuse the golden liquid?

A special edition of 2000 bottles was now filled from the smaller barrel. The wine from the 2010 harvest has aged impressively, distinct from the others produced so far. With a golden yellow color with reddish hints and brightness, it has aromas that bring out spicy and satiny notes combined with new wood bark. The nobility of the wood gives it an elegant and sweet tannin, combined with an elegant freshness and complexity – it has a long, dense and persistent finish.

The result is a wonderful reflection of the combination of the various elements that make this story so unique.

As one of the most beloved historical heritages in Oeiras, Carcavelos Wine was at the verge of extinction. Once, the «Generoso» was the flagship wine for the powerful Marques of Pombal. Back in the XVIII century Pombal produced Carcavelos, rivaling with Port wine.

Today Carcavelos Wine prevails as the only publicly held wine production of the country, after surpassing diseases, forgery and most of all huge real estate pressures. This rebirth of the most exclusive of the Portuguese fortified wines at Villa Oeiras was initiated by the City Council of Oeiras. The winery is located only 20 minutes away from Lisbon, facing the Atlantic ocean where unique white varieties perform their best.

www.villaoeiras.com

www.oeiras.pt



THE DOCUMENTARY

«Wine and music are two human feats. The possibility of uniting these feats based on the noble material that is wood, crafted by 6 prestigious luthiers, allows us to travel from the reconstruction of Lisbon after 1755 to the modernity of the 21st century through 6 extraordinary guitars. This is the journey that I present to you in this documentary.»

João Fonseca, Força Maior Portugal

João Fonseca, producer of the Portuguese production company Força Maior fell in love with *The Guitar Barrel Project* and brought Luís Filipe Rocha and the director Helder Faria on board.

Together with a wonderful film crew they created a colorful documentary about the project. Even though hampered by immense challenges due to COVID they managed to visit with all the builders in their workshops and ultimately finished recording in January 2023, when the guitars were united for the first time at the cellar of the palace of the Marquês de Pombal in Oeiras.

Credits:

Helder Faria / Director

Luís Filipe Rocha / Consultant & Adviser

João Fonseca / Producer

Leonardo Simões / DOP

Vasco Pedroso / Sound Director

João Pais da Silva / Editor

Joana Niza Braga / Sound mixer



Jennifer Mendes / Color correction



Sometimes special circumstances bring together world-class artisans with a remarkable material and suddenly magic happens, sparking the creation of something truly outstanding.

This was one of those moments!

www.theguitarbarrelproject.com

  [theguitarbarrelproject](https://www.instagram.com/theguitarbarrelproject)

