

New York, guitar shop holding a 1992
Monteleone mandola gifted by actress
Elizabeth Taylor to her son. For
decades, Pensa has championed
independent luthiers like Monteleone,
Butch Boswell and John Suhr.



Boutique

A visit to Rudy's
Scarsdale location

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN FISHER

Paradise



Opposite (top): "The whole idea for these guitars was him [Arthur 'Butch' Boswell] saying, 'I never heard a 1937 Advanced Jumbo,'" Rudy says. "This is the most ridiculous guitar ever. And he's playing around and said, 'I'd like to take all the measurements.' After I sold the original, Boswell kept talking about it, saying, 'Rudy, I've never heard a guitar like that. I'd like to make one. But I'd like to improve a few things.' Remember, that was just a Gibson factory guitar, after all. I said, 'Do me a favor: Don't just make one, make two.' I wanted to see the consistency of this guy. I have to tell you, they are simply incredible. This is my model. He only makes it for me."

Opposite (bottom): "The Monteleone Hexaphone is a huge instrument," Pensa says. "As you can see, it's 17 inches! The amazing thing is that a lot of people think a maple guitar doesn't sound good. And I say, 'Are you kidding me?'" And you know who said that about maple guitars? Jimmy D'Aquisto! It sounds amazing, has a carved back, and it's only six pounds. And it has a soundhole inspired by gypsy guitars."

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S A 13-YEAR-OLD growing up in Scarsdale, New York, in the '80s, my guitar fantasies were limited. Bike rides down modest tree-lined streets deposited me at the Sam Ash in downtown White Plains. But this was not

the kind of store that I had in mind. Yes, they had an early '60s Olympic white Strat with an insanely beautiful tortoise pickguard. It was just like the one Rick Springfield played in the "Jessie's Girl" video (don't judge me). But it hovered a solid 14 feet in the air. This guitar, along with a bevy of flame tops, gold tops, blackguards and golden-era Martins, were decidedly *not* for teenagers. The \$2,500 price tags that hung from the headstocks like jewelry clouded my dreams of ownership. Now they just make me sick. Asking to actually see a guitar would result in bolts of hysterical laughter from the manager and a dismissive shake of a mulleted head.


It wouldn't be until several years later that I could take the train from White Plains to Grand Central Station. This was my first guitar journey. Armed with absolutely no money, very little knowledge and a similarly inclined friend, 48th Street was the target. Musicians would talk about this hallowed ground in interviews. There were stories of Jimi Hendrix ordering a dozen Strats for tour and giving them away to fans like flowers. The store on that street that caught my eye was Rudy's, established in 1978.

If you love guitars, you owe it to yourself to meet Rudy Pensa. Talk to almost anyone who has followed an obsessive passion for years. Often, time dims the flame that once burned white-hot. In some cases, bitterness replaces what was

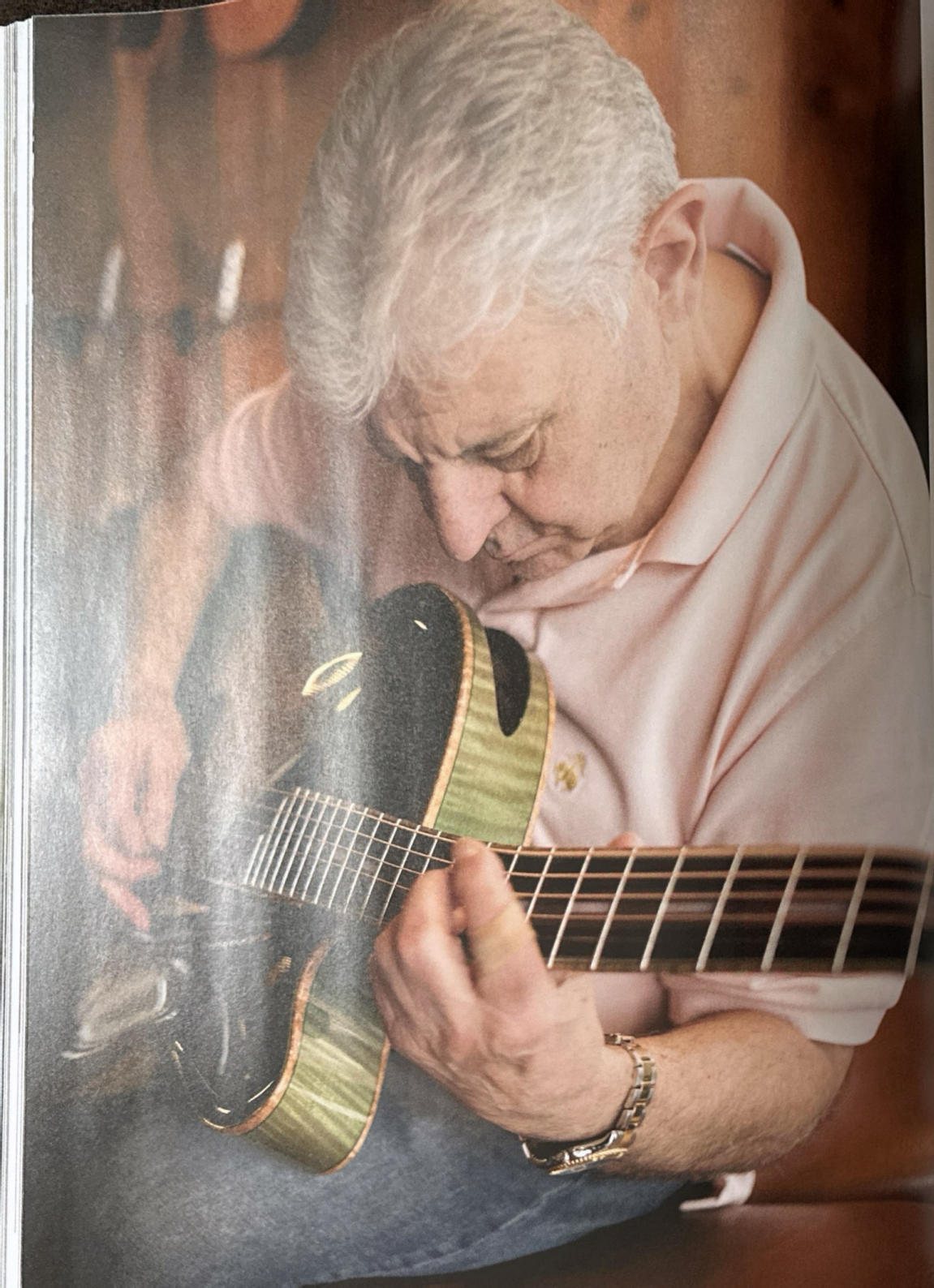
once true love. But this was never the case with Mr. Pensa. Like many true artists, Rudy has always had his eye on the future, and he possesses a true love for instruments that has no equal. Many of the artists he initially admired have befriended him. And in some instances, they have even collaborated to brilliant ends. He's a collector, designer and innovator. Not surprisingly, he has a recent addition to his empire: a shop in, you guessed it, Scarsdale, New York. My life is complete.

Rudy has not lost his charm or his love for instruments. Lucy, the shop dog, pads around the floor, and both Rudy and his daughter Stephanie warmly engage with customers. I saw Rudy taking particular interest in chatting with an emerging guitar player. It wasn't a sales pitch. He was just talking guitars.

The Scarsdale shop is what I was missing as a teenager. It's filled with wood, warmly lit and absolutely stocked with instruments both new and vintage. And Rudy has something that very few dealers can boast: some of the finest current production guitars from makers who rival the work of masters, including Mr. Pensa himself. There's truly no other place in the world where you can see instruments ranging from the finest current archtops by John Monteleone to period-correct flattops from Arthur Boswell. And if you'd like to see how these modern creations stack up against their historic counterparts, he can make that happen like no one else. So let's take a tour of a few special offerings at the Scarsdale shop. If you live in Westchester, you are very much in luck. But, frankly, Rudy's in Scarsdale is worth a guitar journey from just about anywhere. It took me over 30 years to get here. And I'm glad I did. **FJ**



Vintage Fenders and Gibsons
mingle with luthier-built
instruments and Rudy's own
line of guitars, first called
R. Custom and, later, Pensa
Suhr, when he collaborated
with John Suhr.



Only at Rudy's: Where priceless guitars, touring musicians and celebrities intersect.

Opposite: "The Mezzanine is a beautiful story. John [Monteleone] came to my shop in SoHo, and my contractor had painted the banister green to the second level. And John said, 'I love that green banister going to the mezzanine!' And I said, 'What a beautiful name for a guitar.' And he said, 'Yes, yes it is!' And the Mezzanine was born. You don't tell Van Gogh what to paint. I left it to him. We only talked about the color!"

**"You don't tell
Van Gogh what
to paint."**