

# Handcrafted Guitars Built from Scratch

*Koenke Guitars in Teaneck, NJ specializes in the unique craft of guitar building and offers expert stringed instrument repair.*

Teaneck, NJ



Tucked away in a sleepy part of Teaneck, a small business is gearing up for big things. Inside the modest workshop of Koenke Guitars, there is a symphony of wood on a belt sander, guitar strings plucking, and the lively chatter between a luthier and guitar aficionados. Surrounded by wood-working machines, raw lumber, and ailing guitars is where you will find Steve Koenke, owner and master luthier.

“When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I’m a luthier and they always ask ‘huh?’” said Koenke with a chuckle. “I get that all the time but it’s cool with me.”

Since 1997, Koenke has been repairing guitars, mandolins, and various other stringed instruments, with a specialization in vintage guitars. Throughout his 18 year career, he has repaired approximately 15,000 instruments, which includes vintage Martins from the turn of the century, pre-war Martins, Gibson flat tops and archtops from every era, D’Angelicos, D’Aquistos, Monteleones, banjos, mandolins, resophonics, and electric guitars of every brand from every decade.

“Steve has been repairing my guitars for a long time and I only go to him because I trust him and he really knows his craft,” said George Kapitanelis, who is the bassist for the Cosmic American Derelicts and Hillbilly Water, and performs often with Terry Reid.

While repairs have been Koenke's bread and butter, he also builds custom electric and archtop acoustic guitars from scratch, with premium quality wood, and with great resonance and musicality. "I knew I wanted to build guitars since I was 19 and that passion has only grown stronger," said Koenke. He takes great pride in being a guitar builder, not a guitar assembler. "I do everything by hand because it gives me maximum flexibility and lets me customize the tonal characteristics of each instrument. I've learned a lot over the years and the most important thing was that nothing good can come out of taking shortcuts."

It's easy to go to a store and buy a guitar off the rack that was made in a factory overseas. To have a guitar that is handcrafted in the USA from a block of wood and customized to fit your playing style and body shape is a totally different experience, and this is where Koenke Guitars shines.



"I went to Steve to get my guitar fixed. He then told me about his guitar building philosophy and I got a good feeling so I told him I wanted three – red, blue, and black," said Brian of Bergen County, New Jersey, who commissioned custom electric guitars from Koenke. In addition to offering custom guitars made to order, Koenke Guitars is launching its own line of handcrafted electric guitars later this year.

Koenke has a look of intense concentration as he painstakingly wiggles an old fret off a worn neck. Although he is serious about his work, he has a boisterous laugh that can be heard well even in this quiet part of town.

For more information, please visit [www.koenkeguitars.com](http://www.koenkeguitars.com).