

EHLERS PARLOR

They say good things come in small packages. But can this parlour punch above its weight?



Rob Ehlers has been building guitars since 1968, starting out in Santa Monica, California, and now operating out of his workshop in Veracruz, Mexico. Although he makes dreadnoughts and one or two other traditional models, Rob is best known for his sensually curvaceous original designs, particularly the 15 and 16 – essentially small/medium-sized jumbo models. However, in 2004 he introduced the Parlour, which is available with 12 or 14 frets to the body and with either a slotted or solid headstock.

Build And Features

Although the review guitar is described as being a parlour, in reality it's a little larger than many parlour guitars. With a width of 14¼" at the lower bout, this instrument is closer to an 00 in dimensions. However, the design is quite an original one, with characteristic Ehlers curvaceousness. I found that the slightly elongated body felt a little different as I held it on my lap to play, and took a moment or two to get used to, but in no time I had adjusted and found it immensely comfortable.

With a top of AAAAAA-grade cedar, and high-grade East Indian rosewood back and sides, Ehlers has avoided some of the more

esoteric woods currently being experimented with by luthiers, but as each guitar is built to order, customers can specify woods of their own choosing. This is a very well-constructed guitar, with a simple abalone rosette to lift the slightly darker note struck by the cedar top. The body is bound in lovely figured koa, with a matching end piece and a marquetry centre strip at the back.

The neck is a little unusual in that it's solid koa, with some very nice flame. I've never come across koa used as a neck material before, but it looks beautiful and helps to create the

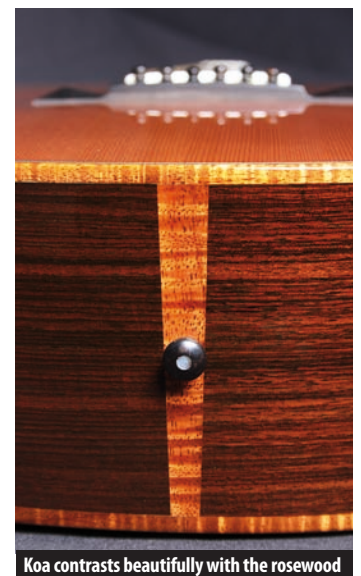
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impression of an instrument constructed with considerable thought and attention to detail. The fingerboard and bridge are made from ebony, polished to a finger-friendly smoothness, complemented by equally well-finished frets, bone nut and

bridge saddle. The fingerboard sports some nice scalloped diamond position markers in abalone, which match the abalone Ehlers logo on the headstock. Gold-plated Gotoh tuners complete the picture and, as usual, do their job superbly.



The use of Indian Rosewood is reliable and comfortable, but different wood can be specified



Koa contrasts beautifully with the rosewood



EHLERS
Parlor

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Technical specification

Manufacturer: Ehlers
Model: Ehlers parlour cedar/AAAAA Indian rosewood
Retail Price: £3,495
Body Size: Parlour
Made In: Mexico
Top: Cedar
Back and Sides: AAAAA Indian rosewood back and sides
Neck: Koa
Fingerboard: Ebony (bound)
Frets: 20
Tuners: Gotoh
Nut Width: 1 3/4"
Scale Length: 24.75"
Onboard Electronics: No
Strings Fitted: Elixir Light
Left Handers: Enquire
Gig Bag/Case Included: Custom Cedar Creek Case

Contact details

Acoustic Music Company
 www.theacousticmusicco.co.uk
 01273 671 841

What we think

Pros: Effortless playability, sweet tone and superb quality of construction.
Cons: I suspect that opinions on the shape will vary.
Overall: A lovely little guitar, with a bigger sound than you might expect.

Our Ratings Explained

5 Stars: Superb, Almost faultless.
4 Stars: Excellent, Hard to beat.
3 Stars: Good, covers all bases well.
2 or 1 Stars: Below average, poor.

Rating out of five

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★



As expected, the Gotoh tuners work perfectly

Mellow, but never bland, the bass and low mids are both warm and rich, while the trebles are sweet and lively...

This is a nicely finished instrument, both inside and out, and exudes quality from the moment you open the Cedar Creek case that comes as part of the package.

Sound Quality

The 24 3/4" scale length, combined with an excellent set-up, makes for an effortless playing experience. This is a comfortable, easy-playing guitar, which very quickly felt like an old friend. Now, I'm not a big fan of cedar-topped guitars, but recent experience of instruments built by luthiers who clearly know what they're doing (Olson and Charis,

for example) is starting to modify my opinion, and the Ehlers Parlor certainly reinforces the point that one needs to treat each guitar on its own merits and put any preconceptions aside.

The combination of cedar and rosewood might lead one to expect a dark tone, particularly on a smaller-bodied instrument. In fact, I was afraid it might be excessively dark, muddy even. However, nothing could be further from the truth. It's true that the tone is a little darker than one would probably get from a spruce-topped instrument, but there's no trace of mud here! In reality, it's a very sweet-sounding instrument.

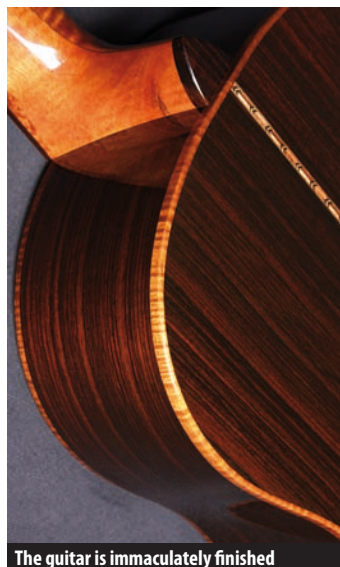
Mellow, but never bland, the bass and low mids are both warm and rich, while the trebles are sweet and lively – no doubt the result of the combination of the cedar top and the shorter scale length.

This is very much a fingerpicker's guitar, but it is by no means limited in that respect. It has a lovely, warm tone when strummed with a light- or medium-gauged pick. Although at times there were aspects of the guitar that fleetingly reminded me of Lowdens and R Taylors, that warm, strummed sound actually reminded me of nothing as much as one or two of the very best old Gibsons that I've played. This is a guitar that would be well suited to underpinning vocals.

Conclusion

Although the jury is still out for me as regards the design of the guitar (in terms of the shape, that is), the Ehlers Parlor provided me with a very enjoyable, very moreish playing experience. Beautifully constructed, with playability to die for, and a tone that left me with a near permanent smile on my face, this guitar is a great player's instrument. The sweet-toned Parlor has much more volume than its diminutive dimensions might lead you to expect too, so there's much more flexibility than you'd get out of a traditional parlour. At £3,495 it's not cheap, but when you consider that you could easily pay twice that much for a similar instrument from other American luthiers, I'd say it represents reasonable value for money. Well worth checking this one out if you're in the market for a smaller guitar with extra reserves of tone and volume.

Richard Thomas



The guitar is immaculately finished



The soundhole inlay stands out against the beautiful minimalism of the instrument