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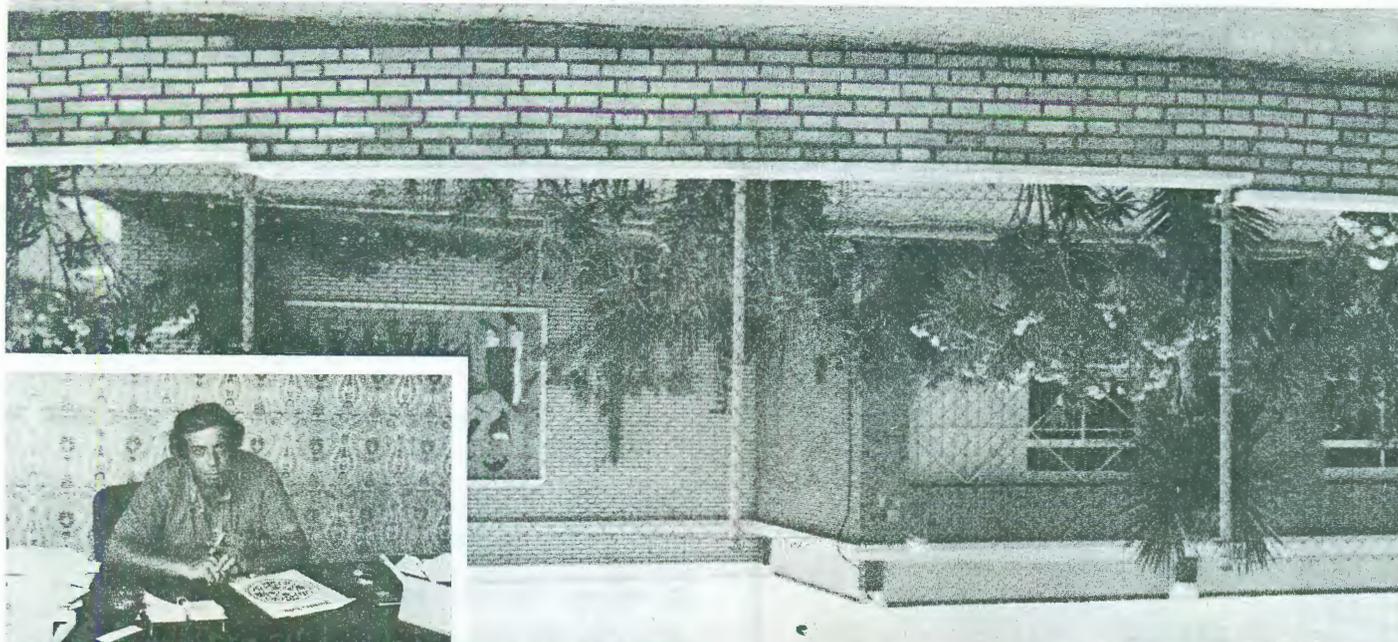
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Hijos de Vicente Tatay

A VISIT TO VALENCIA'S LARGEST GUITAR FACTORY

picture is upside-down!

by Henry Adams



The younger Vicente Tatay manages much of the family business.

The Tatay factory occupies a city block in the industrial quarter outside Valencia.

When one is discussing the Spanish-made guitars, he may mention Ramírez, Fleta, Aguado-Hernández or one of a dozen other principal concert instrument builders; however, not everyone is involved or concerned with the guitar at the concert level. For many young Spaniards, tourists on the go and Latin American students, the name Vicente Tatay may be the first name that comes to mind when thinking about guitars from Spain. Tatay guitars are found in most music stores and tourist shops in the Peninsula, and several thousand are exported to South America on an annual basis, making them a popular item in that part of the world. For the beginner, they are generally considered a good buy, both for their reasonable price as well as for their better than average sound.

When the Tatay family founded their guitar shop in Valencia in 1894, it was like most of the traditional family-operated endeavors of that time with the father supervising his sons so that they could carry on with the family business. For them as well as for many guitar builders of their day, business was best around holidays when guitars were bought to play at family gatherings or possibly to hang on a wall for decoration. But times change, and with the changes came a greater interest in the guitar, both within Spain and abroad. The family business began to grow. They had to hire extra help and increase their output. They began to mechanize and the modest business slowly but surely began to take on a new appearance. It was becoming a factory.

In fact, as of four years ago, due to

the ever-growing demands of production and, consequently, with the need for more work space, "Hijos de Vicente Tatay" moved their business to the industrial quarter, a 20-minute tram ride inland from the regional capital. The present factory employs 37 workers and occupies a warehouse which covers a good-size city block. In contrast to the original business' output of four to five thousand instruments annually, Tatay now produces about 40 thousand guitars a year, not to mention his production of bandurrias, mandolinas españolas and tiples canarios. Not only do the Tatays operate the largest of Valencia's four major guitar factories, but they are also responsible, in part, for the general growth and interest in guitar building in the region, having provided training for many of the workers and owners of

1975?

the thirty-odd smaller guitar-building operations in the area.

Tatay's operation is a factory in every sense of the word. Every worker has his own speciality, with speed being the order of the day. Aside from the more conventional saws, routers and sanders, the Tatays have designed and built machinery for their own special needs. Take, for example, the cutting of fret slots which is speedily executed by a series of small radial saws mounted on a common axis at the calculated fret distances. This particular machine, which was built about 40 years ago, has a set of interchangeable saw-axes so as to be able to cut fret slots for the bandurrias, tiples and mandolins as well. Another machine which has the appearance of a modified pants press, is used to steam and shape the sides of the guitar. What appeared to be two large rollers coated with an abrasive is used to reduce the soundboard to its approximate thickness before it receives the more delicate shaping and sanding by hand. And by inserting the lower end of an unworked neck into the jig of another machine, it comes out with the heel shaped and the slots cut for inserting the sides.



Gluing down purfling with conventional white glue.



The daily quota is around 150 guitars. Note pear-shaped bandurrias in center background.

As for the finishing of instruments, this too has been mechanized with the spray gun replacing the traditional brush and French polish. Also in line with the larger production scale, the Tatays are now ordering custom-made rosettes from Japanese specialists rather than making their own.

Considering the production level they work at, it seems only natural that the old ways would have to be drastically modified or completely eliminated. Nonetheless, one still sees many reminders of the traditional workshops. There are benches and tool racks displaying planes, rasps, chisels, spoke shaves, razor knives and other familiar tools found in most builders' shops. And even though there is a plethora of miracle glues on the market, the Tatays still prefer to use the traditional animal glue and the conventional white glue.

Regardless of what some may think about mechanization and the factory approach to building, the Tatays offer the novice and the hobbyist a varied selection of reasonably priced instruments. The most economical models, which sell for 1,850 pesetas (\$25), have brass frets, three coats of finish and a flat top with three or five fan braces. These instruments are usually made of mahogany and other common woods from South America or Africa. Their most expensive factory-line instruments sell for 13,000 pesetas (\$175); however, they also make guitars to order which sell for as much as 20 to 50 thousand pesetas (\$270 to \$770). The

better instruments have nickel-silver frets, nine to eleven coats of finish and a slightly arched soundboard with seven to nine fan braces. These instruments are made with the better quality traditional materials such as rosewood, ebony and spruce.

When questioned about costs, Tatay explained that his prices are going up



Rather than using clamps, this worker uses cotton cord and small wooden wedges to hold bridge in place during the gluing process. He can fasten two or three bridges per minute in this fashion.

due to both the difficulty of finding suitable woods as well as to the cost of labor, adding that about 70% of the cost of a guitar is attributed to labor alone. Also on the economic side, he estimated that his costs have increased by about 100 to 150% just in the past eight to ten years.

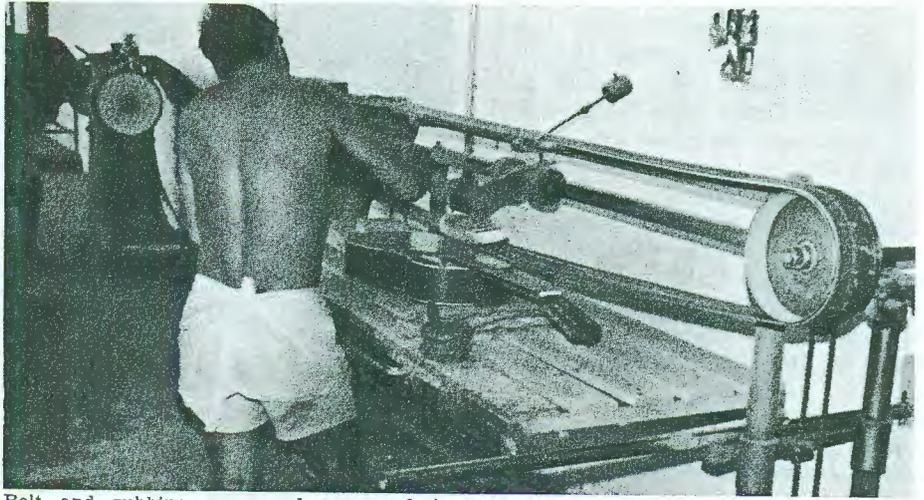
At present, the majority of the Tatays' instruments are exported to Latin America, Greece, Italy and Germany with about 30% of them remaining behind to be sold in Spain. And even though they set their daily quota between 100 and 150 guitars, a moderate output in relation to the production levels reached by the more mechanized factories abroad, their market seems to be very good.

In comparison to the factory-made instruments from Japan, Germany and Italy, many feel that the Spanish guitars are superior in tone and sound production; however, the foreign-made instruments are often much more appealing in their outward appearance. Consequently, many dealers and buyers who are more impressed with the visual aspects rather than the sound qualities have been looking to these other makers for instruments.

Nonetheless, the foreign producers don't appear to be an immediate threat to the long-established Tatays. In fact, the demand for their instruments is so great that they haven't even allotted space for storing the completed instruments. As soon as the finish is dry and rubbed out, the instruments are packed and whisked off to their prospective buyers. □



Fastening down freshly glued back with cotton cord.



Belt and rubbing compound are used in the finishing of the instruments.



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