





RELISH WALNUT JANE & BLOODY MARY £3,799 & £1,599

Guitar design may appear to be stagnant in the mainstream market, but all over the world small 'shop designers and makers are reevaluating the instrument. Swiss-based Relish is a case in point...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin & Adam Gasson

What You Need To Know

1 Who is Relish?
Founded by longtime friends Silvan Küng and Pirmin Giger (aka the 'Relish Bros'), Relish takes an altogether different look at the electric guitar. Küng's background is in marketing and sales, while Giger has a background in carpentry, but in 2008 he began studies in industrial design, which led to him making the first prototype of what was to become Jane – the initial Relish vision.

2 And who's Mary?
The Mary guitar was introduced this year and is a more economical version of Jane. It uses an alder body core, as opposed to the machined aluminium of Jane.

3 Where are they made?
Switzerland – Kriens, to be precise, just south of Lucerne. You can try one out in the UK at Sound Affect Premier and The North American Guitar.

It's sometimes easy to forget that not everyone wants to play a guitar designed in the 50s or 60s. But the outcome for those intrepid designers – and over the years there have been many – who dare to come up with a new recipe for the electric is, historically, failure. So, it's with some trepidation that we welcome Relish to our pages: the modernist vision of a carpenter-cum-industrial designer and marketing/sales specialist.

Jane is the company's original vision. It caught our eye at recent trade shows and in the flesh is no less attention-grabbing, despite its eye-watering price for which you could buy a fine example of electric luthiery from all the world's top brands. Mary is a different proposition in terms of price, but includes less of Jane's modernism in terms of material choice, although it pretty much includes the same hardware and pickups.

Both guitars use a 650mm (25.59-inch) scale length, the classical guitar standard and, of course, just 2mm longer than the classic Fender scale of 648mm. The necks are the same, too: Fender-like bolt-ons, albeit with a small three-a-side headstock that, perhaps surprisingly, doesn't offer completely straight string pull over the nut, like PRS or Music Man, for example.

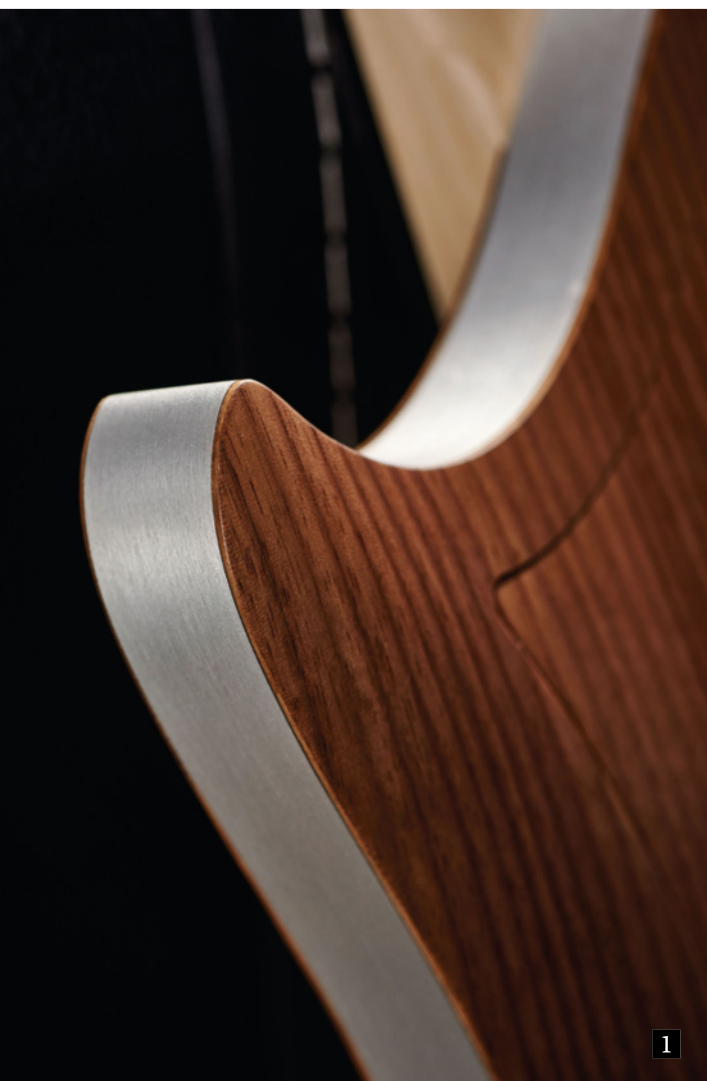
With an intention not to use tropical hardwoods in its designs, Relish has nonetheless chosen a very rosewood-looking 254mm (10-inch) radius'd fingerboard that is actually a 'woven' bamboo – a first for us. Frets are stainless

steel with notched tangs that sit over a thin edge binding – very tidy, very modern and impeccably crafted. The nuts on both are graphite and beautifully shaped: a high level of detail is evident everywhere and there's not a hair out of place. There is a Relish logo on Jane's headstock facing that appears to be stamped, but from any distance you can't see it. Mary is more showy with a raised metallic logo, standard Schaller mini-tuners (not the 510 Gotohs used on Jane), and a less fettled nut that's perfectly functional nonetheless. Both have open-hole truss rod access that might appear unfinished to some. It doesn't bother us.

Both guitars, too, share the same Relish design 'black top' humbuckers with their side covers made by Swiss-brand Good Tone, along with chromed low-profile Tele-style domed and knurled control knobs, standard strap buttons and a walled-hardtail bridge with six block Strat-style saddles. That's where the similarities end.

The body shapes and construction are profoundly different, although they have a sibling similarity, with the upper shoulder of Mary creating, perhaps, a more conventional look that mirrors its construction. But we use the word 'conventional' lightly...

The original vision of Jane features an aluminium core 'frame' that's seemingly machined from one piece of 20mm-thick stock. However, most of it is cutaway, leaving a thin 'side' that's approximately 8mm thick, and a central spine that's 60mm



wide from bridge to tail, and the neck joint platform; under the pickups, it thins to half of that width (see image 2, above). It's this frame that connects the neck to the bridge, creating the sound and vibrational platform.

The structure is sealed, top and back, with pressed seven-ply veneers – the five central layers are ash, while the outer and inside facings here are walnut. The back flips off; it's held in place with nine small magnets, a no-screw zone, and allows you to not only see inside, but to swap out pickups via the RF connectors (Relish offers other options and is currently working with Bare Knuckle) in a matter of minutes without the need for a soldering iron and without even slackening the strings. The downside is that you are limited to single conductors, which means that you can't coil-split.

Further modernism from Relish comes in the form of touch-switches for the pickup on/off selection, which illuminate when they are on. These switches require a special PCB, components and a battery – a standard pickup switch is a no-cost option if you'd prefer.

Mary swaps the beautiful curves of Jane's front and back with a flat-faced 'slab' construction of around 51mm thick compared with Jane's more bulbous 57mm depth. The front and thinner back are machined from what Relish calls 'high pressure veneers' – although it does look like MDF – while the centre core is alder, not aluminium. But the three layers have a gap between them and you can pull the back off and see the construction clearly. Seven magnets hold the back, but, importantly to the design, rubber O rings keep the parts separate. The core is more solid than Jane's. It has cavities for

Mary swaps the beautiful curves of Jane's front and back with a flat-faced 'slab' construction

1. Jane's aluminium core and pressed wood veneer top and back construction creates not only a unique design, but one that sounds much older than its modernistic appearance suggests

2. If only we could lift off the back of our semi or hollowbody guitars like this! All the wiring is on show and pickups can be swapped via those RF connectors without a soldering iron or slackening your strings!



3. Both guitars feature Relish design 'black top' humbuckers with their side covers made by the Swiss-brand Good Tone

4. Are these touch-sensitive controls a touch of high-end irrelevance? Actually, no: pickup selection is fast, you can even do it with the palm of your hand. For the more conventional player, however, you can spec a standard pickup selector switch

the pickups and controls, with the same Emerson electronics and vintage-style paper-in-oil-cap – which is kind of ironic on such a modernist design – but you'll find conventional solder joints and there's no need for any battery power because the pickup selection is a three-way lever switch. However, like Jane, there's no facility for coil-splits, which could have given us some more single-coil sounds via a modern five-way lever switch.

Sounds

If you're expecting a super-bright piercing voice from Jane with her aluminium core, then think again. A quick unplugged strum and we hear a woody, semi-like voice that's rather surprising. Combine that with a beautiful even and long sustain, and it really isn't what we had expected. Mary is a more conventional gal. Again, the sustain is noticeable, but there's less 'wood' and a zingier response.

Strapped on, we find Jane to feel really comfortable; Mary is weightier and feels less ergonomic. Both necks play really



nicely and are smooth and quite full-depted in the upper positions, precision-like rather than vintage 'mojo'.

The supplied pickups are certainly in the hotter realm yet sound significantly different on the two platforms. Jane's high-end is a little muted, especially with volume reduction. Mary is a little spikier – on some cleaner voices there's quite a steel-y almost Telecaster-like voice and we found ourselves pulling back the tone, whereas with Jane we'd like a little more bite. And it's these characters that underpin the sounds we hear as we try out numerous amp tones. Jane can sound a bit too honky with lighter gains, but really big and beefy with a little more push. Mary sits more easily with virtually anything we try, from clinical clean funk through to ultra-gain.

We pulled out a 2016 PRS McCarty some way through our sound-test and that reminds us of a great-sounding 'standard' guitar that's clearer, more 'all-round' with its vintage-y voice and highly usable coil-splits. 'Game over,' we think. Then we plug Jane back in and think, 'Oh, maybe not!'



Those pristine highs don't suit everyone, and when firing up a bluesy Kenny Burrell-style practice track, Jane sits really nicely. Even those unusual pickup switches make sense after a little playing. While both guitars share numerous similar traits, both are hard to pigeonhole into 'familiar' roles. Game on for the creative musician, less so the player who wants to nail the 'benchmark' sounds of yesteryear.

Verdict

The Relish Jane is a beautiful, considered design with a highly endearing voice and superb playability, intonation and character. Mary is a looker, too, with a more conventional voice and has those family traits in the playability, resonance and sustain departments, although – hardly surprisingly at its much lower price – it feels more everyday. Both are hugely interesting designs for the player and collector who appreciates the craft of the instrument and doesn't want yet another 'me-too' electric.

Obviously, Jane's price ticket is prohibitive, Mary's less so, and while the ability to swap out pickups very easily on Jane is attractive, the lack of coil-splits or combined humbucker/single-coil voices could be limiting for many players.

Jane, Mary... who's next? We'll be very interested to watch Relish's progress. Definitely worth a try. **G**





7

5. Jane and Mary are very different gals when it comes to their construction. Mary uses an alder core with thicker, slab top and back

6. You can also remove Mary's back, but the wiring is more conventional, not least the selector switch

7. Both guitars share the same wall-d six-saddle bridge with through-body stringing. There's no vibrato option, although there are various Relish/Good Tone humbuckers to choose from with Bare Knuckle options in the pipeline

8. Mary features a raised metallic logo and standard Schaller mini-tuners



8



RELISH WALNUT JANE

PRICE: £3,799 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Switzerland

TYPE: Single-cutaway semi-solid electric

BODY: Relish sandwich construction: aluminium frame core with moulded wood 7-ply veneer (5-ply ash with outer facings of walnut)

NECK: Maple bolt-on, modern 'C' shape

SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.59")

NUT/WIDTH: Graphite, 43.06mm

FINGERBOARD: Dark strand woven bamboo, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 24 medium jumbo stainless steel

HARDWARE: Hardtail bridge, Gotoh 510Z tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Relish (by Good Tone) Buckers XV, 2x Relish touch sensors for pickup selection, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.37/7.43

OPTIONS: Body veneers – a choice of ash, cherry and flamed maple faced ash body shells, pickup selector toggle switch, pickups

RANGE OPTIONS: See Mary

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Walnut (as reviewed), Ash, Cherry, Flamed maple natural finishes; Snow (white), Shady (black) and Bordeaux (trans red) colours – semi-matt lacquer

8/10

PROS Modernist vision and unique detailed construction; easy-swap pickups; sustaining sounds

CONS Price; lack of sound options; polarising appearance



RELISH BLOODY MARY

PRICE: £1,599 (inc gigbag)

ORIGIN: Switzerland

TYPE: Single-cutaway semi-solid electric

BODY: Relish floating sandwich construction: alder centre with 'plywood' top and back

NECK: Maple bolt-on, modern 'C' shape

SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.59")

NUT/WIDTH: Artificial resin, 43.02mm

FINGERBOARD: Dark strand woven bamboo, 254mm (10") radius

FRETS: 24 medium jumbo stainless steel

HARDWARE: Hardtail bridge, Schaller tuners – chrome-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Relish (by Good Tone) Buckers XV, Relish touch sensors (or Toggle switch), master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.82/8.39

OPTIONS: Pickups

RANGE OPTIONS: See Jane

LEFT-HANDERS: No

FINISHES: Bloody (as reviewed), Snow (white) and Shady (black) – semi-matt lacquer finish

7/10

PROS More conventional vision; 'real world' price; more conventional sounds, too

CONS It's a bit weighty; again, could feature more sounds

Sound Affects Premier
01695 570023
www.relishguitars.com