



a string *of* success

Like a baker guarding a recipe, Anton Krutz won't reveal the exact ingredients of the special varnish brushed onto every violin, viola, cello and bass created at his store, K.C. Strings. In a room pungent from the smell of casein and alcohol, a violin hangs from a string drawn taut, glistening and still damp.

"The varnish is what makes the biggest difference in sound quality," he explains. "We can't give away all the ingredients, or someone could copy it. It's like eating a great cake—you can enjoy it without knowing what exactly went in it or in what order."

Anton, along with his father Misha and business partner Rick Williams, has been crafting, servicing and giving lessons on string instruments since the three men opened K.C. Strings in 1992.

Rick is a former residential and commercial designer as well as a craftsman. He lends his equipment and more than 30 years of woodworking experience to K.C. Strings. Misha, who plays the bass in the Kansas City Symphony, previously ran a violin shop out of his home, where he served both student and professional clientele for 10 years.

At 12, Anton began making violins and apprenticed under master luthier (violin expert) Earsel Atchley, a well-known mentor and one of the first Americans to enter a quartet in an international string competition. Anton also attended the Violin Making School of America in Salt Lake City, Utah, and worked in violin shops across the country.

Armed with these backgrounds, the three men gutted and remodeled a 1904 grocery to serve as the site of their store.

K.C. Strings makes music of instruments

Story by
Jaime Netzer
Photography by
Jason Dailey

LOWER LEFT The elegant entrance greets musicians and curious patrons.

BELOW The men of K.C. Strings, from left, Misha Krutz, Anton Krutz and Rick Williams, have used their knowledge, dedication and expertise to build one of the premier string instrument makers in the Midwest.



When Misha is not aiding the others at K.C. Strings, he is playing bass with the Kansas City Symphony. He began making violins out of his home before K.C. Strings grew to today's operation.



K.C. Strings
5842 Merriam Drive
(913) 677-0400
www.kcstrings.com

Monday-Friday
10 a.m.-7 p.m.
Saturday
10 a.m.-6 p.m.
Sunday
1-5 p.m.

"The shop has grown tremendously," Anton says. "When you have three people with unique talents and abilities, the shop doesn't grow three times as much—it grows exponentially." Since 1992, Anton estimates the shop has seen profits increase by about 20 percent every year.

To maintain a market share, K.C. Strings has been innovative, too. Rick says the shop is trying to create five-string violas and violins so musicians who want to play up or down, and change the range of their instrument, can do so. He also invented a dblBass Buggie to transport a bass with ease. He's already sold 550 of them on the internet to people in countries as far away as Japan.

"The most amazing part of K.C. Strings is that you can get an instrument with a classic Italian sound that's made right here in the heart of America," says Rick.

What sets K.C. Strings apart is the variety of instruments and services it provides. Spread out over several buildings on one antiquated block in Merriam, the store offers instrument repair, construction and lessons. In addition, K.C. Strings makes what lots of other string shops just don't have the space for: basses.

"Most string makers make violins, violas and cellos," Anton says. "Very few, if any, make a bass. It takes big band saws; it takes cabinetmaking equipment."

That's where Rick comes in. Rick, who has worked with designers including Thomas Britt of New York and Robert Trapp of Kansas City, says he made the switch from designing furniture to making instruments seamlessly.



Solid tales from K.C. Strings

With a unique talent at hand, we figured the men of K.C. Strings would have a few stories to share.

“One time, I was sitting in the shop working quietly, and all of a sudden it sounded like a top popped off and let go of the strings. There’s 75 pounds of tension on the strings, so it was astoundingly loud when it let go all at once. I nearly jumped out of my skin.”

– Rick Williams

“We often find love letters that kids pass back and forth but then hide from the teachers inside of instruments.”

– Anton Krutz

“One time we got a bass in from a ways out in Kansas, and the top had popped off it. It warped into a weird shape, and we just couldn’t fix it, so we kind of set it aside for a while. The guy called to check on it after a while, and I said, ‘Let me go see how it looks right now,’ and the humidity had moved it right back into shape.”

– Rick Williams

“I can remember the day Tiberius Klausner, former concert master of the K.C. Symphony, let Anton work on his violin. He was nervous as a cat to let him touch it.”

– Rick Williams



TOP Alexander Svistuhov uses his knowledge and expertise in making these fine string instruments. Each one is made to create a classic Italian sound, something rare among all American-made strings. K.C. Strings also makes basses with heavy-duty equipment, something that sets it apart from other violinmakers.



“Wood is wood,” he says. “You have to know about its basic properties to do things properly.” Anton adds that 95 percent of the wood used to make instruments gets turned into sawdust. Indeed, in every room of K.C. Strings except its sunny repair and showrooms, a fine layer of dust settles over equipment large and small. In one open space, tons of maple and cedar are piled on gray shelving, bark still intact.

From bark to varnish, the staff of 25 at K.C. Strings has a singular goal: to make the instruments sing. “The best instruments in the world all have the same quality: They sound like a voice,” Anton says. “Even though it’s a wood bow with metal string, the sound created when you listen to the them being played is like someone singing. This is what we do here.”

The shop is not limited to professional musicians only because of its top-of-the-line products. “At our shop, we can see a symphony musician standing in line next to a 3-year-old coming in for his first instrument,” he says. “It’s beautiful to own a place that’s bringing people together in such a way.” **ISM**