



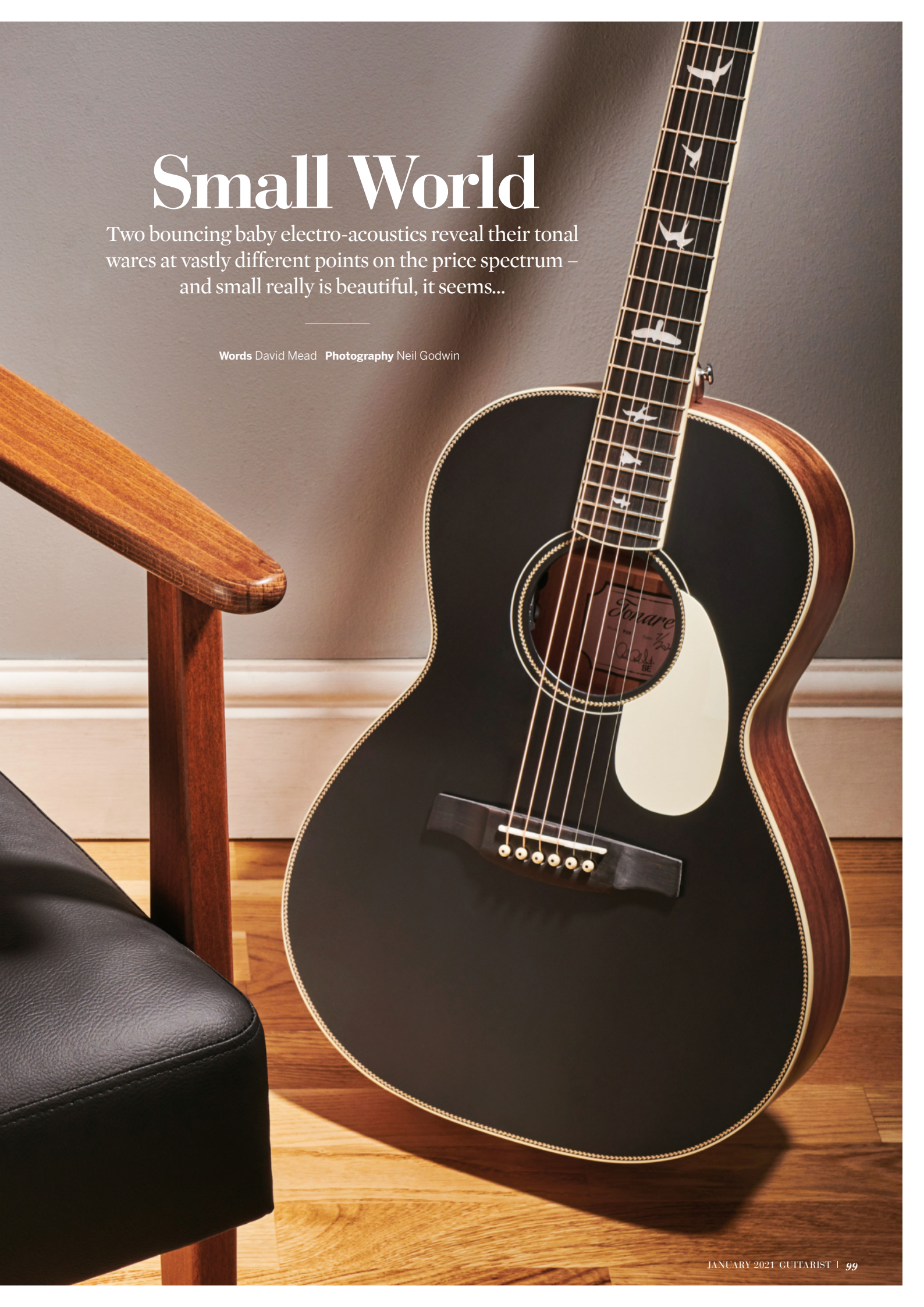


# Small World

Two bouncing baby electro-acoustics reveal their tonal wares at vastly different points on the price spectrum – and small really is beautiful, it seems...

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Words David Mead Photography Neil Godwin







## PRS SE P20E & TAYLOR GTE URBAN ASH

**£499 & £1,835**

CONTACT **PRS Guitars** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB [www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)

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### What You Need To Know

#### 1 **The price differential here means that this isn't a fair fight, surely?**

Absolutely correct, and that's why we're not pitting this pair against one another, we're merely taking two smaller-bodied acoustics at two very different price points to illustrate that there's something to suit everyone's pocket in the compact acoustic range.

#### 2 **So, parlour is the new dreadnought?**

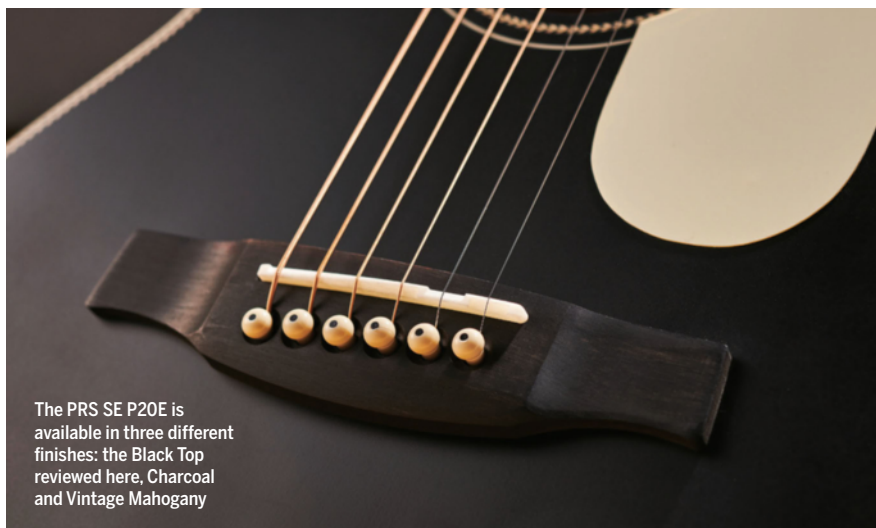
It would appear that smaller acoustics are enjoying something of a heyday, yes. But while a more diminutive guitar might pack quite a surprisingly hefty punch, if you're after the majesty of the sound of a dreadnought then you know where you can start looking.

#### 3 **Home-use only or are these guitars crowd-pleasingly performance fit?**

We're going to stick our necks out and generalise a bit. If you put a good pickup on any well-built acoustic, irrespective of body size, and feed it into a good acoustic amp or capable PA, you're entering a whole new sonic dimension. In our experience, even the tiniest mite can be made to roar, given the right setup – and a good pair of ears behind the mixing desk.

**Y**ou have to admit that in recent months the world has gone a little mad. And one of the more surprising offshoots of lockdown, isolation, working from home and no live gigs is the increased sales of acoustic guitars across the land. Not only that, we hear that it's the smaller, boudoir-friendly instruments that are receiving a disproportionate amount of interest. It seems that everyone is after a sofa-buddy six-string to soundtrack their solitary social hours these days, and, of course, the industry has responded accordingly.

We've selected two models to take a look at, but we'd like to point out first and foremost that this is no slugging match between grossly mismatched opponents. On the contrary, we've been careful to pick this pair as being representative of what's available on the market at very different price points. Both PRS and Taylor are well known for their high-quality instruments that come with hefty price tags to match. But we're focusing in on the somewhat specialist area of smaller-bodied instruments in order to find out how both these heavyweights have addressed the quandary of achieving



The PRS SE P20E is available in three different finishes: the Black Top reviewed here, Charcoal and Vintage Mahogany



1. PRS's SE P20E comes loaded with a Fishman GT1 pickup for live use. But if you can do without, the P20 model is available at £100 less

2. The distinctive PRS headstock is adorned with Kluson-style tuners and white buttons, adding a dash of vintage chic to the instrument

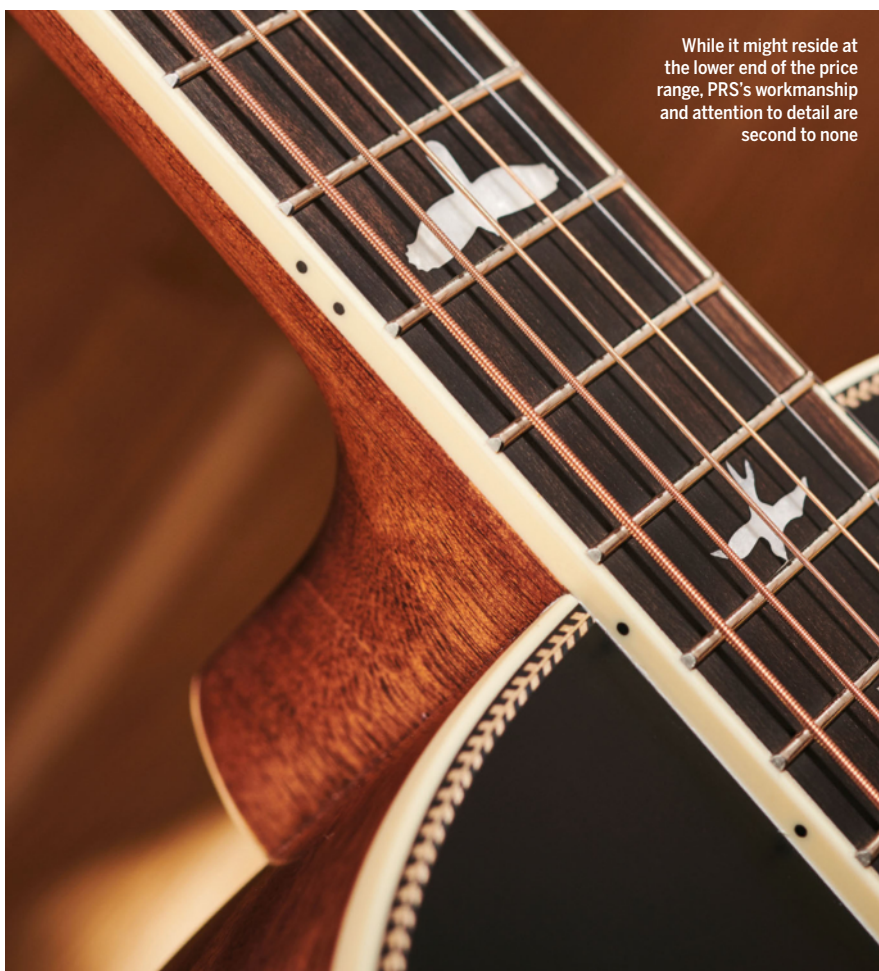


With an ebony 'board, 20 frets and a Wide Fat neck shape, PRS's P20E is open for serious business

concert-hall performance from parlour-sized – or thereabouts – instruments. So, let's start opening cases, and in the interest of being scrupulously fair, we'll look at each guitar individually.

### PRS SE P20E

PRS's parlour acoustic – or Tonare, to give it its catalogue name – is available in three different liveries: the Black Top we have here, Vintage Mahogany, and the all-black Charcoal, with the all-mahogany cocktail of body woods remaining static throughout. If you're not particularly fussed about having a pickup installed, then your wishes are accommodated with the SE P20, which comes in at around at £100 less. Kerb appeal is very high; this is a very attractive guitar, from its signature PRS headstock and bird inlaid fingerboard to the herringbone bound black-topped body. It's cute and it makes us want to pick it up and start playing immediately, but first we have to run our eyes down the spec sheet and look at what's going on behind the scenes.



While it might reside at the lower end of the price range, PRS's workmanship and attention to detail are second to none





3. Controls for the PRS SE P20E reside just inside the bass edge of the guitar's soundhole, within easy reach during live performance

4. The jack output is situated on the lower reaches of the body below the strap button, with an easy-change battery compartment



The top is solid mahogany, whereas the back and sides are, we suspect, a hog-topped laminate. Nevertheless, we know roughly what to expect from all-mahogany instruments – mellowness and warmth but with a definite bite when played hard. Traditionally good for playing a bit of Delta blues if you're so inclined, but it's capable of addressing most musical styles you care to throw at it.

As we've found many times in the past when reviewing instruments hailing from China, build quality really is excellent. Considering the price, you're getting something seriously attractive on a sub-£500 ticket. The combo of herringbone and white binding has been expertly done, as have the other decorative refinements onboard. With an ebony fingerboard, 20 frets and PRS's Wide Fat neck shape, the P20E is open for serious business – and a Fishman GT1 pickup means that it's not shy of performing on stage either. Controls for the aforementioned are hidden away unobtrusively inside the bass side of the soundhole where they're under the fingers but otherwise anonymous, as far as the overall appearance of the guitar is concerned.

Vintage-style butterbean tuners adorn the headstock and tuning seems absolutely stable. We only had to tune once and didn't have to touch that side of things again for all of the time it took to write this review.

## Taylor's GTe is a fun instrument with serious ambitions, standing tall among acoustic big hitters

First impressions of the sound are as good as our reaction to the design. There's plenty of volume – more than you'd expect, in fact – with the basses and trebles evenly represented. Both fingerstyle and chord work are effortless, thanks to the low action, generous nut width and the palm-friendly feel of the neck. Fretting and neck binding are, again, exemplary – everything we'd expect from PRS's SE instruments.

When amplified via our trusty AER Compact 60, the Fishman GT1 does its thing as you'd expect and reproduces the acoustic vibe of the P20E faithfully while allowing you to EQ things to taste. Want a bit of gritty blues? Then walk this way. If it's sensitive fingerstyle ballads you had in mind, no problem. We're seriously impressed.

### Taylor GTe Urban Ash

Taylor's entry into pint-size pluckery moves us away from the parlour-sized end of the spectrum and up to what Taylor refers to as Grand Theater territory. Technically speaking, the GTe is, in Taylor's own

## THE RIVALS

If the smaller-bodied acoustic is your idea of a strummer's bliss, the marketplace is positively awash with models that will suit your needs. For starters, how about checking out Vintage's Viator range? Although designated as travel guitars, they fit the brief of smaller body with a lively sound. The VTR800PB-USB (£349) has antiqued good looks plus a Fishman Sonitone preamp for those plugged-in moments, and even a USB output to help out with all those recording projects you've been putting off for ages.

Then there's the Baby Taylor (circa £350 depending on model), which is available in various guises and body wood combos, and you should check out Martin's Dreadnought Junior, for example, the DJR-10E (£637) – loads of toneful heft for a little 'un.

Moving upscale, Lowden's Wee range delivers the goods, with the cedar-topped WL-25 (£2,890) and its stablemates packed with performance power. Martin's mahogany-topped 0-15M (£1,499) should be included here, too, and a quick Google search will reveal that companies such as Faith, Washburn, Guild and Seagull all have entries in the compact acoustic race and so exploration is well advised.





words, a “scaled-down body that echoes the jumbo curves of our Grand Orchestra shape, with its dimensions reduced to create a remarkably approachable feel”. Couldn’t have put it better ourselves. It’s another good looker and it has some serious ecological credentials, too.

We’ve looked at Taylor’s use of Urban Ash before in these pages when we reviewed the Builder’s Edition 324ce, but if you missed it, a brief sketch of events goes something like this. On the lookout for alternative timbers for use in its guitars, Taylor’s Andy Powers wondered what happened to the trees that line the highways and byways of California after they reach the end of their time, that is, when West Coast Arborists – the local tree-minders and carers of the state – are forced to remove trees from the streets due to age or safety concerns. Luckily, the wood is being archived with the expectation that it might enjoy a second life at the hands of furniture makers or, as it turns out, luthiers. Andy found that the wood produced a similar sonic quality to that of Honduran mahogany – one of the royal family of instrument timbers – and so a plentiful supply of ethically resourced, good-sounding wood suddenly became available. And it’s Urban Ash that we find on the GTe’s back and sides here.

The guitar’s top wood is the more familiar Sitka spruce, but the fingerboard features eucalyptus on a mahogany neck. So, not

only is this guitar a new venture in terms of body size for Taylor, its ‘green’ credentials are fully intact, too.

There’s a new form of bracing under the top of the soundboard, as well. A relative of Taylor’s groundbreaking V-Class bracing, the GTe boasts asymmetric C-Class, aimed at producing “more volume and longer sustain, while also bolstering the GT’s bass response to surprising levels of low-end power from a smaller guitar”.

It’s another very playable instrument and we would agree about the sustain and full bottom-end. The trebles are sweet,



5. Taylor’s GTe has a fingerboard made from eucalyptus, in line with the company’s ongoing ‘green’ philosophy

6. The rustic look of the wood grain on the fingerboard and headstock veneer suits the guitar’s ecologically minded aesthetic down to the ground

7. A more traditional Sitka spruce soundboard sits atop the GTe’s Urban Ash back and sides







8

with very good separation, the basses rich without being in any way overpowering. Both fingerstyle and strumming are well catered for, meaning that this is another all-rounder that will be a happy companion for virtually any stylistic persuasion you could name.

The GTe's acoustic voice is aided and abetted for the live stage by Taylor's renowned Expression System 2. Suddenly size doesn't matter and the sound from the guitar can get as big and boisterous as you want, while retaining its sonic integrity to the full. It's a serious instrument, to be sure.

### Verdict

Two very different instruments, each with a well-considered set of features and a sonic portfolio to match. The PRS parlour is amazingly priced, considering the build quality and general sound capabilities – and you have to consider the fact that the non-pickup version is even cheaper still. It represents very good value that would be equally at home as an erstwhile songwriting companion or performance ally.

Onto the Taylor and it is in line with the company's reputation for acoustic luxury, with a great build-quality and a seductive and sophisticated sound palette. It's a fun instrument with serious ambitions, as it could stand tall among the big hitters in the acoustic world, despite its diminutive appearance. And let's not forget those green credentials, as well.

Overall, a dynamic duo that were both very difficult for us to put down. **G**

8. Taylor's renowned Expression System 2, with its trio of subtle side-mounted controls, offers the prospect of great live sound



### PRS SE P20E

**PRICE:** £499 (inc gigbag)  
**ORIGIN:** China  
**TYPE:** Tonare parlour-sized electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Mahogany  
**BACK/SIDES:** Mahogany  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 98.4mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 355mm  
**NECK:** Mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 628mm (24.75")  
**TUNERS:** Vintage-style with butterbean buttons  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Ebony  
**FRETS:** 20  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Ebony/51mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Fishman GT1  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.76/3.9  
**OPTIONS:** The SE P20 without pickup costs £399 and both models are available in three colours: Black Top (as reviewed), Charcoal and Vintage Mahogany  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** PRS SE acoustic models have 3 basic body shapes: the Tonare Parlour (2 models), Tonare Grand (4 models) and Angelus Cutaway (5 models). See website for details  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Black Top (as reviewed), Charcoal, Vintage Mahogany – satin

**Guitarist CHOICE** 9/10

**PROS** A well-made, good-looking and great-sounding guitar at a bargain basement price

**CONS** Practically nothing for this very modest price



### TAYLOR GTE URBAN ASH

**PRICE:** £1,835 (inc AeroCase)  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Grand Theater sized electro-acoustic  
**TOP:** Sitka spruce  
**BACK/SIDES:** Urban Ash  
**MAX RIM DEPTH:** 108mm  
**MAX BODY WIDTH:** 380mm  
**NECK:** Tropical mahogany  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 638mm (25.1")  
**TUNERS:** Taylor nickel mini  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Graph Tech Tusq/44mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Eucalyptus  
**FRETS:** 20  
**BRIDGE/SPACING:** Eucalyptus/51mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Expression System 2  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 1.71/3.7  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The GT model without pickup costs £1,619  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** No  
**FINISH:** Natural Matte

8/10

**PROS** Sophisticated sounds from an ecological thoroughbred

**CONS** The price might put off those who want a smaller-bodied guitar for home-use only