

## **Simon interviewing Alice Verheij, guitar-maker**

Simon: And I'm here in Saint Gilles Vieux Marché with Alice Verheij. Welcome to Spotlight on Brittany.

Alice: Yeah, well thanks. Nice to be here.

Simon: And er you have an interesting er career and an interesting workshop that we're sitting in

Alice: Yep

Simon: You are a

Alice: Er, I'm a novelist but er I make guitars so I'm a luthier I guess.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: And I'm making music and playing guitar and recording that so and probably also recording artists maybe hopefully. In good time if I get the instrument and my fingers a little bit better

Simon: Yeah. So many strings to your bow, literally. I'm interested in all of that of course, but um the luthier part

Alice: Yeah

Simon: This is something you started quite recently I believe.

Alice: Yeah, Well I I I took up guitars about forty years ago, for a couple of years playing classical guitar and then I I got bored er with the way being taught and then life got in the way for for thirty five years doing all kinds of other stuff and having some disasters and then after recovering I thought oh what the hell I'll just buy a guitar and see what happens and and please do not take lessons and just try to invent how the thing works. And I got hooked.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: And so I bought second guitar, a third, and now I have over twenty. It's a a nice collection.

Simon: You have over twenty?

Alice: Yeah, over twenty. The walls left and right of you are packed with guitars and honestly it's getting worse. It's not not getting less, it's getting worse.

Simon: Right

Alice: No, I got caught by the instrument. And how did I get this collection? I started buying second hand guitars um and then fixing them up

Simon: Right.

Alice: And and after fixing them up I started repairing guitars

Simon: OK

Alice: And, well the next challenge after repairing guitars obviously is building your own guitar.

Simon: Obviously! Of course

Alice: Yeah. And I have some ideas about the acoustic guitars I want to build.

Simon: Yes

Alice: Er. I have um. It's not commercial, it's it's because I just want. I'm retired. I just want to do it.

Simon: Yeah. Yeah.

Alice: And um I'm quite handy so I want to know if I can actually get away building proper guitars. Not just a guitar but a proper guitar.

Simon: So, so OK I I get it when you buy a second hand guitar you think oh this needs some repair work, but where do you start? I mean, how did you how did you become capable and and qualified if you like, I mean I don't mean with the paperwork but just to learn to do those fiddly things that you need to do?

Alice: Well I had a technical education. So I'm er if it's about electronics I'm fine with that, that's no issue. If it was about the woodwork, that was part of my education

Simon: Right

Alice: Although it was many years ago, I still know that.

Simon: Right

Alice: And and then there are some really great books of er some luthiers, they're like really thick, heavy, large books.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Ah which explain all all the detail, all the tiny little things. And and to be honest if you cut up the whole process of building a guitar in all the many different tiny steps, then it is not difficult.

Simon: OK

Alice: The difficult part is to to glue that process properly together. To not become hasty in any way in the process but just do everything on its on its time, how it should be done.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: And do it do it properly and give proper attention to it. And if give proper attention to it and you're a little bit handy you can build a guitar.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: But you do have to know a lot of things.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: There's a lot of technical things

Simon: Yeah

Alice: About how the instrument works. For most people it's just a box with a couple of strings and a neck on it, and you can play on it. That's true.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: But a good guitar has has I think a novel thick of specifications of how the instrument is constructed.

Simon: Yeah



Alice: And that you need to know and and you need to follow. And if you follow it properly you can start thinking about how if I tweek it a little bit? Cos that's what every luthier does. So, you sort of think, OK, what if I do it like this? Maybe I can change a little bit? And. So there there's all these little things, And and then you start shifting and and you design something – OK that's feasible.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Then you go to a proper luthier

Simon: Yeah

Alice: And take a course for a couple of weeks, which is like er er a pressure cooker course

Simon: Right and you've done that

Alice: No. I'm I'm going Sunday and coming back in a fortnight

Simon: Right

Alice: With a guitar. I promise I come back with a guitar and it will sound nice.

Simon: Great

Alice: But. Er that's a pressure cooker and then you learn from someone

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Who's been in the trade for thirty five years

Simon: And that's amazing.

Alice: And you learn tips and tricks

Simon: Yeah, that's amazing

Alice: Um. Then you, from then on you can start to build your own way of working

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Er every luthier works differently



Simon: Yeah

Alice: You have your own tricks up your sleeve

Simon: And you told me you've already got your brand name for your guitars

Alice: Yeah, I got a brand name yeah.

Simon: Tell us what it is

Alice: Well I bought this house here, it's a lovely old house. And it has a sign at the front, it says Florette, which means little flower. Now my partner has a farm in Saint Martin. She's also Dutch, She's also a a a writer, a novelist just like me. And er her writing name is Floortje, which is Dutch for little flower.

Simon: Right

Alice: So my guitar brand name is Florette.

Simon: Florette

Alice: Florette is also, if you look at it differently, a kind of a symbol in sports

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Er. It has a couple of different meanings.

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Er, if if you manipulate the word a little bit, so it's a nice brand name

Simon: Yeah

Alice: So we're going to use that. And it it's and the flower is of course er yeah that that's what the guitar is

Simon: Yeah

Alice: You take that wood and you make it into a living creature

Simon: Well I'm really looking forward to seeing the first Florette guitar which comes off the bench

Alice: You definitely will, um,

Simon: Hopefully

Alice: Third week of

Simon: When do you think that will be when you think

Alice: Third week of October it will be there

Simon: Oh, you're going to make one

Alice: Yeah

Simon: Down in

Alice: In the fortnight

Simon: In the fortnight you can actually make the first guitar them

Alice: That's the pressure cooker so I'll probably be er er close to death after that! But I have built a guitar in two weeks.

Simon: Wow. So you build this guitar in two weeks and when do you think, I mean are you looking at, I know you said it's not commercial but you part of the joy I imagine of making a guitar is making it for people to go and play it.

Alice: Yep. Absolutely.

Simon: Other than yourself.

Alice: Absolutely.

Simon: So when do you anticipate you will be having people knocking on your door saying "please build me a guitar".

Alice: Er, depends if I get someone who wants to test out a guitar with me and and enjoy it. Um a couple of reviews throwing round. And. Well, the thing is, um I'm a lefty

Simon: Right

Alice: Um, so primarily I will build left hand guitars.



Simon: Right

Alice: Why? Because it's very difficult to left hand guitars and getting a left hand guitar from a luthier is almost impossible

Simon: Right. Well that's um, yeah.

Alice: So there there's a market for it, but I'm not focussing on on being a market or serving a market, but producing left hand acoustic guitars, classic and acoustic guitars is interesting for a lot of players

Simon: Yeah, yeah

Alice: So they will find me.

Simon: Right

Alice: Um. And of course there are some some great er er luthery how you call them, er they got special days on it and er all over France

Simon: Right

Alice: In different places

Simon: OK

Alice: And all luthiers come together and you show your instruments – and you get to know it. And um so so that's one. And the first two guitars are not for sale, they they're for for learning experiment. Third guitar is going to someone I know

Simon: Yeah

Alice: Looking at him – um and then I'll probably get a criticism back hopefully – er

Simon: Yes

Alice: To help me out, what's not OK on it

Simon: Yes, so we we might as well come clean. So you're going to build me a guitar

Alice: Yeah, I'm going to build you a guitar



Simon: Which of course is going to be fantastic for me because I've never had a guitar built specifically for me. So that's going to be really interesting. And er

Alice: I'm going to build something that that you you want. The thing is that that you give me the parameters

Simon: Yeah

Alice: What type of guitar you will you want to have

Simon: Yeah

Alice: And that's what I'm going to build. And then we'll see how it works. Does it actually er give a a result that's proper

Simon: Yeah

Alice: It will be built traditionally because I use traditional building techniques. So it will be OK but if it's OK or good?

Simon: Yes. Or excellent

Alice: And if it's not good, then what is not good on it? So

Simon: Yeah yeah yeah

Alice: I can learn and improve. That that's the idea.

Simon: That's fascinating. Alice, thank you very much for coming to Spotlight on Brittany

Alice: Yeah. Lovely.