



## Twelve-Fret Kings

### Recording King's RP1/RP2-626-C

**T**he Montgomery Ward Recording King guitars, produced from 1929 to '43, included iconic instruments such as the Ray Whitley advanced jumbo and the Regal Prince archtop. Today, the name lives on, ascribed to a series of flat-top import guitars designed in conjunction with fingerstyle guru Eric Schoenberg.

The 0-sized RP1-626-C and the 00-sized RP2-626-C are nearly identical 12-fret models that vary only in body dimensions. Their tops are Englemann spruce, a timber known to be relatively stiff, longitudinally, but fairly flexible side-to-side. This makes it an excellent choice for the narrow dimensions of these petite guitars. Sides, back, and neck are African mahogany, showing a pleasing ribbon figure. The straight-grained necks are quartersawn, with flecks running down the ridges of their vintage-carved V profiles.

The fingerboard scale length is 25.4", with a 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" nut. The RP2 body measures 19<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" long and 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" wide, and is 4" deep at the end block. Its smaller partner is 19<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" long, a lucky 13<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" wide, and a touch deeper at 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>". The tops are domed – a popular builder's strategy.

Both employ familiar vintage styling; each has a pyramid bridge, neck volute, ivoroid heelcap, and binding with multi layers of black and white purfling, nitrocellulose lacquer, "zipper" back strip, and diamond/square abalone fingerboard inlays. The headstock is Martin-inspired, with "Recording King" rendered in gold lettering. Each is finished with a light tint except for the top.

By virtue of design and craftsmanship, both smack of vintage goodness, certainly more than worthy of the venerable Recording King name. A look inside shows a level of care superior to the affordable '30s, "Monkey Ward" catalog guitars; Recording King and its

crafts people get props for clean, detailed work.

Both were set for easy fingerstyle playing, but not so forgiving that flatpicking wasn't satisfying, as well. Intonation was good, thanks to finesse in assembly and installation of the intonated bone saddles. String slotting at the tapered bone nuts was accurate, making the most of its wide dimensions. The small frets were dressed with care. The playing experience and setup are enhanced by an adjustable truss rod and the Grover tuning machines.

Strung with D'Addario J16 phosphor bronze strings, the RP1 and RP2 were easy to negotiate into slurs, hammer-ons, and other manipulations of the fingerstyle that Schoenberg popularized with his ragtime and pop ventures from the '60s onward.

Sonically, each model's voice blossomed during the test period, day by day. Each had a predominantly midrange, throaty sound. The larger RP2 had a bit greater bass presence, but each produced a surprising degree of tuneful volume despite their diminutive dimensions. The warmth of mahogany is a part of the sound, and even upper register single-string notes are fat and present; chords and arpeggios combining open

and fretted strings may lack the shimmer of bigger-bodied models, but are marked by a balanced clarity that promises to amplify and record well.

One hundred years ago, so-called parlor guitars in these sizes were the norm. Early jazzers, for instance, didn't have big archtop L-5s, New Yorkers, or Emperors, and large, 14-fret flat-tops didn't evolve until the '30s. But the cutaway on these 12-fret Recording Kings eliminates one of the big disadvantages of this design, rendering the high end of the fingerboard usable for the modern player.

The Recording King RP1-626-C and RP2-626-C won't be confused with the Schoenberg guitars built in recent years by makers like Dana Bourgeois and Bruce Sexauer. But they represent a stellar value. And with their timbers, finish, and distinctive vibe, they can only improve with use by eager guitarists putting in the time to make them as great as John Fahey's rebuilt Ray Whitley Recording King. – **Chip Wilson VG**

#### RECORDING KING'S RP1-626-C/RP2-626-C

Price: \$999 (each, street)

Contact: [recordingking.com](http://recordingking.com).

