

# Andy Taylor

Born c.1965. Trumpet maker.

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# 1. Introduction

*The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the Norfolk Magazine at [www.greatbritishlife.co.uk](http://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk). The article was written by Rowan Mantell, and was published in August 2020.*



*Andy Taylor hand makes trumpets for musicians all over the world - Credit: Archant.*

When you hear the music of Muse, Radiohead or Jools Holland’s Rhythm and Blues Orchestra you are likely to be listening to a trumpet made in Norwich.

Andy Taylor’s instruments are bought by musicians around the globe and his creations are played by festival headliners, chart toppers - and even for royal fanfares. Andy has been making trumpets (and flugelhorns and cornets) in a unit on the Sweetbriar Industrial estate for 30 years. They have their own tone. Andy describes it as ‘Phatter, warmer, darker, browner,’ calling the sound of traditional trumpets more shiny and brittle.

And they have their own look. Andy has spent years honing designs which not only work musically, but also look fantastic. As a biker he uses biking imagery to describe them. “We make the glossy, glitzy, flamboyant, expressive instruments. The Harley Davidsons. The best looking bikes have these sexy curves.”

Many of his custom-made trumpets are finished by motorbike artist Ty Lawer of Pageant Paintwork in Snetterton. One is a masterpiece of Americana featuring the Stars and Stripes, the Statue of Liberty, a Native North American, an eagle and the New York skyline. Andy’s biggest market has always been America but he sends his instruments all over the world.

The bends in the bell (the tube that makes up the body of the instrument) are also works of art, sometimes sinuous curves, sometimes sharply angled, but always perfectly finished so that seams are imperceptible and metals and colours flow.



But Andy is not really one to blow his own trumpet. His instruments are world famous, but made in a workshop tucked away in an almost-anonymous unit. His customers come to him by word of mouth – and although he is a musician himself, and played trumpet and saxophone at school, they are no longer his forte. He will demonstrate to people who might have travelled thousands of miles to find him but is a rock'n' roll guitarist at heart.



When he left school, with a passion for music, art and making things, there was a job going in a French horn factory. And so he learned how to hand-make French horns. After 15 years he moved to Norwich and set up on his own at first making brass instrument components, but soon designing and

making entire instruments. For the first few months he supported himself as a holiday camp session musician, until the trumpets he was creating began making a bit of noise internationally.



They are designed to create a stir. Rarely played by orchestral musicians because orchestras demand uniformity, they are beloved of jazz musicians. “If you hear Jools Holland, the trumpet section are playing them. If you hear Muse, Radiohead, the Hoosiers, the session guys backing them are playing my trumpets,” said Andy. They are also bought by collectors and feature in museums. Many days of labour go into each one. Standard Andy Taylor instruments cost £3-4,000; more for the spectacular customised and specially built versions.

In a gloriously packed workshop Andy and his two expert members of staff work by hand, transforming sheets of brass, bronze, copper and nickel into works of art. They measure with rulers, cut, bend, weld and polish by hand, with the help of basic tools rather than computers. It means that every instrument is obviously, to those in the know, an Andy Taylor, but also unique.

They make 80-90 trumpets a year, plus flugelhorns (which produce a mellow sound between that of a trumpet and French horn) and some cornets. Andy is also constantly experimenting and it is the tweaks and flourishes, and entire new designs which emerge, that he loves creating.



“I like to think they are works of art, or even a flash piece of sculpture” said Andy. “I’m successful enough to give me the scope to have enough time to make what I want to make and then worry about selling it later.”



The sound always comes first, developed over Andy’s decades as a maker and musician, building on his natural gift for acoustics, with skills honed by world-class training, and his own feel for how each instrument should sound and how to make that happen. If he hears a trumpet played, he can usually tell whether it’s one of his. “There is a certain fluidity about them,” he said. And if turns out not to be a Taylor then he knows that it’s the kind of player who would probably love one because they are playing with the insouciant style which cries out for stand-out design.

They are beautiful from the flare, and flair, of the bell to the striking bends, those imperceptible seams and a gleaming finish as polished, precise and perfect as a piece of jewellery. Andy has made a trumpet which might almost have been carved from green-black marble, and show-offs flashy with glowing patina, glittering metal, rose-gold lacquer, or valves capped in sparkly blue or mother-of-pearl.

He names his instruments Piranha (his best-selling) or Chicago, Zeus, Orpheus or Terminator. Other customised trumpets and flugelhorns are inspired by Chrysler, Lamborghini, Batman... One remarkable horn was inspired by the iconic Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club cover. Artwork can be painted or engraved and colours range from, well brass, to the shocking pink, with added bling, trumpet that Andy created for American trumpet star Cindy Bradley. He has even made his own new instrument which he calls a Phat Puppy. Like every Andy Taylor it is a joy to look at, sinuous, sleek, glossy and based on his Phat Boy flugelhorn but smaller, travel-sized and utterly gorgeous.

He also makes components as collaborations with other instrument makers, including supplying the bells for all the trumpets used to play fanfares for the Queen at official ceremonies.

In a corner of the workshop a bike is under construction. Andy is customising it for himself. And padding bear-like between the benches is chow chow Jacks – a rescue dog with liquid brown eyes as perfect as the sound and finish of Andy’s trumpets. Andy’s livelier and noisier Jack Russell is back home in Cromer today but is usually part of the workshop team too.

Here metal and craft, natural talent and painstaking attention to detail have created instruments renowned worldwide for their signature sound and bold design - and heard by millions who might not have heard of Andy Taylor but have definitely heard an Andy Taylor trumpet.

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## 2. Transatlantic Visitors

*The following chapters describe a visit to Andy Taylor's trumpet workshop in Norwich by a team from the National Music Museum at the University of Kentucky. They were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the museum's website at [www.collections.nmmusd.org](http://www.collections.nmmusd.org). The museum contains the Utley Collection of more than 600 brass instruments. The account of the visit was written by Sabine K.Klaus, the Joe R. and Joella F. Utley Curator of Brass Instruments at the museum.*

The most striking trumpets in the Utley Collection were created by the British trumpet maker Andy Taylor in Norwich (Norfolk), U.K. No tour group, when visiting the Utley Collection, has ever failed to ask questions about these unusual-looking instruments.

It was, therefore, a very welcome opportunity on October 18, 2010, to visit Andy's workshop in an industrial estate on the outskirts of the English cathedral town of Norwich to interview the maker personally. Taylor generously gave of his time and provided fascinating insight into his work.

*Right: Andy Taylor's trumpets on display in the Utley home in South Carolina.*



### 3. It all began with French Horns



*A Paxman French horn.*

Andy Taylor did not train as a trumpet maker, but rather, as a French-horn maker, with the renowned London firm of Paxman, where he landed a job right after school and spent the next fifteen years of his working life. “I was the last of an old line of apprentices who worked with their boss.” It was old-school, hands-on training, and after specializing as a bell maker, Andy ran the bell department for a couple of years.

Later he ran the whole workshop and had to learn all the other jobs as well. In the 1980s, Paxman was still making everything in-house, including the valve sections. This gave Andy ample opportunity to learn most aspects of horn making from scratch. He also worked in the repair department, where damage that may have occurred during the manufacturing process was mended: “My repair background is from repairing for new, not repairing used instruments.”

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## 4. Setting up Shop as a Trumpet Maker



*Andy Taylor in his store room holding a trumpet with square tubing.*

After leaving Paxman and relocating to Norwich in 1990, where his wife held a job as a micro-biologist, Andy took a completely new path, making trumpets rather than horns. “I think my strength was that I was never ever taught to make trumpets. So I had to make up my own mind, what I would put into a trumpet.”

His French-horn background led to a new concept for trumpet design: “My background in French horns was more about creating that warmer, softer, broader tone.” This timbre appealed to certain customers, particularly in the U.S., where David Monette of Chicago had been re-designing the trumpet in a much heavier style. Andy’s instruments looked like normal trumpets at first, but they had a sound that interested players who liked the warmer tone, but could not afford these top-of-the-price-range instruments. To satisfy this market, Andy created imaginative-looking trumpets that would not only sound different, but also look different, and which were more affordable.

## 5. Joe Utley Discovers Andy Taylor

*Joe Utley was an American doctor who collected more than 600 brass instruments. His collection is now held in the National Music Museum at the University of South Dakota. He is shown with his wife Joella on the right.*

Utley was among the first U.S. customers who were immediately drawn to Andy's unusual-looking instruments.

Consequently, most of the Taylor trumpets in the Utley Collection are also the first of their kind. When shown pictures of these early trumpets with their imaginative names, Andy started to reminisce:

The *Custom Shop 'Uncle Sam'* (NMM 7147) was "the first one to combine my love for cars and bikes (meaning motor bikes) with instruments." For this first custom-made trumpet, Joe requested a patriotic theme. Andy responded by making a trumpet with stars and stripes created with a motorcycle-paint finish, featuring an American eagle inside the bell.



*The Custom Shop Uncle Sam trumpet (NMM 7147) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1996, with stars-and-stripes finish and an American eagle inside the bell.*

The more traditional-looking *Retro 'Renaissance' Custom Shop* trumpet (NMM 7224) was the first of the *Heritage* series, in which vintage looks of the 1920s through 1960s are combined with modern trumpet design that makes the instruments sound louder than the old ones on which they are based. This series includes reconstructions of *Selmer Balanced Action* trumpets (the type Louis Armstrong played) and *Martin Committees*, a favorite of jazz musicians. The trumpet, NMM 7224, is decorated with arched braces and abalone pearls; the fingerbuttons are made from British five-pence coins, revealing Andy's keen sense of humor.



*The Retro 'Renaissance' Custom Shop trumpet (NMM 7224) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1995, with a vintage look and decorative features such as arched braces with abalone pearls. British five-pence coins form the fingerbuttons.*

The *Blues Boy* trumpet (NMM 7225), exhibited at the International Trumpet Guild Convention in Long Beach, California, in 1996, has a bluish, translucent nickel plating that gives it a lovely sheen. This trumpet has a strikingly wide bell throat, the dimensions for which, Andy explains, were inspired by David Monette's flumpet (a cross between a flugelhorn and a trumpet). Not only is the bell throat wider, but also the overall proportion of conical tubing is greater than in a normal trumpet, resulting in a darker, warmer sound. Later,



Andy developed this type into the *Phat Boy* series. This series “is just a big, phat, huge, thick sounding trumpet,” and Andy proudly reports that he has made an instrument of this type for Gregory Davis, Miles Davis’s son. “He wanted what his dad would have bought now, and that also pays homage to his father.”



*The Blues Boy trumpet (NMM 7225) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1995, has a wide bell throat, a design that later led to the Phat Boy series.*

When the heavy-style trumpets first emerged, there was a joke going around that they looked like a lump of concrete or a slab of brick. So, Andy decided to take this joke literally and made the *Fred Flintstone Custom Shop “Rock’n Roll Artform”* trumpet (NMM 7252) to look just like a slab of concrete. But when it was finished, it looked grey and boring. “What do people do with concrete? They graffiti it; so I applied the graffiti straight away.”

Another inspiration for the heavy granite-like coating was the pseudo stone-age technology in the animated TV series *The Flintstones*, popular in the 1960s, which gave this trumpet its name. When asked whether he uses any designers to make such extravagant instruments,

Andy replies: “This kind of stuff is all me, totally me. I need artistic control. I make most of the special ones, it stops me from getting bored with making ordinary ones!”





*The Fred Flintstone Custom Shop “Rock’n Roll Artform” trumpet (NMM 7252) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1997, with graffitied concrete-imitation exterior.*

Andy Taylor’s instruments fit right into Joe and Joella Utley’s ideas about collecting trumpets as works of art. In 1998, Joe commissioned a special instrument as a focal piece for his collection: the *Utley Collection Custom Shop* trumpet (NMM 7316). In his correspondence with Joe, Andy confessed that “this is the most involved and difficult horn I have ever made.” Once again, he was inspired by car and motorcycle designs: “I am constantly looking at car development and bikes. The best looking bikes have these sexy curves.” This trumpet was very complex to build: the filled-in bows had to be made with double-skinned metal and it was tricky to join the straight and the curved tubing.

For the decoration of this artistic trumpet, Andy drew on the experience of a specialist, the motorcycle-painter Ty Lawler, the owner of ‘Pageant Paintwork’ in Norfolk. For Ty the challenge was to paint an object which is to be seen close up, not at some distance as are motorcycles; that meant greater attention to detail. The larger than normal bell provided more surface area for the art work, but also helped create a bigger sound.

To the question, “what kind of customers order such instruments,” Andy replies, “people who are quite happy to show off, or who want a centrepiece for their collection,” like Joe. It was this very instrument “that inspired me to push it further,” eventually leading to designs which contradicted common wisdom about trumpet design, such as the Vulcan series with corners in the tubing. “When I design anything, I want to get away from two straight lines and a semicircle at each end.”

When asked whether he does any acoustical testing, Andy paused for a moment and looked at me, saying “What?—Ears, that’s all we use. The guy who gets re-booked is the guy who sounds good. That’s what my instruments are based around—sound. The other stuff is secondary.”



*The Utley Collection Custom Shop trumpet (NMM 7316) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1998, was a special commission to celebrate the Utley Collection.*

“When this [the *Utley Collection Custom Shop*] trumpet arrived, Joe was over the moon with it,” Andy remembers. “So I asked him on the phone” (their main means of communicating), “where do we go from here?” And in his humorous way, Andy suggested: “You know, there are these Fabergé eggs . . . .” There was a silence on the other end of the phone, after which Joe answered: “If you make it, I’ll buy it.”

This is the origin of the Taylor “*Fabergé*” trumpet (NMM 7317), basically a standard model trumpet that is decorated with numerous colored glass beads of various sizes. “I spent fifteen hours decorating this. One problem was the circles of the gemstones didn’t interlay with each other, because of the bell curves. It opened up how hard it is to do this decoration on an egg.”

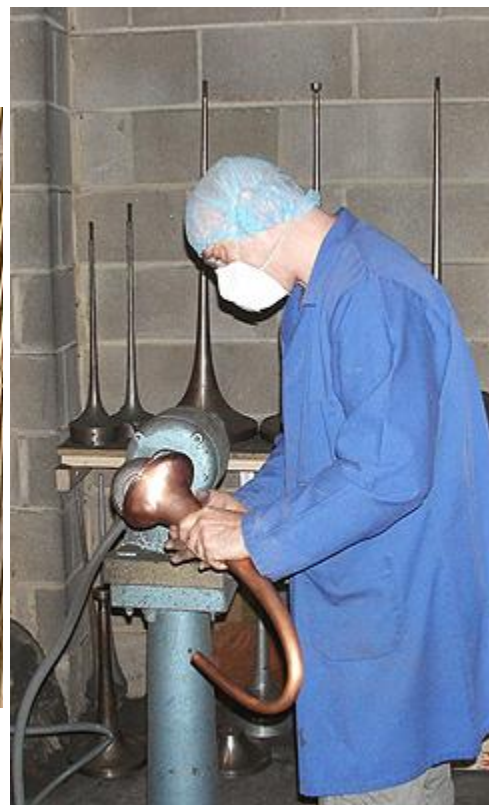
Below: The *Fabergé London Model* trumpet (NMM 7317) by Andy Taylor, Norwich, 1998. The bell is decorated with numerous colored glass stones of various sizes.



## 6. The Taylor Trumpet Workshop Today

Today, the U.S. remains the biggest single country of export for Taylor Trumpets. After working alone for the first couple of years, Andy has now expanded to a company with five employees. The mixed group of workmen have previous experiences working as a chef, fisherman, and hobby cabinet maker with a degree in politics (“we try to stay away from deep political discussions with him”) and includes an old-school engineer who is experienced in lathe work, machine work, and even cuts threads by hand. “We don’t use computers to make any of this.”

Indeed, when entering the workshop, the traditional manner in which these futuristic-looking trumpets are made is striking. One worker forms a bell over a mandrel and a blow torch lies ready for action on a huge hearth. In a corner next to an ultra-modern looking, half-finished flugelhorn is a stack of unfinished bell parts, some of which are lopsided and not yet formed out into a cone. The conical section of the bell is made with the traditional tab seam, while the flaring part is spun and then soldered to the cone, Andy explains.



*Above, left: Unfinished bell sections, those on the right showing the characteristically lopsided shape before being formed into a cone. On the far right are brass rods and tubes. On the wall hang wooden moulds for bending the bows; they have unusual contours and reveal that unconventional instruments are made in this workshop.*

*Above, right: The buffing of a flugelhorn bell. In the background and on the floor are bell mandrels of various shapes and sizes over which the bells are formed.*





*Above, left: Bells and tubing in various stages of completion (the ketchup is not used in trumpet making, it's left over from lunch).*

*Above, right: The conical section of the bell is formed with a tab seam, a technique that has been in use in trumpet making for over three thousand years.*

For all these parts Taylor uses the traditional 70/30 brass (70% copper, 30% zinc) with some additives to make cutting easier. “Material and material changes have been an issue over the years,” Andy reports. The mills have cut down on the size options, and it becomes increasingly difficult to order sheet brass in small quantities.

The brass that is now available is harder than it used to be and therefore has to be softened in the Taylor workshop; in addition, the alloy mix is not as consistent as it once was. The European health and safety regulations also add to the growing difficulties in obtaining materials needed for trumpet making, such as lead solder. “The lead stuff just runs, it cuts better, it is easier to clean up,” Andy says enthusiastically, “but now we have to be very careful about lead content.”

Three different joining methods are used: brazing, silver solder and soft solder. The pitch needed for filling the bows during the bending process is also problematic as it can be dangerous. “All this added safety legislation means the manufacturers have to spend more to meet the new standards of the European Union.”

The only part that is made completely differently from the old methods is the mouthpipe or leadpipe. “The pipes for our own instruments are special.” Andy pulls out a drawer with a whole array of pipes. “This is one piece of brass, machined with great big reamers.” The workpiece starts with a solid rod which is then hollowed out with a series of drills. At the end “you run a reamer to take all the edges away and make it smooth

inside.” While in traditional seamed tubing each tube is slightly different, in these machined pipes, everyone should come out the same and the outside and inside tapers are both very controllable. A pipe manufactured that way can also be a lot thicker than a tube would be and is ‘almost’ undentable.

Everything is made in-house, except the valve section. “What we have is the best of CNC [Computer Numerical Controlled] engineering in the middle and British flair and craftsmanship on the rest of it. It is important to get the best valves we can as this is the real heart of the instrument, the part you actually hold in your hand.” The valves are the only part on a Taylor trumpet that is made with computer assistance, because accuracy is of the essence. Valves are like a car engine—it has to be precision work—and that’s where the machines come in, Andy explains.

Sixty to seventy percent of the work in the Taylor workshop goes into creating their own instruments, while thirty to forty percent consists of making parts for other people. This includes the making of speciality bells on a small scale. A custom-made trumpet is created in eight to ten weeks. Most of our customers are what Andy calls “commercial players,” jazz, pop, and big band players. “Classical players don’t always come out to us as a first choice, only after they have had a chance to play a Taylor instrument do they realize we make a full range of trumpets, not just commercially biased ones. In the classical world there is much more resistance to change!”

When leaving Andy Taylor's workshop, which is guarded by a huge, but cuddly dog in a comfortable bed right by the front door, it feels as if one has stepped back two-hundred years for a few hours, into a time when trumpets were hand-crafted instead of mass-produced by computers in factories. But at the same time, it feels like having seen a glimpse of a future when old wisdom will be thrown overboard and the trumpet will be a different instrument. It certainly increased tremendously my understanding and appreciation of the eye-catching trumpets by Andy Taylor in the Utley Collection.

*Photos by Mark Olencki and Malcolm Rose.*

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