

Made in Japan /// Silent Guitar

STYLING: KATSUYA KUBOKAWA | THE "SILENT" SERIES AND "SILENT GUITAR" ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF YAMAHA CORPORATION

WORDS NAOMI POLLOCK
PHOTO KAZUHIRO OKUMURA

A "silent guitar" sounds like it would defeat its own purpose. But the one developed by the musical instrument experts at Yamaha does just the opposite. This revolutionary device makes it possible to play anywhere, anytime and without disturbing anyone. In Japan, where rooms are small and walls thin, these qualities are right at home.

Intended to replicate the sound and feel of a genuine guitar, Yamaha's silent version has a wooden fingerboard, nylon strings and a classic figure-eight profile defined by a smoothly curved wood body frame. As with any other guitar, playing this instrument entails strumming or plucking its strings. But the hollowed wooden sound box that forms the body of conventional acoustic guitars has vanished quite literally into thin air. Instead, an electronic pickup system affixed behind the bridge turns the strings' vibrations into audible sound. And by attaching this device to an amplifier and headphones, the musician can crank up the volume to his or her heart's content. Yet because the Silent Guitar is not electricity dependent, it can generate a quiet sound even unplugged.

The guitar, which debuted in 2001, is just one of the many silent instruments developed by Yamaha. Launched in the 1990s, the first endeavor was a piano, and the company has since created drums, basses and violins.

Instead of starting from scratch, the instrument's designers began by examining a regular guitar and removing its unnecessary elements. They then added new components to achieve the desired function and feel, such as the wooden rest that allows the guitar to sit comfortably on the musician's leg. Composed of lightweight, detachable parts, the Silent Guitar is as easy to stow away as it is to pick up and go.

Tokyo-based American architect Naomi Pollock writes on *Japanese design for the Financial Times*, *Wallpaper and Architectural Record*. Her books include *Modern Japanese House and Made in Japan: 100 New Products*