

## Herb Trotman, Fretted Instruments

If you lived in Birmingham in the early 1970s, you knew Fretted Instruments when it was located near Demetri's BBQ and the Upside Down Shoe Repair shop. Homewood must have some kind of lure for musicians, because like Bob Tedrow, Herb Trotman's store is situated in this part of Birmingham for good.

Herb grew up in Fairfield. "My father was a square dance caller, so I've heard music all my life," he muses. "There was music played in my home all the time as a child. My grandmother played the piano, and I play two instruments—the guitar and the banjo.

"I sort of learned music along the way. My first instrument was the ukulele, but I wanted to play banjo. So I spent time hanging out with people that played it. There weren't really any teachers at the time, so I just went around and found people," he says. "It was a small community back then. My father worked at U.S. Steel in the daytime and would call square dances at night."

Fretted Instruments moved to a house on Linden Avenue in 1976, and since those days, Herb's business has morphed into a menagerie of music lessons, informal jam sessions, guitar repairs and impromptu Friday-afternoon gatherings at the store. Many

people in town know and adore Herb. They remember his dog Sugar fondly, and enjoy the Herb Trotman Band live at Otey's and Java Jams.

"I have said before that running this business is like steering a big ship without a rudder—it runs itself and goes where it wants," Herb says. "The place is

sort of like a Mayberry barbershop... people come by and sit and visit. People don't come just to buy stuff. We have a couch in here, and the couch serves as a center for people to come drink coffee and talk."

The strong sense of community encourages the store's customer allegiance. Friday afternoons, Herb and his associates cater in cake to share with whomever happens to drop by. On Fourth of July, friends gather at Fretted to watch fireworks, and for Christmas Herb and his musical friends produce a miscellaneous Christmas CD that they simply give away.

Stop by for cake, a guitar or banjo lesson (\$25/half hour) or to just lounge on Herb's couch. It's a plush and comfy cornerstone of Birmingham. ◉

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OPPOSITE: Herb Trotman enjoys the social aspects of his store almost as much as he does the musical instruments. Christmas and Fourth of July are great times to stop in the store, and every Friday visitors are treated to cake.

