

The Italian job

A tour of North America includes a stop in Langley for the maker of some of the world's finest pianos

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Times Reporter

The moment Paolo Fazioli steps through the door of the north Langley home, he identifies the gleaming black instrument at the centre of the room.

Shortly before Christmas, the renowned Italian piano maker had given his personal stamp of approval on the grand piano which the Langley family (who asked not to be named) took delivery of, last Saturday.

"This is our most current instrument," says Fazioli, stepping across the room to take a closer look at his \$167,000 creation before sitting down to play, and later, autograph it.

For a few minutes he is immersed in the music of Chopin, while conversations carry on around him, praising the instrument's beauty and the fullness of the tones produced by its spruce soundboards — wood harvested from the same forest Antonio Stradivari used for his famous violins.

Even after its overseas flight, the piano remains perfectly tuned, just as it was at the factory in late December, Fazioli reports.

No instrument leaves the factory in northern Italy without first being inspected by the company's founder and owner.

In fact, the 66-year-old oversees every aspect of each hand-built piano's production.

It's not as time-consuming as it sounds, since only about 100 Fazioli pianos are completed each year.

This fall, the company will celebrate the 30th anniversary of its first sale, as well as the completion of its 2,000th instrument.

What began in a furniture factory in Sacile, (60 kms north of Venice) with three craftsmen and an idea to build the ideal piano that would allow each musician to shine, has expanded to encompass

40 employees completing eight to 10 pianos per month, each one taking three full years to craft.

"We want to achieve the best sound, the most beautiful sound we can give to a pianist to make it possible for them to express themselves the best," says Fazioli.

Thirty years later, they are closer to that goal, but it will always be just out of reach, he says.

"Every result we reach is a good one, but it is not the best. It will never be the best."

His background as both a pianist and an engineer, combined with the fact his family was already in the furniture business created the ideal set of circumstances for Fazioli to take that dream and run with it.

For a man his mid-30s, it was a huge risk, he acknowledges.

"When you are young, if you believe you can do this, you can."

Traveling with Fazioli on this trip is his own 22-year-old son, Luca, who is learning more about the business he will one day run, while on a break from his university studies.

The men flew from Los Angeles to Vancouver, where on Monday morning, Fazioli dedicated both a \$225,000 white piano, and a hotel suite named in his honour, at the Fairmont Pacific Rim hotel, before making the drive to Langley.

Joining them is Manuel Bernaschek, owner of Showcase Pianos. The Vancouver dealer opened his doors in 2007, hoping to sell two or three Fazioli pianos each year; instead, he's managed to sell 30 in three years.

"I compare it to watches," says Bernaschek, explaining how he describes the instruments' quality.

"Eighty per cent of people will say the best is a Rolex, but many people know there are other brands that are much, much finer.

"I say (Fazioli) is the Patek Philippe of the piano world."

If cost is a factor, you might want to look elsewhere.

"The specific characteristic of these pianos is they're hand made with the best materials," says Fazioli.

"What is important to reach is the best result. We don't see the cost — it is what it will be.

"It's important to reach the best quality and the price of the piano is the consequence of that."



John GORDON/Langley Times

Renowned Italian piano maker, Paolo Fazioli, was in Langley on Monday to dedicate one of his creations. After he spent a few minutes on the instrument, Fazioli was replaced on the the bench by Russian pianist, 18-year-old Evgenia Rabinovich. For video of her performance, go to www.langleytimes.com.

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