

## Nomadic maker Fridolin Rusch reveals the importance of his decorative lights and his stash of herbal tea



PHOTOS: LYN TAYLOR

**Fridolin Rusch makes full- and fractional-size instruments and is based in Memmingen, Germany**

### I AM SOMETHING OF A NOMAD AMONG

violin makers, having had many different workshops over the years: this is the third since I've been based in Memmingen.

When I was doing my apprenticeship, my dream for my first workshop was of a kind of travelling circus full of tools and wood.

That never became reality, but I have maintained some of the spirit of the fantasy by not staying in one place for too long. One benefit of moving around has been that I have picked up useful

items along the way. The small workbench in the foreground of the picture used to be a dentist's chair. I inherited it from the previous owner of one of my old workshops, and decided to transform it into something I could use. Its height is adjustable so I can sit or stand to work at it, and it's small enough to enable me to walk all the way round it.

I usually sit at the seat on the left, and my colleague Carolina sits at the desk to my right. About a quarter of our business consists of making fractional-size instruments: the cello that's on my workbench at the moment is a half-size instrument that has just come back from the boy who was playing it, as he now needs a larger one.

The workbench in the middle of the room is where we do our planing. I sometimes make my own planes because often the exact size that I need is not available to buy. You won't see many tools lying around my workshop, though, because I like to put everything away in the many drawers around the room.

The little round lights hanging up beside the middle window look decorative, but they perform an important function. They serve

as a reminder of whether I have switched off everything that could start a fire in the workshop overnight. This is particularly important now that I live some distance from my workplace. An electrician put these lights on the same electrical circuit as all the main currents in the workshop, so if they are still on, it tells me that I need to switch that circuit off.

The cabinet at the back of the room was one of the pieces of furniture that my father, Franz Rusch, had made for his first lutherie workshop in the 1920s. On its shelves are my brushes and some spirits and oil of turpentine. On the window sill beside it is a large thermos flask containing herbal tea. In winter I prepare several litres every morning. I think it's important to stay hydrated while you're working.

On the right-hand side at the back is our glue space. There's a pot of glue on the edge of the desk, and a sink at the other end. Between this desk and the shelves is a door that leads to my other three rooms.

One of these is for working with ebony; the second contains some band-saws, a drilling stand and my store of wood for the next six months; and the last is my office, with computer equipment, a display cabinet of my instruments and space for customers to try them out. Despite having a lot of rooms to work in, I do my varnishing at home, partly because it's less dusty but also because it's easier to concentrate. In the workshop, if I know I have to add another layer of varnish to a violin in an hour's time, it can be difficult to focus on another task in the meantime – so I take white instruments home with me. This works quite well: I hardly notice I'm working, but I can varnish several instruments in a weekend.

**Interview by Catherine Payne**

**NEXT MONTH >> Sharon Que in Ann Arbor, Michigan, US**

