

BARRON'S

PENTA

OWN

20 Minutes With: Steinway & Sons CEO Ben Steiner

By Emma Reynolds Updated Jan. 3, 2022 12:35 pm ET



In September 2021, Ben Steiner became the CEO of Steinway & Sons after five years of working with the company.
Photo by Chris Lee



SHAMIN ABAS
COMMUNICATIONS FOR ULTRA-LUXURY BRANDS

In 1850, Steinway & Sons founder Henry E. Steinway immigrated to America from Germany with his wife and nine children in pursuit of perfecting the art of piano building. Three years later, Steinway & Sons was born in New York City.

The company has been manufacturing its pianos in the same factory in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens since 1870 (the company also has a second factory in Hamburg, Germany). Steinway pianos are still handcrafted by more than 200 artisans and made using more than 12,000 individual parts.

The pianos take a year to produce and are crafted with high quality and sustainably sourced materials, including spruce from Alaska. The award-winning company is known for its distinctive sound, which is why concert pianists gravitate toward Steinway pianos.

Despite Steinway's long history, the brand takes pride in innovation. The company has more than 130 patents for its innovative techniques. Over the years, Steinway & Sons has partnered with famous musicians and has even released special collaborations, including the Lenny Kravitz and Lang Lang pianos.

In September 2021, Ben Steiner became the CEO of Steinway & Sons after five years of working with the company. He recently spoke to *Penta* on the history of Steinway and the future of the company.



PENTA: What does Steinway mean to you?

Ben Steiner. I have been at Steinway for five years, working as the COO/CFO, and recently being promoted to CEO. However, before joining Steinway, I worked at Paulson & Co. (Steinway's parent company) and was intimately involved in the acquisition of the company in 2013. More importantly, I've known about Steinway since childhood and have always appreciated the company's history and commitment to quality above all else.

How are you moving the brand forward while celebrating Steinway's heritage?

One of the largest parts of our heritage has been a commitment to continuous innovation in ways large and small. The best Steinways we've ever produced are always the ones we're building today. Additionally, we have taken a huge leap into the technological world with the launch of SPIRIO, the world's finest high-resolution player piano. It's still a fully playable, acoustic Steinway, but with the touch of an iPad, you have access to thousands of performances by great pianists across all genres of music.





Steinway & Sons has been manufacturing their pianos in the same factory in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens since 1870.
Steinway & Sons

What might people not know about Steinway?

Being located at the Steinway Astoria Factory, I get to see the production process firsthand. One of the things that initially surprised me that I think most people don't realize is the degree of technology that is part of the manufacturing process. Certain parts of the process are still very old school, with a craftsman chiseling wood, but many parts of the process utilize some very cutting-edge technology. The thing with Steinway is that technology is absolutely incorporated where it makes sense, but never in situations where it could adversely impact the musicality of the instrument.



What sets Steinway apart from other pianos?

If you ask a pianist, you could get many different answers to this question. But from my perspective, it comes back to the continuous improvement of the product and the innovation. Steinway is generally credited with inventing “the modern grand piano” in a three-decade period beginning with our founding in 1853. But it’s important to note that we never stopped innovating. If you think you have something perfected and all you have to do is to repeat the same process, eventually others will figure out what you’re doing and achieve the same (or better) results.

What are some of Steinway’s values, and how does this tie into how the company chooses its collaborations?

Because we are an innovative company, we often look for collaborations with others that innovate and have a creative spark. A good example of a recent collaboration is the Kravitz Grand that we did with Lenny Kravitz. Lenny is obviously an innovative musician, but we chose to work with him on this project because he’s also a very innovative designer.

How is Steinway committed to sustainability?

Steinway & Sons prioritizes suppliers and manufacturing processes which conserve energy and natural resources and that minimize negative impacts on the environment. We are a benefactor to the Hardwood Forestry Fund, whose purpose is to promote hardwood timber growth, management, education, and environmentally sound uses of our forest resources. We source our birch, hard maple, and yellow poplar from trusted FSC-Certified lumber suppliers.



Working with responsibly managed forests, our suppliers procure the special wood grades of mature timber that are required to build each piano in the Steinway & Sons fleet. These trees are harvested when they reach 80 to 100-plus years of age, leaving space and light for younger trees to grow in their place.

What does luxury mean to you?

For me, the core of Steinway isn't a commitment to "luxury" per se but instead a commitment to producing the ideal, perfect piano. Fundamentally, we aim to produce the very finest instruments which allow the world's finest musicians to produce music as close to perfect as is humanly possible.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

