

Lifestyle



French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz poses for a portrait with her "Mycocaster," a mycelium and paper guitar in her studio.



French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz holds a sample made of mycelium in her studio.



The "Mycocaster," a mycelium and paper guitar is seen in French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz's studio.



French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz holds her "Pawtuxet," a guitar made using honeycomb in her studio.



A bag of mycelium and cornhusks used to mold a guitar body sits in French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz's studio.

MEET THE FRENCH LUTHIER MAKING MUSIC OUT OF MUSHROOMS

Leave mushroom spores in a mold for a couple weeks and they'll bloom into a puffy material akin to brie, says Rachel Rosenkrantz, a sustainability-minded guitar-maker innovating with biomaterials. Once her mycelium, the root-like structure of fungus that produces mushrooms, mimics the rind of a soft-ripened cheese Rosenkrantz dehydrates it into a lightweight, biodegradable building material — in this case, the body of a guitar.

The musician trained as an industrial designer embarked on her career as a luthier — maker of string instruments — about a decade ago, and over the past several years has integrated mycelium and other biomaterials in her quest to create more environmentally friendly, plastic-free instruments. Rosenkrantz chuckles as she delivers her brie analogy that's also a nod to her French roots; the designer was raised in Montfermeil, an eastern suburb of Paris, and now resides near Providence where she teaches at the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design.

The basement atelier below her sunny apartment full of plants and books is home to her craft and doubles as a science lab, where she's growing materials like kombucha leather to make banjo heads, and using fish leather to make pickguards. "In the design world, everybody's working with biomaterial, it's exponential," the 42-year-old told AFP from her workshop.

"It's not, like, a hippie solution anymore," she continued, pointing to BMW which has used flax fiber in dashboard

construction, or Hermes, which has used mushroom-derived leather in their purse linings. "It's not a pie in the sky like just five years ago. It's actually very tangible."

'Potential'

Traditionally luthiers construct guitars with woods including cedar, rosewood, mahogany and ebony, depending on the tonal qualities sought. Wood of course is also biodegradable, but issues including overforestry have led makers like Rosenkrantz toward more sustainable options, reclaiming wood and sourcing from local woods. "Do we really need to use the same species as 400 years ago, because who really plays music like 400 years ago? A few students at Juilliard," she said, referring to the elite Manhattan conservatory.

"This is an industry where I feel because it's craft-based, there's a lot of 'how things are supposed to be,'" she continued, adding that woods like poplar or bamboo were long ignored but could offer new opportunities. "What if it's frankensteining parts of guitars that are still good, so we don't discard the whole instrument?" Rosenkrantz said. "We have to keep our eyes peeled and see the potential in different things."

'Mushroom sound'

Cue mycelium, the fungal network that lies beneath the fruit we know as mushrooms. It's easy to grow, easy to mold and easy to replace even if it begins to disintegrate, and can be made into both acoustic and electric instruments. And sound-wise? Rosenkrantz's mushroom

guitar is layered and fine-tuned, and doesn't sound just like a traditional guitar. It's a bit nasal — but rife with possibility.

"The idea came about when I was looking at packaging, since mushroom has been used to replace polystyrene" which "is known to be a good sound conductor, because it's full of air," she said. The designer found that her mycelium also conducted sound — "but it has a different timbre. So it doesn't sound like something else before."



A sample of dried tilapia fish leather is displayed on an unfinished guitar at French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz's studio.

"It's just a new sound," she continued. "It won't replace cedar because it's not cedar." She's found the mushroom materials generally work best with electric formats: "There's a regular pickup, so it sounds like a normal electric guitar, and there's also another microphone that's in the mushroom." "So then you can switch how much mushroom sound you want."

'Help the cause'

Some of Rosenkrantz's custom-made guitars are made completely out of wood, and others integrate the more experimental biomaterials. Given the time it takes to make a unique guitar from scratch, her instruments start at about \$6,000. But when it comes to the mushroom-based prototype, "my dream is for a big company to say, 'Let's produce it, 50 bucks, every kid can have one,'" Rosenkrantz said. "Some students cannot afford an in-



The "Honfleur", a semi-hollow guitar decorated with eggshells hangs on the wall of French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz's studio.

strument... what if that could be a solution? Hello Fender, if you hear that," she said with a smile. Much of Rosenkrantz's work is driven by curiosity: she keeps bees, and trained them to build an art piece of a guitar by providing them the instrument's bracing — the part "that guides the sound and give some stiffness to the instrument."

The bracing mimics the top bars of a hive, and "the bees communicate through the comb at 309 hertz, which is in the guitar range," she explained. "So we're gonna make a honeycomb that is a natural sound diffuser." And it worked: the bees built their comb along her structure, ate their honey over the winter, and left Rosenkrantz with a cleaned-out guitar that resonated.

The project was less about future use and more about "the poetry of it," she



Before and after molds of a mycelium grown guitar body in French luthier Rachel Rosenkrantz's studio.

said, another test to find biomaterials with acoustic qualities. It's exploration she hopes can help build a more sustainable future: "I'm experimenting to help the cause in some way." — AFP



Screenwriter David Corenswet arrives for the Netflix premiere of "The Politician" at the DGA theatre in New York City. — AFP

US actor David Corenswet cast as next Superman

Rising US star David Corenswet will become the latest actor to don Superman's famous red cape, director James Gunn confirmed Tuesday. The 29-year-old, best known as the lead of recent Netflix series "Hollywood," will take on the iconic role for "Superman: Legacy," due in 2025 from Warner Bros. The news was first reported by various Hollywood trade publications, which also revealed that Rachel Brosnahan, star of multiple Emmy-winning comedy "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," is set to play Lois Lane.

"Accurate! (They are not only both incredible actors, but also wonderful people)," wrote Gunn, retweeting the Hollywood Reporter's article. Given Superman's status in pop culture, the role is considered one of the most high-profile, and highly scrutinized, going in Hollywood. Superman has previously been played on the big screen by Christopher Reeve, Brandon Routh and, most recently, Henry Cavill. British actor Cavill, star of Superman films such as 2013's "Man of Steel," briefly returned to the role for the post-credits scene of last year's "Black Adam." But last year, Warner — itself under new leadership after merging with Discovery — placed "Guardians of the Galaxy" director Gunn in charge of all movies tied to DC Comics superheroes, alongside "Aquaman" producer Peter Safran. — AFP

South Koreans get younger as traditional age system dropped

Lee Jung-hee was set to turn 60 next year but South Korea dropped its traditional age counting system, so the Seoul-based housewife just got a year younger — and she's thrilled. South Korea is the last East Asian country to officially still use a method of calculating age that determines babies are aged one at birth, counting their months in the womb as their first year of life. Under that system everyone gets a year older with the turn of the year rather than on their actual birthday, meaning a baby born on December 31 would be considered two years old on January 1 in Korean age.

From Wednesday South Korea will use the international system that calculates age according to a person's actual date of birth, meaning everyone will officially become a year or two younger. "It feels good," Lee, a Seoul-based housewife, told AFP. "For people like me, who were supposed to turn 60 next year, it makes you feel like you're still young," she laughed.

China, Japan, and even North Korea dropped the system decades ago but it has endured in the South, even as the land that gave the world K-pop and kim-

chi played a larger role on the international stage. "It's confusing when a foreigner asks me how old I am as I know they mean international age, so I have to do some calculations," office worker Hong Suk-min told AFP.

Hong added, after a thoughtful pause, that he was 45 in international age and 47 under the Korean system. The official change will have limited practical impact: many legal and administrative functions, including the age listed on a passport, the age at which one can be prosecuted as a juvenile, retirement benefits, or health-care services, already uses date-of-birth rather than Korean age. The government hopes the change will ease confusion and cites, for example, the issue of older Koreans who may believe they are eligible for pensions and free travel benefits several years before they legally are.

Complex calculation

"There is a difference between the age Koreans use in their daily lives and their legal age and because of that, various legal disputes may arise," Seoul's Minister of Government Legislation Lee Wan-kyu told AFP. Lee, who is overseeing the offi-

cial age change, opened a media briefing on Monday by attempting to teach the assembled Korean journalists how to determine how old they are.

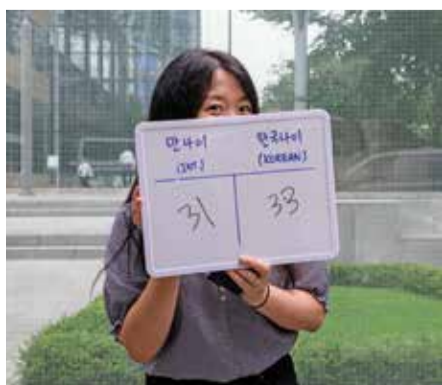
"Subtract your birth year from the current year. If your birthday has passed, that's how old you are, and if your birthday has not passed, subtract one to get your age," he said. Some key areas, including the school year, eligibility for compulsory military service, and the legal drinking age, are determined by another separate age system — known as "year age" — and this system will remain in place for now, Lee said. This means that, for example, everyone born in 2004 — whether January or December — is eligible to begin the military enlistment process from January 1, 2023, because they are all legally considered to have met the minimum required age of 19. The government might consider revising the use of "year age" for such areas depending on how the current changes go, Lee said.

'Age matters'

The idea behind "year age" is to ease South Korea's linguistic-linked hierarchies by ensuring that everyone in one

school year is considered the same age and so can speak to each other without using honorifics. "Age really matters" in South Korean culture, anthropologist Mo Hyun-joo told AFP, because it affects one's relative social status and dictates which titles and honorifics one must use for others. "It's hard to communicate with people without knowing their age," she said.

People typically use terms such as "unni" and "oppa" — meaning older sister and older brother respectively — rather than names in conversation, she said. South Korea's "hierarchical age-based culture (might) become neutralized a little" over time, Mo said, because people become more used to using international age in school settings, for example. For now most South Koreans, such as schoolboy Yoon Jae-ha from the southern port town of Busan, can simply enjoy feeling younger as the new legislation comes into effect. "My age has shrunk," he told AFP. "I like being younger because then my mum will take care of me longer." — AFP



In this picture Kim Jin-sil, an office worker, poses with a whiteboard showing her international age, 31, and Korean age, 33.



In this picture taken Lee Kyu-ok, poses with a whiteboard showing her international age, 86, and Korean age, 87.



In this picture Yoon Jae-ha (left), poses with a whiteboard showing his international age, 8, and Korean age, 9, next to his father, Yoon Dong-gun, who works in trade, and whose international age is 43 and Korean age 44.—AFP photos