

## Inside



LUDWIG

*by Billy Jeansonne*

### A Brief History

1909: The Ludwig & Ludwig Drum Company was founded by William F. and Theobald Ludwig. The address of the Ludwig & Ludwig Drum Company was 1354 West 31st Street, Chicago, IL.

1912: The city salesroom was located at 601 Omaha Building, Chicago, IL. The main office and mail order department was located at 2235 W. 20th Street, Chicago, IL.

1916: Ludwig & Ludwig purchased the building at 1611 N. Lincoln Street on Chicago's northwest side. The building went through several changes throughout the years until the purchase of L & L by Conn.

1929: Ludwig & Ludwig was sold to the C. G. Conn Corporation. The company was relocated to Elkhart, Indiana.

1937: William F. Ludwig, Sr. started his own drum company once more. The Wm. F. Ludwig Drum Company started production at 1728 N. Damon Ave., Chicago 47, IL., just three blocks from the original plant that had been moved to Elkhart, Ind. This was the year that the Speed King pedal was invented.

1939: The company name was changed to the W.F.L. Drum Company.

1955: The Ludwig drum division was repurchased from Conn by William F. Ludwig, Sr., and was incorporated into the W.F.L. Drum Co. The company name was then changed to Ludwig Drum Company.

1971: William F. Ludwig II becomes president of Ludwig Industries.

1971: Bill Ludwig III takes an active interest in the company and later becomes artist relations manager for Ludwig Industries.

1981: Ludwig Industries was purchased by The Selmer Company.

1984: The Ludwig Drum Company began producing drums at the Monroe, North Carolina plant.

# Ludwig Factory Tour ...

Like so many other drummers, I've always been fascinated with the Ludwig Drum Company. Growing up in the 60's, I never dreamed of visiting the Ludwig factory in Chicago because it seemed like a million miles away from Louisiana, where I lived. All I could do was look at their beautiful drum catalogs of that era and dream.



#1 - Floor display in showroom  
#2 - The humidity room stocked with shell veneers  
#3 - Molds used in making shells

The Ludwig Drum Company is now located in Monroe, N.C. The company's drum manufacturing facilities were moved there in 1984, after The Selmer Company bought Ludwig Industries in 1981. I decided to visit the Ludwig plant and called Chuck Heuck, assistant marketing manager, who has been with Ludwig Drum Co. since Oct. 9, 1972. He arranged a tour of the factory with plant manager James Kinsey and quality technician Steve Cotton . I was excited!

Bruce and I drove up to North Carolina together (actually he drove and I slept). That's the way I like to travel.

The factory tour began early Friday morning, February 22, 2002. We were welcomed by Mr. Kinsey and Steve who gave us a brief rundown of the history of the North Carolina facilities. The plant contains 140,000 square feet of manufacturing space!

The entrance of the facility leads directly into a showroom which displays several drumsets and snare drums, from re-issued Ringo style kits, to Vistalites, to Black Beauty snare drums.

## *Now it was time to see how Ludwig drums were made.*

First, was the humidity room, where many plies of wood and veneers are stored to maintain a consistent moisture content within the wood. This is important for the molding and gluing of the wood into drum shells. The 4' x 8' wood sheets were of very high quality, with the poplar coming from Italy, birch from Finland, and beautiful American maple from the midwest. The sheets of wood are then cut to size by a computerized saw, once the drum size and specific wood type is determined.

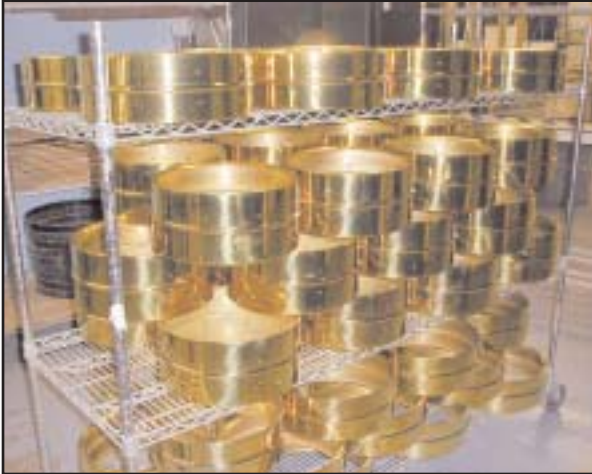
We stepped into the next very large section of the building. This is where the individual pre-cut wood panels are molded into drum shells. The molds are different size metal cylinders. The individual wood panels are glued, and placed in the mold in a staggered order. A rubber

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*Steve Cotton, Bruce Jeansonne, and James Kinsey*

# Ludwig Factory Tour *continued ...*



bladder is placed inside the wood shell and is inflated to put pressure against the wood shell and the mold, until the glue dries. "Hoop" shells are also made to cut into bass drum hoops. The largest mold in the plant could form a 36" concert bass drum! Also amazing, is the fact that some of the molds being used, were used in the Chicago factory since the 1960's.

After the shells are formed into the appropriate size, the bearing edges are cut. The shells used for snare drums have the snare beds cut into them at this time. All finish cuts are then hand sanded. This completes the wood shell manufacturing process, except for final details to insure quality and performance. The drum shells are then stored until they are needed to wrap with a plastic finish or a stained finish to complete an order.

Ludwig is producing some of their wrapped drum shells with a butt joint at the seam of the wrap, although the conventional method is still used with the overlapping of the plastic wrap. The many different plastic finishes are purchased from companies that have supplied plastic finishes for very many years.

This next location and procedure is where the wood shells begin getting their exterior stain finish applied. The shells are spray stained, and sanded and sealed several times until a UV topcoat is applied to achieve a glass like finish. Marty Summerford has been staining the Ludwig shells for 15 years! The finished shells that we saw were truly beautiful. All of the dyes are mixed at the plant to achieve the desired color of stain. The finished shells are placed in a UV oven to help expedite the curing process.

A row of large drill presses are set up with different templates for drilling holes into the wood shells for lugs or mounting hardware. Some of these drill presses were brought to the Monroe plant from the Chicago factory. The shells are carefully positioned into the template

of the drill, the shell is then locked into place, and the holes for the appropriate hardware are precisely drilled.

Step into a world of seamless aluminum, bronze, and brass shells. Dennis Ledbetter buffs and polishes these metal shells to turn them into beautiful snare drums. The shells designated for chrome plating are sent elsewhere to be plated, since chrome plating is very environmentally challenged. Hand hammered shells are created from bronze or brass shells in this area. The hammering is done by machine, but is a hand operated process, so each hammered shell is unique in appearance. The Black Beauty snare drums are brass shells plated with black nickel applied to the shell. The shell is then lacquered to protect the nickel plating. The last edition of engraved Black Beauties were issued in 1999 as a 90th Anniversary Edition model, all which were hand engraved by John Aldridge.

Drumheads are still made at the Ludwig plant. This was a very interesting part of the tour. It was amazing to watch a drumhead being made. The mylar used for the drumhead is cut from larger sheets of different colors and thicknesses of mylar, into the appropriate size used for a specific size head being made. The cut mylar is placed on a heated press to form the head. The aluminum rim of the drumhead is actually molded into shape from a roll of flat stock metal. Rollers take the flat stock aluminum and form it into a U shaped outer channel which is then cut to length. The square shaped inner channel is formed by another machine and fits into the outer channel locking the mylar head into place. The textured coated heads are made at the Ludwig plant using a special type of paint material that is formulated for excellent adhesion to the mylar head.

The final stop on the tour was the packaging and shipping department, which was stacked to the ceiling with boxes ready to be shipped out. The Ludwig Drum Company has an active list of over 20,000 items, which supplies the drum community with a wide variety of percussion products!

*The Ludwig Drum Company has an active list of over 20,000 items!*

This concluded the tour of the Ludwig Drum Company. I was intrigued at the many stages and processes that are involved in building and finishing a wood drum shell, to get it ready to be played and enjoyed. Ludwig drums have always been world class instruments and today the tradition of building top quality drums by the Ludwig Drum Company carries on.

Ludwig is now producing drums that are covered in finishes that were first introduced in the 1960's. The popularity and demand of these "vintage" colors is on the rise. Acquiring one of the original kits from the 60's has been getting more difficult, with prices rising to all time highs. Ludwig recently re-issued the Vistalite series of acrylic drums that were famous in the 1970's. The famous 201 Speed King bass drum pedal, invented in 1937, is still made at the Ludwig plant! Drum catalogs are still available for Ludwig drums and products.

The drum company founded by William F. Ludwig, Sr. and his brother, Theobald in 1909, is still going strong almost 100 years later, after three generations of the Ludwig family. Many drummers who have helped shaped music throughout the 20th century have used Ludwig drums and still do. From famous drummers such as Ray Bauduc, Buddy Rich, and Joe Morello, to Hal Blaine, Mitch Mitchell, John Bonham, and Ringo Starr, Ludwig drums have been out front. What William F. Ludwig, Sr., his son, William F. Ludwig, II, and Bill Ludwig, III, have done for the world of drums and drumming has certainly had a direct affect on the history of our country. Music shapes and records many important events that have a very strong influence on people and occurrences. Ludwig drums have been a major part of the music in image and in sound. They have helped to shape our lives, by the people who have played them. Ludwig drums are "The Most Famous Name On Drums".

The Selmer Company, who now owns Ludwig Industries, is located in Elkhart, Indiana. Marketing manager for Ludwig and Musser Industries is James Catalano. Mr. Catalano has been with the company since May 8, 1983. Since the sale of Ludwig Industries to Selmer in 1981, William F. Ludwig, II has been an active consultant and clinician, and attends most of the drum functions throughout the country.

To schedule a tour of the Ludwig Drum Company in Monroe, North Carolina, please call Chuck Heuck or David Mester at 1-800-348-7426.

Visit Ludwig on the web at [www.ludwig-drums.com](http://www.ludwig-drums.com).

# Drum Forums

[www.drumsmith.com](http://www.drumsmith.com)  
[www.drumcenter.com](http://www.drumcenter.com)

<http://www.drumlink.com/board/default.asp>  
<http://www.musicplayer.com/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi>

<http://www.remo.com/fusetalk/>

# The World Wide Web

Atlanta Vintage Drums	<a href="http://www.atlantavintagedrums.com">www.atlantavintagedrums.com</a>	Rebeats	<a href="http://www.rebeats.com">www.rebeats.com</a>
Not So Modern Drummer	<a href="http://www.notsomoderndrummer.com">www.notsomoderndrummer.com</a>	Drum Supply House	<a href="http://www.drummaker.com">www.drummaker.com</a>
Nuncios Music	<a href="http://www.drumschool.com">www.drumschool.com</a>	Ludwig Industries	<a href="http://www.ludwig-drums.com">www.ludwig-drums.com</a>
Trixon Drums	<a href="http://www.trixon.de">www.trixon.de</a>	Pro Mark	<a href="http://www.promark-stix.com">www.promark-stix.com</a>
Gene & Buddy's Museum	<a href="http://www.geneandbuddys.com">www.geneandbuddys.com</a>	Drum Magazine	<a href="http://www.drumlinks.com">www.drumlinks.com</a>
Modern Drummer	<a href="http://www.moderndrummer.com">www.moderndrummer.com</a>	MRP Drums	<a href="http://www.mrpdrums.com">www.mrpdrums.com</a>