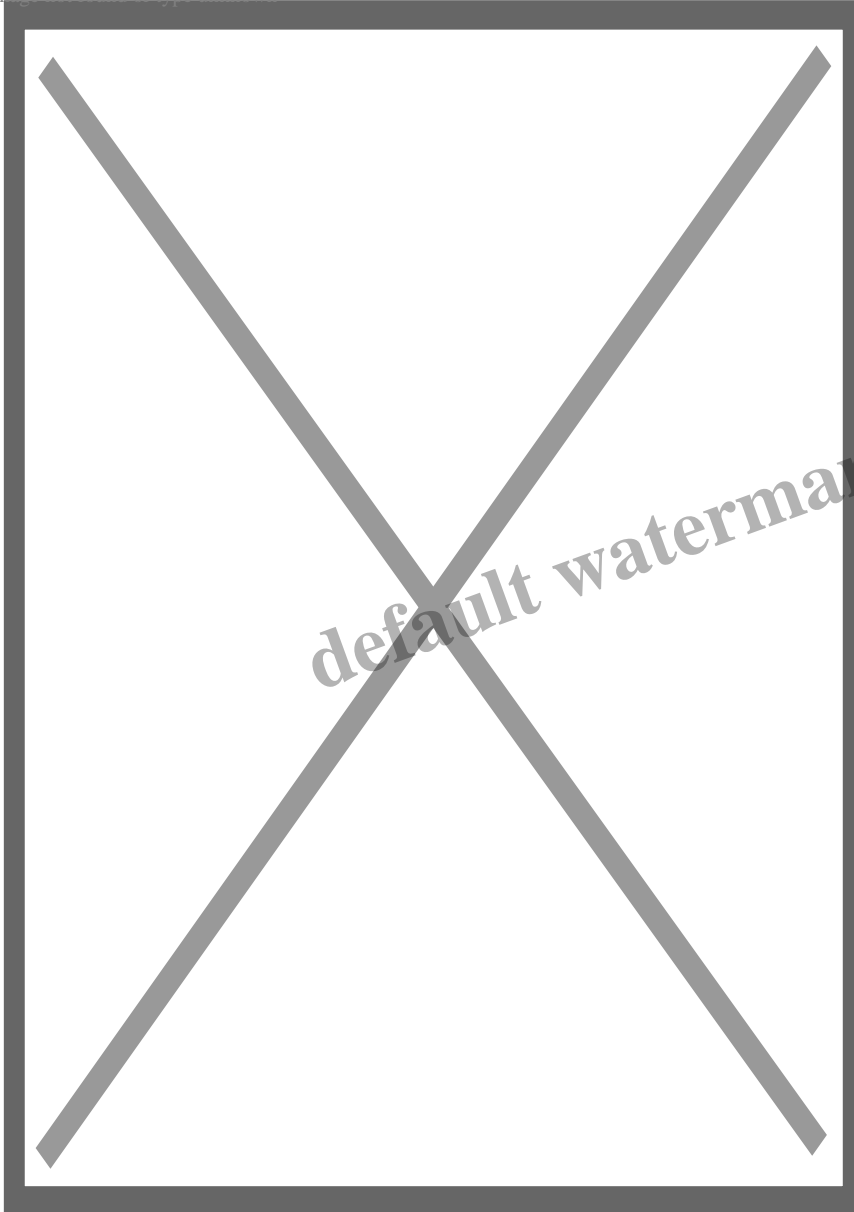


The view from space: Martin's Earth Guitar

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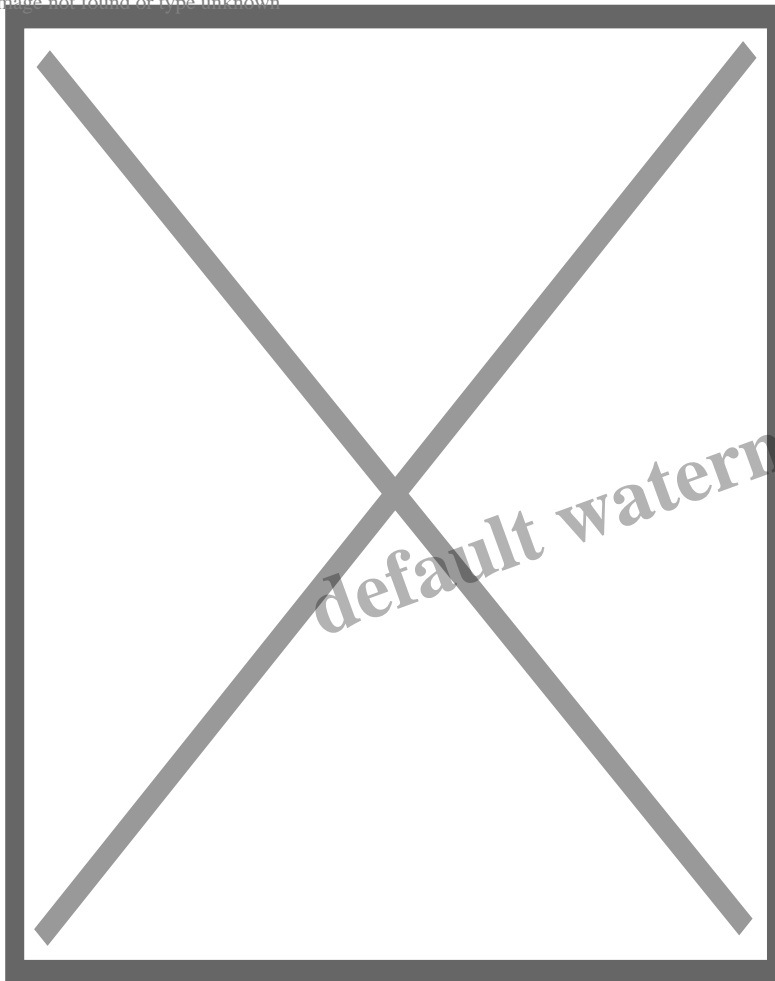


The Martin 00L Earth guitar, with its striking painting of our planet, was inspired by Greta Thunberg and protests seeking meaningful action on climate change. But its roots like back in the 1960s with the first views of Earth from space. Its message is too important to ignore.

In the [previous post](#), we visited the Martin guitar factory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania and looked at Martins made from cherry and mango wood. If you go to the [Sustainability page](#) of Martin Guitar's website the first thing you see is an image of a guitar with a painting of planet Earth on the front.

The guitar in question is the [Martin 00L Earth](#), first introduced in 2021, and the painting, originally created by artist [Robert Goetzl](#), is applied to the top using a special ink-jet printing process.

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Robert Goetzl with the Earth guitar. Source: [Instagram](#)

Goetzl was inspired by climate activist [Greta Thunberg's](#) School Strike for Climate movement.

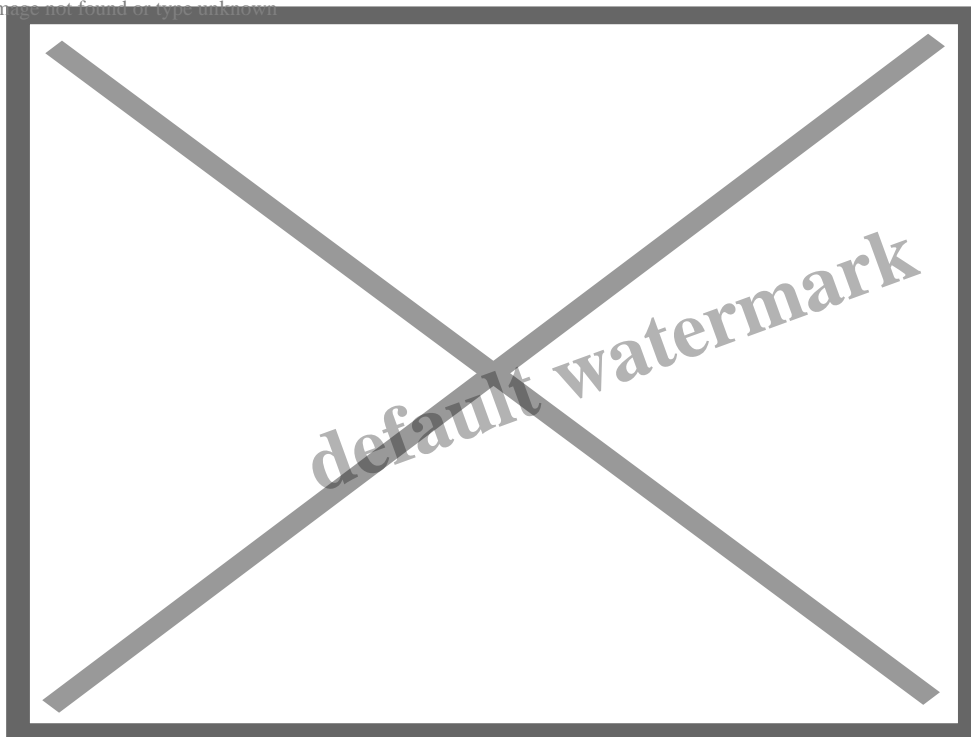
He [said](#): “When I first heard this eloquent young woman, Greta Thunberg, speak so passionately about climate change, I was immediately inspired and thought, why not design a guitar with a visual element as a tool to promote the message ‘Save the Earth’”

Former Martin CEO Chris Martin added, “There’s so much that we can do as individuals to fight climate change in our daily lives. Yet we are continually looking for ways that our company can inspire musicians and their fans to take action. Not just on [Earth Day](#), but every day. Music has always been a powerful tool for bringing people together for change.”

“It’s not just a guitar. It’s a call to action on climate change. A reminder to preserve the planet for future generations. To show our dedication to this cause, we’ve created the first acoustic guitar that is 100% FSC®-certified and the only plastic-free guitar in production today. Its top, emblazoned with a work by renowned artist Robert Goetzl, is as stunning as it is powerful, a reminder of what we’re fighting for. And even the gig bag is sustainable: made from hemp—a Martin first. So play, preserve, and protect the planet with the most environmentally friendly guitar on earth.”

[Martin Guitars](#)

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The 00L Earth consistently receives excellent reviews in terms of how it plays and sounds, not only on how it looks. (e.g. [Pegheadnation.com](https://www.pegheadnation.com)). Interestingly, it has had a more mixed reception from the guitar playing public, and I’ll come back to that later in this post.

Martin 00 L Earth Demo at Maury’s Music

The Earth guitar pretty much epitomises the broad philosophy behind the Nature of Music. It resonated with me as soon as I saw it, although I didn’t actually lay hands on one until quite recently. I just love it. It’s one of those guitars that bursts into life when you play it.

Chris Martin and Robert Goetzl focused on the current relevance of the guitar in terms of highlighting the need for action on climate change. For me, it also rekindled memories from my younger years back in the 1960-70s – memories of the Apollo space program and the awakening of the global environmental movement.

Going to the moon

As a kid I was obsessed with aeroplanes and flying. I wanted to be a pilot. I joined the Air Cadets at school so that I could go flying, gliding and shooting rifles. I also watched TV programs like [Dr Who](#), [Fireball XL5](#), [Lost in Space](#), and [Star Trek](#) – all programs about space travel being broadcast a decade before the first [Star Wars](#) movie.

It was pretty inevitable that I would also become obsessed with what was known at the time as the “[Space Race](#)”. An extension of the [Cold War](#) between the United States and the Soviet Union, this was a competition through the 1950s and 60s to achieve superior spaceflight capability. This was portrayed as necessary for national security and became part of the symbolism and ideology of the time. Starting with artificial satellites, the space programs extended to human spaceflight in Earth orbit and ultimately to men landing on the Moon.

We take satellites and what they do for us pretty much for granted these days. However, [sending satellites into space](#) successfully only really got underway in the late 1950s, starting with the Russian Sputnik. [Telstar](#) was a US communications satellite launched in 1962, and is often credited with heralding in the era of world-wide telecommunications. Telstar is also the title of a futuristic recording by the Tornados (released the same year) that got played on the radio a lot.

The Tornados – Telstar (1962)

In 1961, US president John F. Kennedy committed the US to the goal of “landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth” before the end of the decade. This was a highly ambitious goal, considering that, at that stage, only one person had been in space before – and that was the Russian Yuri Gagarin, who was in orbit above the earth in [Vostok 1](#) for a little over an hour.

But over the course of the 1960s, the American space program, coordinated by NASA, successfully developed the Mercury and [Apollo](#) space programs that led to the successful landing on the moon by Apollo 11 in 1969.

I followed all the Mercury and Apollo missions avidly, listening to commentary on the radio, watching TV coverage when it was available, and reading about it all in newspapers and magazines. Much to my wife Gillian’s amusement, I even kept the newspaper clippings from the Apollo 11 mission.

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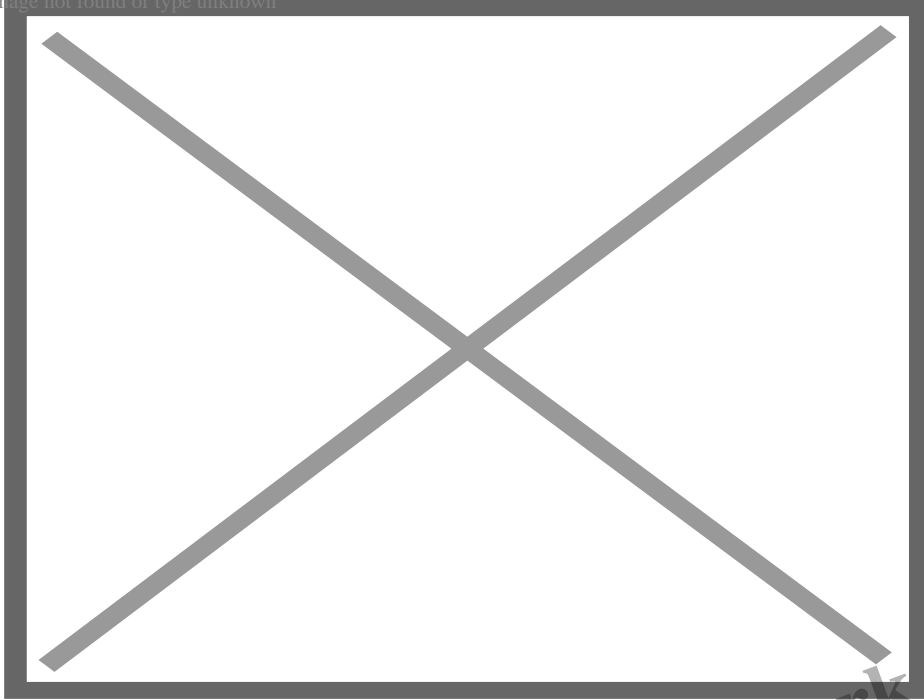
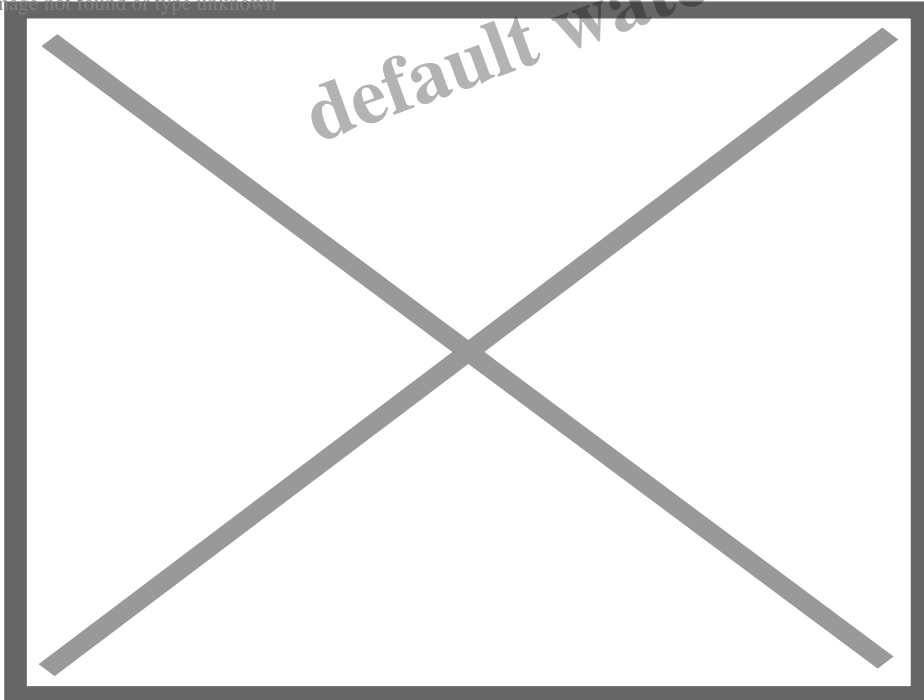


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Stashed in a box in our garage, I still have the newspaper and magazine clippings from the first moon landing.

I still vividly remember tuning in to updates on the Apollo missions, and especially the moment Neil Armstrong stepped off the lunar lander and onto the surface of the moon.

The moment man first stepped on the Moon – BBC World Service

There's a persistent [conspiracy theory](#) that the moon landings never actually happened, but rather were staged. Well, my personal experience leads me to think that this idea has less going for it than "[Birds Aren't Real](#)".

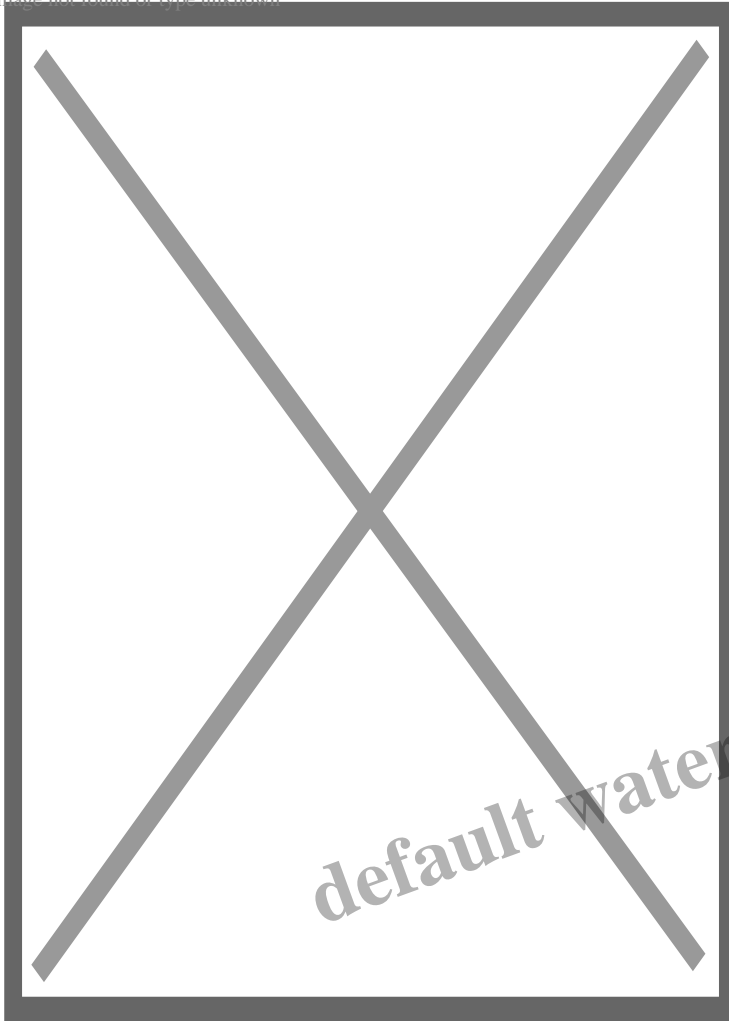
And then there was Woodstock

So, what's the point of reminiscing about my teenage infatuation with the Apollo moon landing? More relevant to the themes of this website perhaps was a radically different event that took place only a matter of weeks after Neil Armstrong took one small step onto the surface of the moon.

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair, remembered simply as [Woodstock](#), was perhaps the pivotal musical moment for my generation. Being only 15 at the time and living in Scotland, I didn't go, of course. But I and my friends certainly went to the movie made of the event in 1970, bought the records, and had many of the performances etched in our consciousness for ever.

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Source: [Wikimedia](#)

There was so much going on at Woodstock and so many amazing performances that it is neither possible nor fair to pick particular high points. But who can forget Ten Years After, Joe Cocker, Jefferson Airplane, Santana, Country Joe McDonald, Joan Baez – and, of course, Jimi Hendrix and his rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. And there were [a lot of guitars](#).

Woodstock: Ten years after – I'm going home, with Alvin Lee on guitar and vocals

Jimi Hendrix – National Anthem U.S.A (Woodstock 1969)

Looking back on Earth

Woodstock epitomised the anti-establishment [counterculture](#) phenomenon that grew during the 1960s. These were tumultuous times, with huge geopolitical and societal upheavals. The civil rights movement in the United States continued to grow, as did anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiment.

Widespread social tensions were evident across a wide range of issues including women's rights, human sexuality, and racial equality. It was also the dawn of the modern environmental movement which often pitched ordinary citizens against governments and big corporations in attempts to curtail

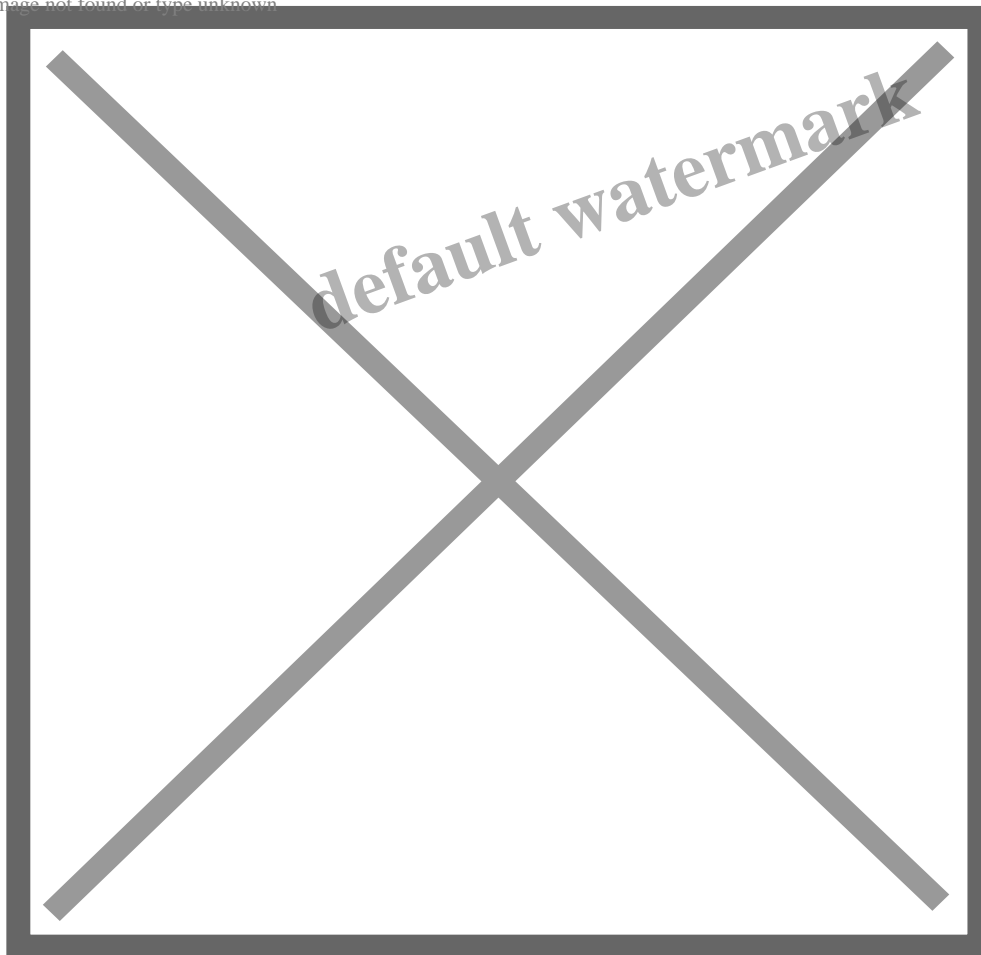
rampant environmental destruction and decline.

The space program was happening in the midst of all this, and could justifiably be pointed to as everything the counter-culture revolution wasn't. It received a lot of criticism at the time, being portrayed as a big distraction and a waste of money that could be better spent on useful things back on Earth.

And yet, as a [2019 book](#) by Neil Maher illustrated, the Apollo program was not separate from the various social upheavals underway, but rather each affected the other in a variety of ways. Not the least of these was the impact of images captured from Apollo and their impact on the environmental movement.

When I was studying at Edinburgh University, I had two posters up in my bedroom (I would have had many more, but the landlady got extremely annoyed by Sellotape or bluetack making marks on the wallpaper). One was a Led Zeppelin poster and the other was "[Earthrise](#)".

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"Earthrise" Source: [NASA](#)

Earthrise was a photo taken from lunar orbit by astronaut William Anders on December 24, 1968, during the Apollo 8 mission. It depicts the Earth as it rises over the moon's surface and is a stunning image depicting our small blue planet hanging in the darkness of space. It's become a symbol of the

finite nature of our planet and the need to care for it.

[“Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet”](#) was the title of an influential 1972 book with the photo on the cover. Earthrise been described as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken” and credited with helping spark the beginning of the environmental movement. Fifty years to the day after taking the photo, William Anders observed, “We set out to explore the moon and instead discovered the Earth.”

The Martin Earth guitar echoes this image from over 50 years ago.

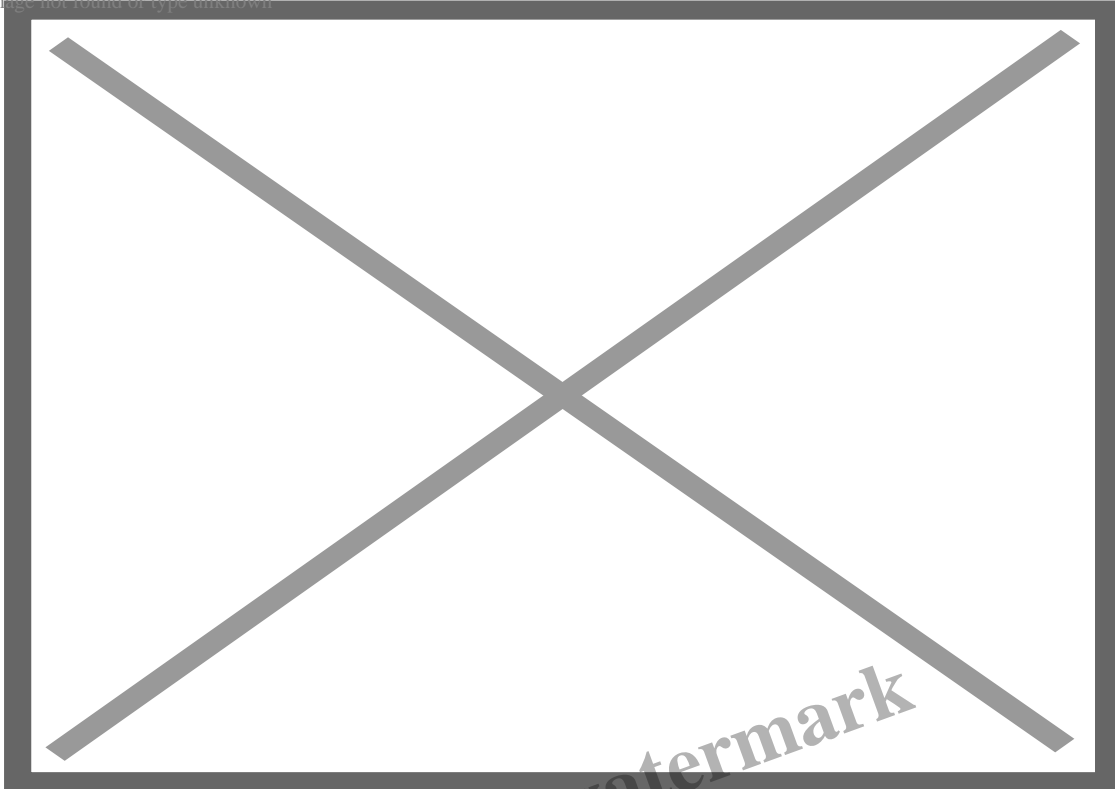
Spaceman

The Apollo program continued until 1972, with another 6 missions to the moon, landing a total of 12 men there. The program left a [lasting legacy](#) of achievement and inspiration. Thereafter, developments in space technology continued, but mostly focusing on putting hardware and humans in Earth orbit, with the occasional mission to send things further away to explore other planets, particularly Mars. The Space Shuttle and the [International Space Station](#) facilitated long stays in orbit for astronauts, and more and more satellites continue to be launched into orbit.

My interest in space continued into adulthood. I even got to visit the [NASA Space Center](#) in Houston in the 1990s – on a fieldtrip associated with an [ecology conference](#), believe it or not. A small bunch of space geeks took the trip and had a wonderful time seeing all the NASA stuff. Best conference field trip ever!

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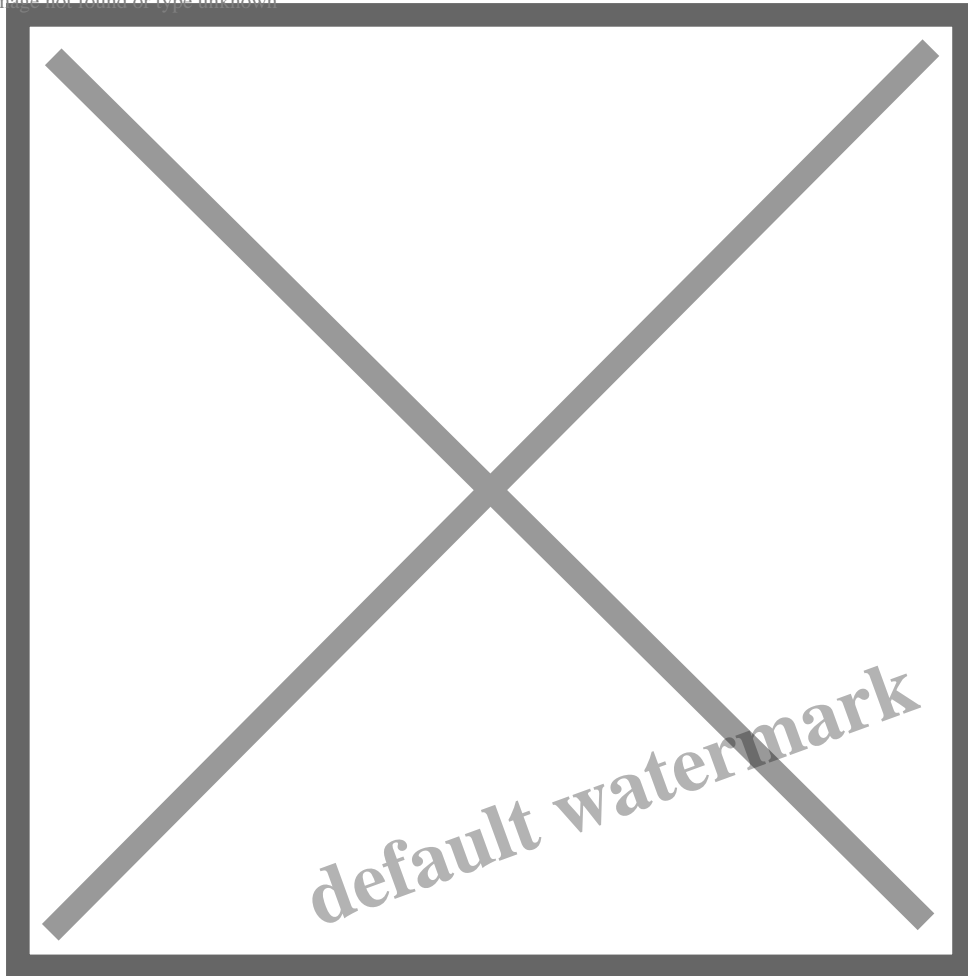


The closest I got to being an astronaut – visiting the Houston Space Center.

[Hundreds of people](#) have now been in space. Even [Captain Kirk](#) from the Star Ship Enterprise made it into real rather than dramatized space. Many astronauts came to the space program with backgrounds that wouldn't immediately be connected with becoming an astronaut. I never had any desire to become a spaceman, but one of my classmates during my undergraduate studies in Edinburgh did. We were all doing an Ecological Sciences degree, a relatively new program developed in response to growing environmental awareness. Like me, [Piers Sellars](#) had been in the air cadets in high school, and he always sported an ex-RAF bomber jacket.

After completing a PhD in biometeorology (interactions between the living world and the Earth's atmosphere), he joined the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in 1982, as a scientist working primarily on computer modelling of climate systems. But it was clear that what he most wanted to do was to become an astronaut – he applied to join the program each year, only to be turned down because he was not an American citizen. He eventually took the plunge and became a naturalized citizen in 1991, and was then selected as an astronaut candidate in 1996.

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Piers Sellars (1955-2016) Source: [Wikipedia](#)

Piers went on to fly on 3 space missions and spent a total of 35 days in space, working on the International Space Station each time. When reading about Piers' career, I was fascinated to find that he had carried a four-inch wood sample of Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree to the International Space Station. A fascinating link back to an [earlier post](#) about apple wood.

The science of observing Earth from space

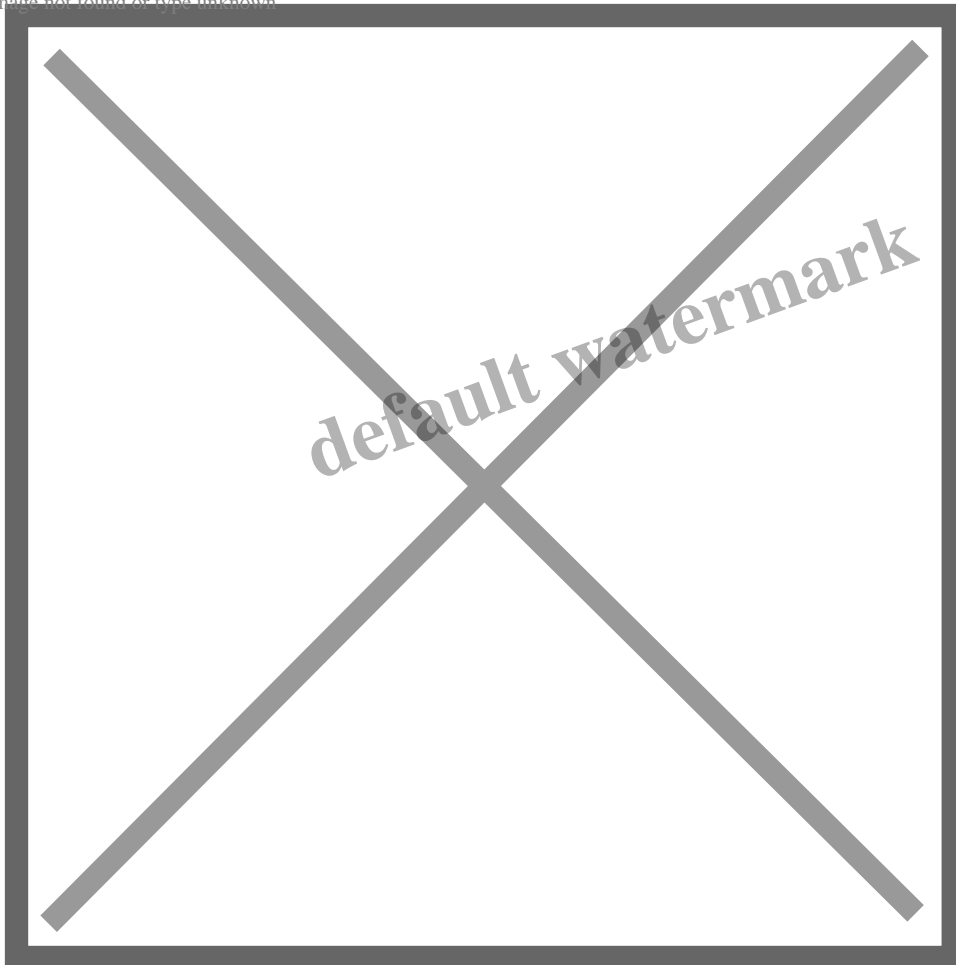
I never knew Piers that well while we were undergraduates, and we lost touch thereafter. But I did bump into him again at a later stage in our careers.

It was 1989 and I had moved to Australia to work with CSIRO on the ecology and conservation of the fragmented landscapes of the Western Australian wheatbelt. I had previously had 2 years at Stanford University, working with [Harold \(Hal\) Mooney](#), and I my association with both Hal and Stanford has continued to this day.

Hal has been the best colleague and mentor anyone could ever hope for, and we have collaborated on more projects than I can remember. He has a particular skill of identifying up-and-coming issues that need research attention and jumping in at ground level to get things going in those areas.

On this particular occasion, Hal had noticed the increasing interest in using satellites to observe the Earth's surface. Satellites with appropriate sensors could collect data on all sorts of things and provide spatial imaging that had the potential to greatly expand our ability to analyse and understand things at broader scales than had ever been possible before. Understanding what's happening at a planetary scale is incredibly difficult when you can only measure things at a few points on the earth surface. Space provides the opportunity to get a bigger and better perspective on how the Earth works.

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Source: [Dreamstime](#)

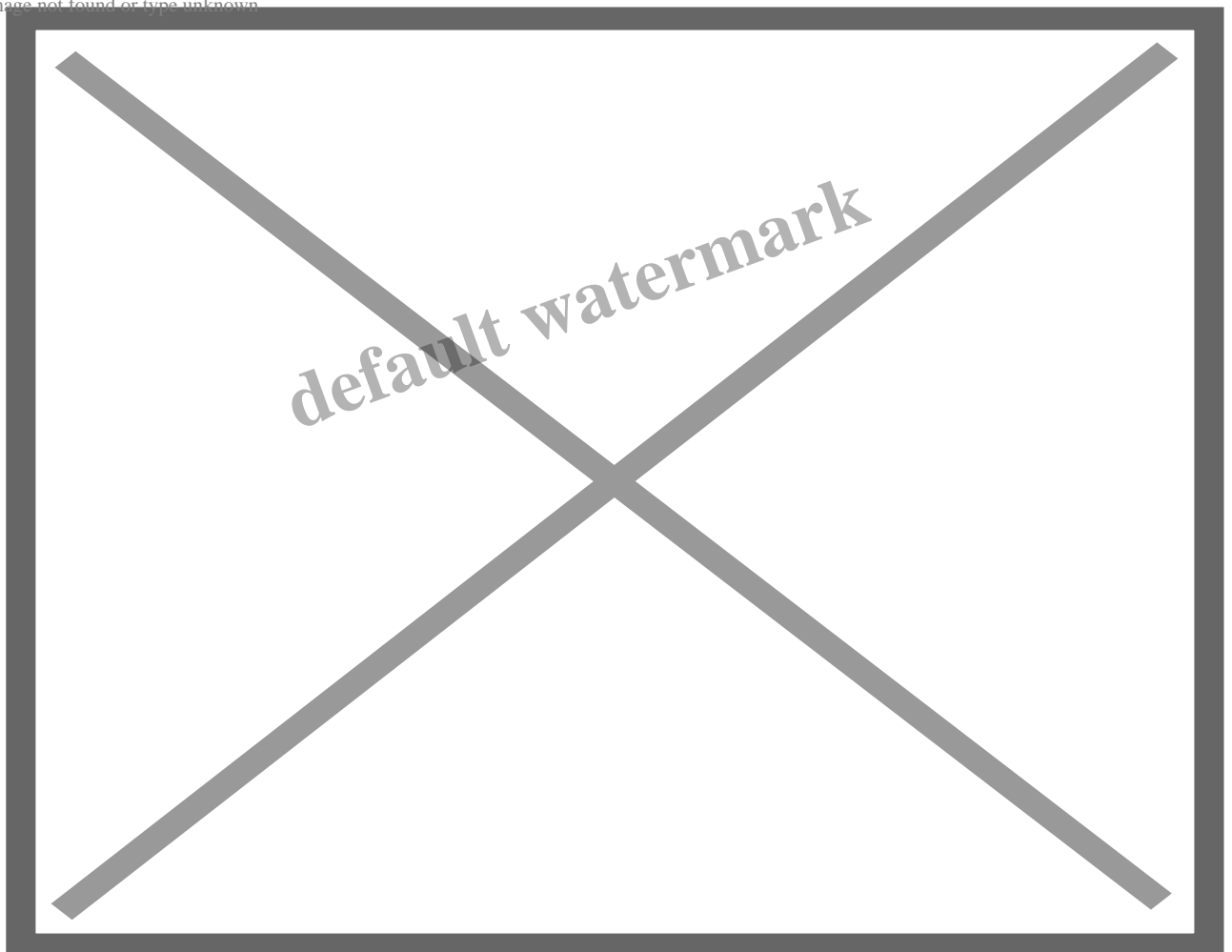
Of course, now we take all this stuff for granted and, whether we know it or not, are using satellites and their data every day. But back in the 1980s, the capabilities were only slowly developing – satellite sensors were course and unreliable, and computers were simply not up to handling the potentially huge amount of information the sensors could generate.

So, the question that intrigued Hal was whether remote sensing capabilities of satellites could be used and developed to allow us to look at how the earth's ecosystems work: not just their spatial patterns, but also how they actually function.

In any early exploration of a topic such as this, a standard way of kicking off useful discussions is to hold a workshop which brings together people working in the field. We managed to secure funding through the [East-West Center](#) in Hawaii to bring a bunch of US and Australian scientists together to assess the current state of the field and discuss its future development.

One of the US participants was Piers Sellars – then at Goddard, but not yet enrolled in the astronaut program.

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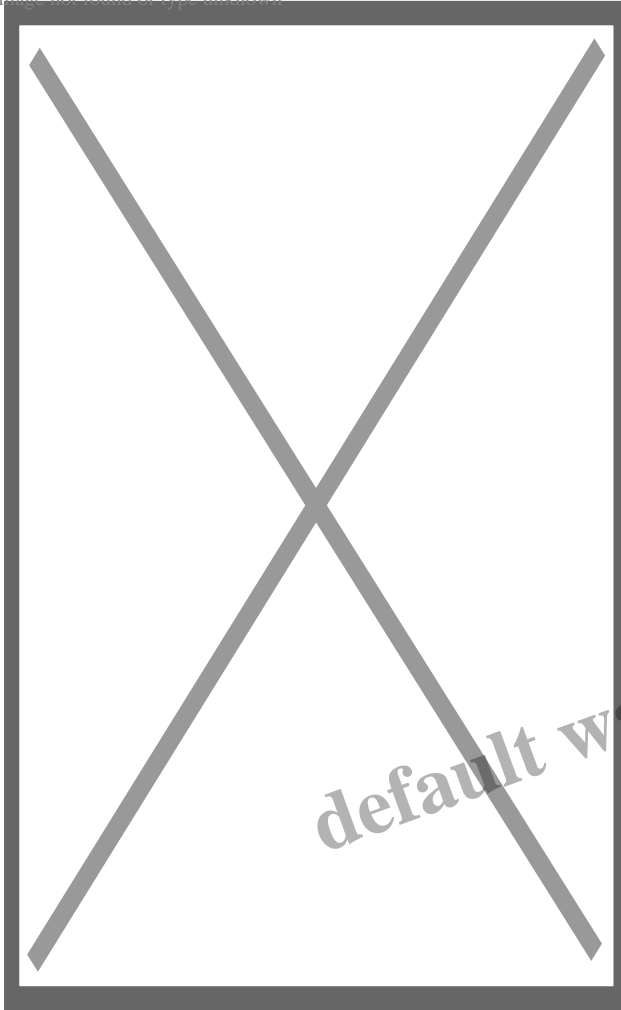


1989 workshop at the East-West Center, Hawaii. Hal Mooney is on the left in the front row beside the bush, I'm on the left next to him, and Piers Sellars is just behind us. Note, even in 1989, there were only two women participants for this workshop.

The workshop was a great success, and Hal and I edited a book of contributions from the various participants. This was the first book I had ever published, and so it was very exciting for me. Its title was "[Remote Sensing of Biosphere Functioning](#)", and it was published in 1990 by Springer. It was

quite well received and even translated into Japanese.

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Hal and I wrote in the introduction:

At present there is enormous concern about the changes that are occurring on the surface of the earth and in the earth's atmosphere, primarily as a result of human activities. These changes, particularly in the atmosphere, have the potential for altering the earth's habitability. International programs unprecedented in scope, including the International Geosphere-Biosphere Program, have been initiated to describe and understand these changes. The global change program will call for coordinated measurements on a global scale of those interactive physical and biological processes that regulate the earth system. The program will rely heavily on the emerging technology of remote sensing from airborne vehicles, particularly satellites. Satellites offer the potential of continuously viewing large segments of the earth's surface, thus documenting the changes that are occurring. The task, however, is not only to document global change, which will be an enormous job, but also to understand the significance of these changes to the biosphere. Effects on the biosphere may cover all spatial scales from global to local. The possibility of measuring biosphere function remotely and continuously from satellite imagery must be explored quickly and thoroughly in order to meet the challenge of understanding the consequences of global change.

Over 30 years ago, the science was pointing to the urgency of understanding and responding to climate change. Since then, the science and technology has progressed by leaps and bounds. Although it was exciting to be in at the start of all that, our book is now so out of date that it's amusing to read in some places. The capacity to collect and analyse data from [earth-observing satellites](#) has increased way beyond what we believed might be possible 30 years ago.

Consolidating the science

So, the capacity to observe and record changes in the global environment has improved greatly over the past few decades. So has our collective ability to analyse and interpret these observations. The world's official body for assessment of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC](#)) has just released its [seventh report](#).

The IPCC was formed in 1988 as a joint effort between scientists and governments to review scientific work on climate change and comment on response options. The understanding of climate change has improved considerably over time, with the evidence for human-induced climate change becoming clearer and the need for action more urgent.

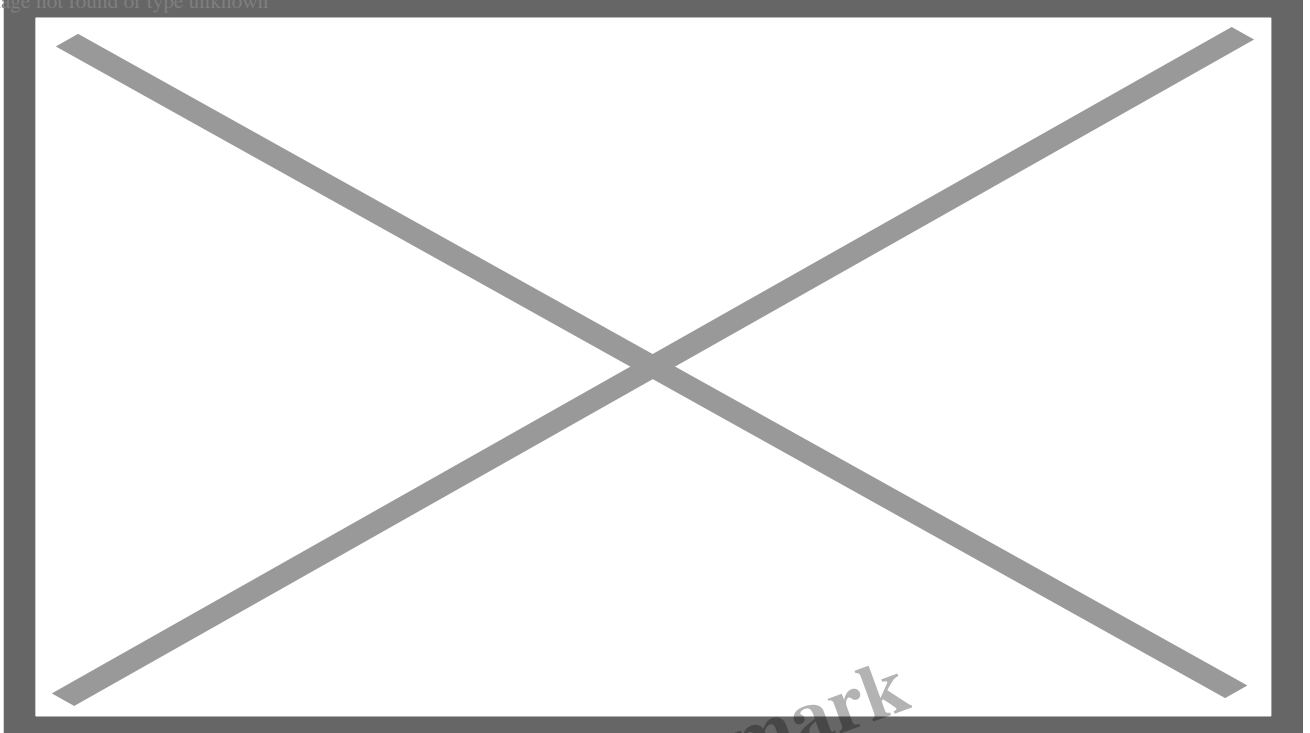
The first report in 1990 stated: "the unequivocal detection of the enhanced greenhouse effect from observations is not likely for more than a decade". The [equivalent assessment in 2021](#) stated: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land". The report just released sounds a clear clarion call that humanity is at a crossroads, with an urgent requirement to take actions to limit future warming. The [ABC](#) paraphrased the main message of the report thus: "The world is in deep trouble on climate change, but if we really put our shoulder to the wheel we can turn things around".

Watch and wait

The improved ability to observe and analyse changes in the Earth system has not, unfortunately, been matched by an improved ability to respond to the observed changes in any meaningful way.

While the IPCC continues to ramp up the evidence for the need for urgent action, progress in that direction has been painfully slow. The UN process of convening regular climate summits aims to aid the development of international agreements on action to deal with the causes and effects of climate change. The most recent were in [Scotland](#) in 2021 and in [Egypt](#) in 2022.

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COP27 meeting. Source: [Wired](#)

These are huge affairs attended by representatives from countries around the world, as well as providing a venue for the many NGO and community groups who want to influence the outcomes. The summits see common-good responses that require collective action battle against national and commercial [vested interests](#). They're usually the scene of intense debate and negotiation, with tired and frustrated conveners working down to the wire to broker some sort of deal by the end of the summit. Despite a few small advances, the outcomes are mostly disappointing and inadequate.

Of the most recent COP27, [one commentary](#) concluded: “..the talks also disappointed many stakeholders by not taking any significant new steps to curb emissions, which are critical to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F) and avoid a far more dangerous world. And despite some bright spots, progress on adaptation was also less than hoped for”.

It's easy to feel disheartened by the lack of progress in these international arenas. But it's important to remember that things are happening in other arenas. In an [article](#) in the Conversation on the CCOP27 outcomes, Matt McDonald wrote:

“United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres lamented: “Our planet is still in the emergency room”....

“And while the world dithers, the window of opportunity to respond effectively to the climate crisis continues to close.

It's important to note, however, that while COPs are clearly significant in the international response to the climate crisis, they're not the only game in town.

Public mobilisation and activism, market forces, aid and development programs, and legislation at local, state and national levels are all important sites of climate politics – and potentially, significant change.

There are myriad examples. Take the international phenomenon of school climate strikes, or climate activist Mike Cannon-Brookes' takeover of AGL Energy. They point to the possibility of action on climate change outside formal international climate negotiations.

So if you're despairing at the limited progress at COP27, remember this: nations and communities determined to wean themselves off fossil fuels will do more to blunt the power of the sector than most international agreements could realistically hope to achieve.”

And that, of course is where Greta Thunberg and the many people she's inspired come in. Harking back to the social unrest of the 1960s, ordinary people are pushing for change. In 2019 millions of people joined [protests](#) around the world demanding more effective responses to climate change. Of course, it's hard to keep momentum up for something like this when there are also pandemics and wars causing more immediate problems. However, more [large protests](#) are planned this year.

As well as collective action focussed on global responses to environmental change, there is plenty that people can do individually and collectively that feeds into the bigger picture. The saying “[Think globally, act locally](#)” was coined in the early days of the environmental movement to empower people to think constructively about solutions.

Chatter in the Chat Room

Swinging the focus back to the Martin Earth guitar – as Robert Goetzl suggested, if it can play some small part in inspiring people to think and act about climate change, then it's a worthy project. If satellites and science aren't sufficient to promote action, then it's up to musicians and artists to join in and help.

Interestingly, although widely praised in reviews as a great sounding guitar and lauded for its message, the OOL-Earth has received a mixed response from guitar players. A quick look through various discussion pages and chat groups reveals that not everyone likes it as much as I do.

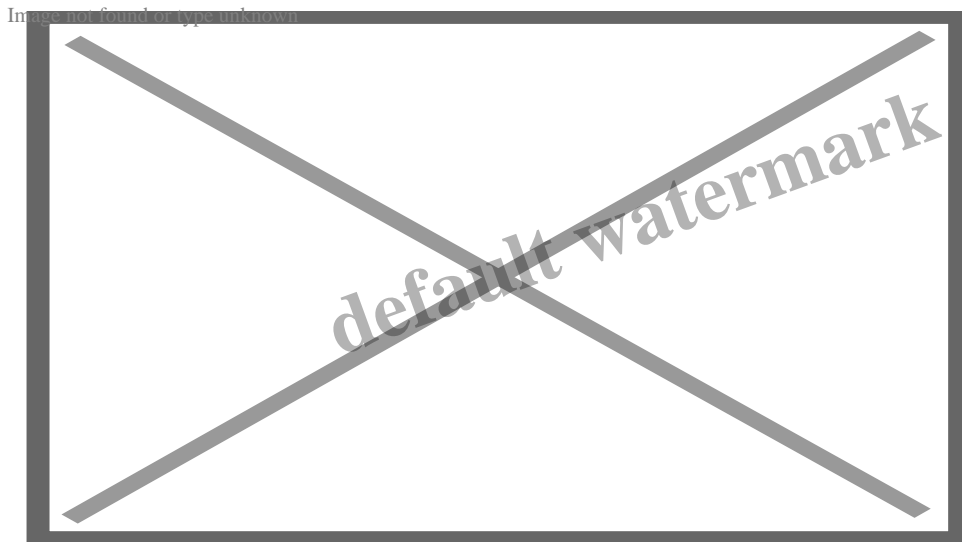
Why is this? I've found that guitar builders are, almost without exception, lovely people. Most guitar players are too. But it turns out that chat rooms and discussion groups bring out the best and worst in people. Some are in these groups to share their experiences and exchange knowledge and information about the things they love – i.e., guitars and music.

On the other hand, some participants make it clear that they love guitars and music, but only particular brands, styles and artists. Anything else is to be scorned, sometimes with as much passion as the love side of things.

And some are in there simply to sound off about whatever beefs them at the time – whether it’s a new guitar model, someone else asking dumb questions on the discussion board, a guitar repair or modification job that doesn’t align with their preconceived ideas about what’s correct and what’s not.... The list is endless.

Mixed messages

In relation to the Earth guitar, some folks thought it was overpriced (but, hey, it’s a Nazareth produced solid-wood Martin that happens to have an image ink-jetted on the front). Some thought it looked cheap or like a novelty item. Others simply don’t like painted guitars. Regardless, Martin has produced quite a few special edition guitars with images, from their [anniversary models](#) through models that definitely sought to make statements on [particular issues](#). They even produced a guitar marking the 50th anniversary of Woodstock. For more guitar artwork by Robert Goetzl, check out his [Instagram page](#).



Martin guitar marking the 50th anniversary of Woodstock. Source: [Gearnews](#)

Here’s a few assorted comments on the Earth guitar:

“I would rather quit guitar than get caught playing that.”

“Pretty cool actually.”

“I’m sure it’s a great guitar but I guess it’s the guitar equivalent of a moped. Fun to have but nothing you want your friends to catch you with.”

“Support the sentiment, but would not own a painted guitar.”

“I bought this guitar because of its beauty and historical significance.”

And then there were a bunch of commentators that suggested that Martin should stick to guitars and

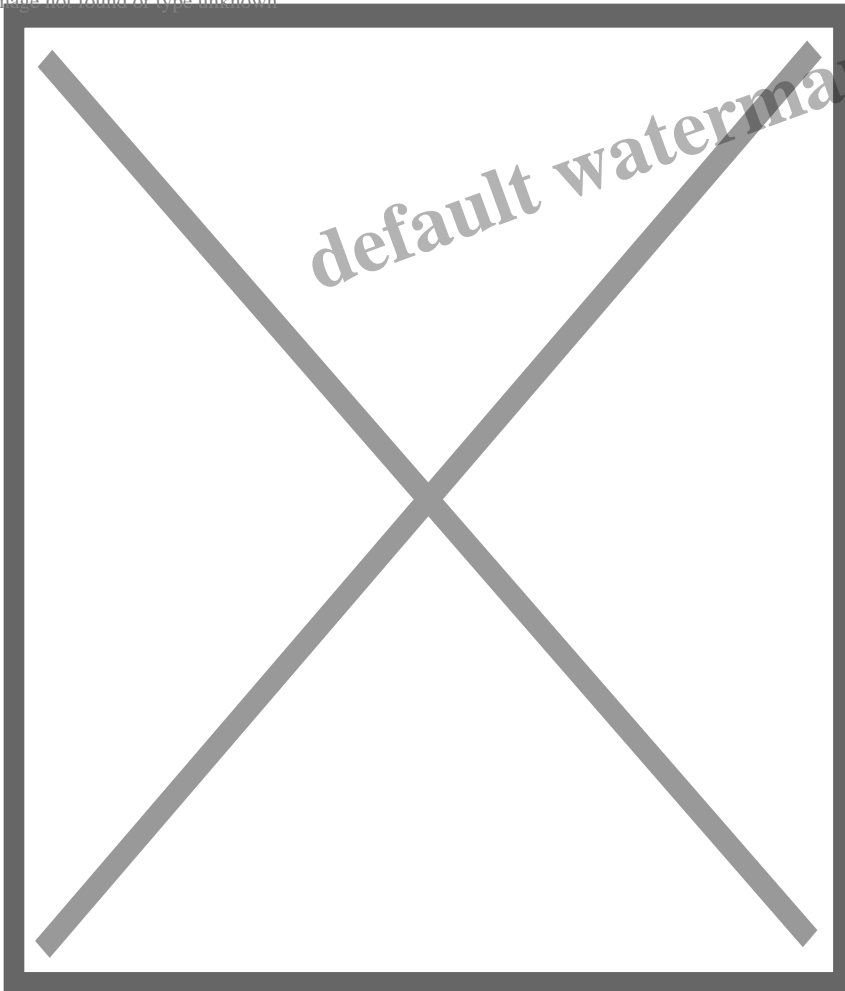
stay out of politics. Music not messages. And a few who stated quite strongly that climate change isn't real anyway.

When I was chatting with Mike Dickinson, we agreed that such chat groups represent a fairly small proportion of people who like owning and playing guitars. They attract the guitar geek and the attention seeker in equal amounts.

So, it's not really surprising that the Earth guitar copped such a varied response on these forums. Guitar players are, after all, just a subset of humanity as a whole, and are unlikely to share similar views on everything. You might think that a love of guitars and music might unite people – and sometimes it does, but often it can't paper over the other fault-lines criss-crossing society.

But again, if the Earth guitar gets discussion going, there's a chance that more people will come on board with the idea that everyone can play a part in tackling the issues facing our wonderful Earth. Music has always been an important medium for carrying messages – the message carried by the Earth guitar is too important to ignore.

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David Bowie's *Space Oddity*, recorded by Commander [Chris Hadfield](#) on board the [International Space Station](#) in 2013 He's playing a [Larrivée](#) Parlor guitar – the first guitar in space – that lives on the ISS. You can watch David Bowie's original version [here](#).

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1. Uncategorized

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