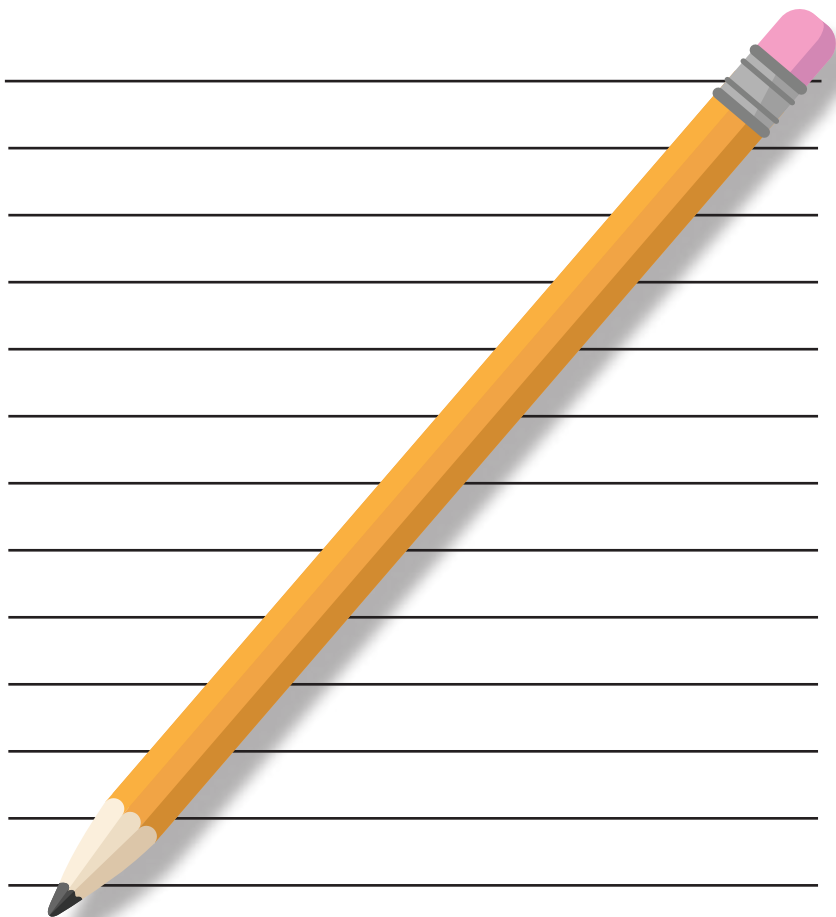




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# WIRED SO



Rock-in closet. Photo: Ryan Moser



# D FOR OUND

**Forget  
Electric  
Ladyland —  
have you  
ever been to  
The Ranch?**

**GARAGE BAND. Audacity. Traverso. Nowadays, every computer comes armed with some “home studio” software. But Scott Franson’s recording setup won’t fit on your laptop — it barely fits in his house.**

The living room furniture is a seven-piece drum kit. The dining room set’s a mix of cabinets and keys. And the cutting-edge gear for mixing and mastering the final product lives in — where else? — the “master bedroom,” where Franson can layer on any number of sounds with millisecond precision.

“When I was a kid, I dreamed of getting into a recording studio someday,” says the lifelong musician and owner of The Ranch, a full-service, 32-track, digital audio production facility. “I never imagined the technology would allow me to live in one.”

Better yet, Franson gets to make a living helping others record their dreams. In fact, just about every local artist has cut tracks, if not complete albums, in this one-story brick structure. (Zack Mexico, Sassagrass String Band, The Dune Billys, and Birddog, to name just a few.) Commercial products include both cable spots and Whalehead walking tours. He even recorded local voices for Warner Brothers to use on the film *Nights in Rodanthe* — right when the neighborhood was in a construction boom.

“When the director came to record, I went over to ask [the construction workers] for their hours so that I could work around them,” Franson recalls. “But when I told them why I was asking, they were like, ‘That’s so cool, we’ll just shut down for that!’”

Of course, Franson’s digs weren’t always the Outer Banks’ answer to Electric Ladyland. When the Richmond native bought the one-story brick structure 20 years back, he just wanted a place to crash after gigs. As the late-night schedule started to get to him, he decided to turn his classically trained guitar skills onto the burgeoning OBX wedding business. But first, he needed a website. And his website had to play samples of his music.

“That was when computers were just starting to be able to record,” says Franson. “I’d never used one before. But I learned. I started building my rig, and it just grew and grew and grew.”

Today, Franson’s place houses more studio equipment than home furnishings. Open the linen closet, and there’s a tube amp where the towels should go. Another walk-in’s strictly for vocals — a Neumann U-87 microphone mounted to catch every whisper. Instead of art, Owens Corning 703 acoustic panels adorn the walls to control sound reflection and “keep the bass from gathering up in the corners.”

And just like most remodels, the work is never really done.

“Some parts are a couple of months old, others are ten years old,” he explains. “As soon as I buy one new thing, I have to replace another so that the pieces can talk to each other. Keeping up with the technology is constant.”

And crucial. Not only do the digital updates keep his gear running smoothly, but they also allow him to send files across the globe — or share work with fellow local producers like former Snuff frontman Chuck Larson and hip-hop specialist Mic Journey. And now, Franson’s software can search through over 90,000 different tones to match any artist’s imagination.

“One keyboard player had this nonorganic, specific sound in her head,” Franson recalls. “I asked her, ‘If you had to name the sound, what would you call it?’ She came up with three or four names, and in five minutes — boom — we had it.”

Of course, it takes more than digital magic to make a proper studio. Franson keeps plenty of traditional hands-on instruments within easy reach. Play bluegrass? A brand-new mandolin hangs on the wall. Want vintage rock tone? The 50-year-old Fender Bassman will knock the bottom out of your bottom end. Even his collection of prize axes stand poised to strike — like a 1986 Paul Reed Smith that’s subbed in on more guitar solos than Franson can count.

**“Often, people are recording their life’s work... Stuff that’s been in their heads for years.”**

Whatever it takes to get the perfect sound. No matter who’s playing. In fact, some nights the jams go well into dawn. After all, there’s a couch to crash on. An icebox full of beer. Two bathrooms in case someone’s using one to pick out a fresh riff.

“Often, what I’m dealing with here is people who are recording their life’s work,” says Franson. “Stuff that’s been in their heads for 20 or 30 years. So it’s amazing to get them in here, do multiple takes, and then put it all together. My whole mantra is to provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. People that come here appreciate that it’s not so stuffy.”

That same relaxed attitude keeps his live game kicking, as Franson does sound engineering for a range of local bands and venues like Bonzer Shack. He also performs solo gigs and jams out with Clarence “Moon” Munden. And, of course, he still plucks classical melodies for weddings all summer long. But ask where his heart is, and he’ll still say it’s at home.

“People ask me, ‘When are you going to do what you really want to do?’” says Franson. “Well this is it. I get to make music in my house every day...And many times, I’ll walk out to get the mail an hour after a band has finished, and they’re still there in the driveway, listening to the stuff we recorded, jamming out and loving it. That feels good, man.” — **Dave Holton**