



Kaden Hill is the audio engineer behind Rare Bird Stereos.

PHOTO BY JEREMY WINSLOW

## Reuse, revamp, repurpose

There's nothing like cruising down the street in a six-fo' with a killer stereo, but what if you could take that stereo with you? **Kaden Hill** is an engineering auteur who manufactures killer, portable stereos sold under the **Rare Bird Stereos** moniker.

The stereos first start with an idea, usually a speaker Hill finds in a junk shop or thrift store. He fashions the found speakers into a variety of vintage vessels: canteens, purses, suitcases, toolboxes. Then, after some time and work—cutting holes, lining the interior with acoustic foam and wood, shellacking to prevent rust, wiring the inside—the end product is an “up-scaled Bluetooth stereo,” as Hill describes it, replete with multiple-day battery life and bass-thumping speakers. SN&R caught up with Hill to talk about Rare Bird Stereos, favorite projects and, of course, music.

### When did Rare Bird start?

Rare Bird was probably about four years ago. I was living out in the woods with some friends, and that was kind of a time in my life where I was learning to ride the waves of the universe. I didn't have a whole lot. I didn't really have a job. I had a friend that was throwing a market in Sacramento, so I started building stuff for it. I was building little wood reclaimed shelves—anything I can find.

My passion has always lied in what I can find around me and what I can make out of it. I kept finding speakers everywhere, just laying on shelves.

For that market, I ended up putting together this plywood, ugly speaker out of random stuff I could find. And it was the hit of the market. Everybody loved that ugly speaker.

### Craziest, fave project?

I love doing custom work. That's probably my favorite ... when there's intention behind it. ... There's a sentimental value. It gives it an actual purpose. The coolest one I got to do will forever be—it was actually for an ex-girlfriend of mine that's a really good, dear friend—was this '80s red TV... I took the actual screen and cut a wood piece to go where the screen was. I Mod Podged this static on it so it looked like a dead TV. I put the speakers in there, I put these different lights in it. I don't know. It was rad and weird.

### How do you select projects?

I had this speaker on my shelf for a year and I had no idea what to do with it, but it sounded amazing and I needed the right vessel for it because it was a really amazing speaker. I'll find speakers and then I'll find vessels—I usually find them separately—and then I kind of wait for them to come together.

### How does your ADD influence your creativity?

[I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD in] my junior year of high school. I was like, “That's why this has sucked.” But I also didn't truly apply myself because academics was never really my jam. I was lucky enough to have teachers who would let me do art projects instead.

I think I've come to know myself a lot better than I ever have, where I understand that I get depressed sometimes, or I understand that some days are crazy, but it's also temporary. Working in the trades, too, you always have so many projects going at one time that it's really easy to be ADD.

### Fave artist, music genre?

I listen to a lot of old country, like Hank Williams. That's my genre. It's a lot of Steely Dan and rock. I love rock. ... And psychedelic rock. □

Visit [rarebirdstereos.com](http://rarebirdstereos.com) for more information and to check out some of Hill's stereos.

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