



GPIW

PIANO SALES • TUNING • RESTORATION

**THE TOP 10 THINGS
WE WISH PEOPLE KNEW BEFORE
THEY CALLED US**

A Quick Note About Us



Gray's Piano World is home to Gavin Gray, master piano technician. Gavin is at the height of a thirty-plus year career servicing instruments for top level musicians, both local and international, and acting as in-house technician for many of Melbourne's premier venues and teaching institutions.

A gifted musician in his own right, he brings a sensitive musicality to his tuning work.

Whether you are a student pianist, or a high level professional, Gavin applies his unique talent and expertise to achieve absolutely the best sound possible for your instrument.

Recent clients include:



The Top 10 Things We Wish People Knew Before They Called Us

A Guide To Buying Secondhand.

We love dealing with secondhand pianos, for several reasons; pianos are one of the few things in life where new is not necessarily better. Many older piano models are excellent and highly sought after (see point 6, below).

We have the expertise to recondition or refurbish to an extremely high standard, and to guarantee our work should we acquire a basically good piano that needs attention. Many of them don't need much (our Yamaha and Kawai pianos come to us in excellent order from a trusted supplier).

We love that a great instrument need not cost an arm and a leg. We love that a great secondhand piano is often cheaper than a mediocre new one, and we want as many people to have quality instruments as possible. At the cheaper end of our range, we love supplying new players and families on a budget with decent instruments that have been thoroughly checked out, given some extra TLC, and will not present any nasty surprises.

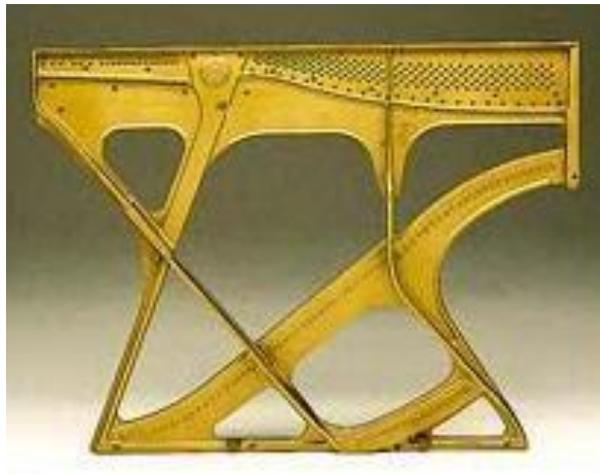
It's wise to look and ask first. Take photos of the inside as well as the cabinet.

We are always more than happy to give advice to people wanting to purchase secondhand, whether you end up purchasing from us or not.

With that in mind, we would like to share some of the most common pitfalls, misunderstandings, and "knowledge gaps" people have when searching for their dream piano on the secondhand market. We hope you find it helpful!

#1 Wooden Frame= Don't Buy The Piano!

The frame of a piano is the main structure to which strings are attached, by which the piano holds its tuning tension. Early pianos were made entirely of wood. The iron frame was patented in 1825 by American Alpheus Babcock, who later worked to develop the grand piano frame in 1843. The advent of the iron frame allowed the strings to be held at much higher tension- typically 20-30 tonnes! – which created a much richer sounding instrument, not to mention more solidly constructed.



Wooden frames crack and warp under pressure, so strings had to be looser, resulting in a softer, less resonant sound. Pianos made this way don't bear up very well under the onslaught of time and usage.

People often call us with a prospective piano in mind, and they quite often say some variation of this: "It's seems like a good piano- **it has an iron frame**"

All modern pianos, and the vast majority on even the "antique" market, have iron frames. **This is not remarkable, or a reason to believe that the piano is of superior quality than most.** Rather, it is a baseline requirement. **An iron frame is standard** - you shouldn't buy anything else.

#2 Loose Tuning Pins = Don't Buy The Piano!

The tuning pins and pinblock are crucial to tuning stability. The tuning pins are the little metal pegs which can be seen sticking out of either wood or metal when you look in the the top without dismantling the piano cabinet. It's worth looking carefully around the pins to see if the pinblock has split or the holes have elongated. This is not always apparent as there are many variations in design. Look for rust in the strings as well.

You can use a tuning device of some sort (there are plenty of apps) to determine how far out of tune the piano is. More than half a semitone and there will almost definitely be issues. A lack of tuning will cause a piano to become badly out of tune over a number of years. Some pianos can be brought back up to pitch with repeated tunings but others can not.

The photo below shows loose pins in their wooden pinblock- you can see the space between the pins and the block, which should not be there. The pins should be tight and snug in the block.

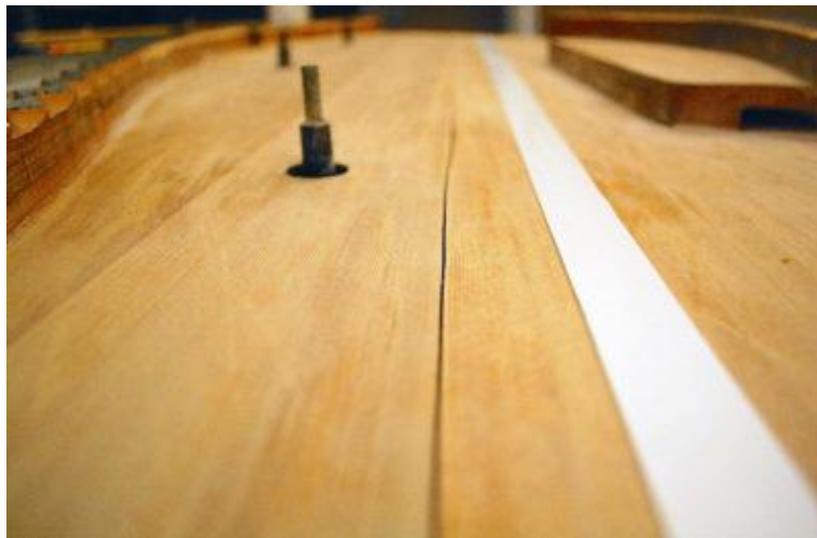


#3 Crack/s in Sound Board=Don't Buy The Piano! (In Most Cases)

The soundboard is the resonant section of timber situated under the frame, which amplifies the strings' vibrations. They sometimes develop cracks over time, either due to poor materials and general construction, or because the piano has been exposed to extremes of humidity and temperature. While some minor cracks are often not much of an issue, if you notice a buzzing or rattling sound from your piano, or if you can see a very obvious split in the wood, the soundboard may be more severely damaged. Some cracks can be fixed without too much compromise on sound, depending where and how large they are.

It can be a costly repair. All old pianos should be checked for this issue.

The image below is an example of a severely cracked soundboard in a grand piano (with strings removed):

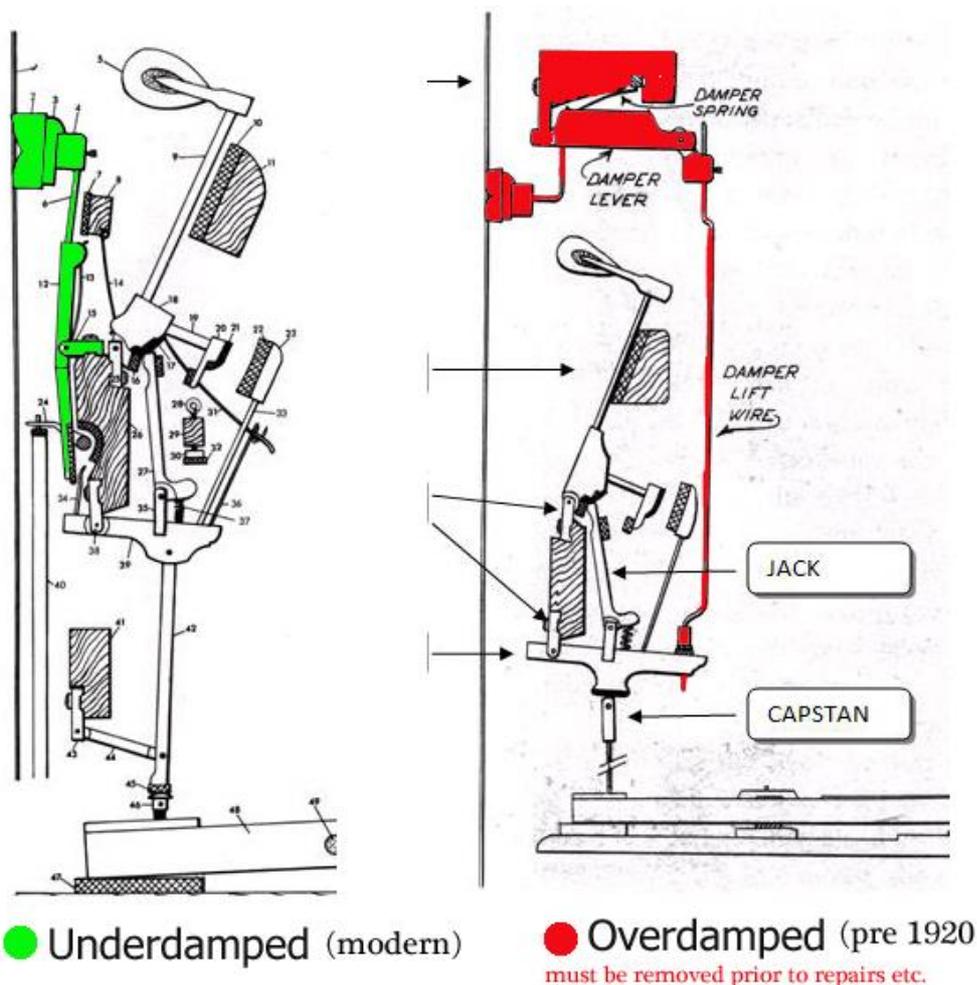


You can get a look at sections of the soundboard when you remove the bottom front panel of an upright piano, or by looking directly in the top of a grand. The strings will be in the way, so look behind at the timber.

#4 Avoid Overdampers!

Overdamper and underdamper are terms that apply only to upright pianos. Dampers are the mechanisms in pianos that cut off the sound of the keys. An overdamper action has the dampers above the hammers. Underdampers, as the name implies, have the dampers contacting the strings below the hammers' striking point.

Dampers are coloured green and red, respectively, in the following diagram.



Overdampers have a wooden beam above both the dampers and the hammers, where the dampers are attached (see in cross section at the top of the right hand diagram, above). This obscures the view of the rest of the mechanism, when viewed from above with the piano lid open.

“Overdamper”, or overdamped action



As opposed to an underdamper/underdamped action:



Overdampers are sometimes also called birdcage pianos, due to the parallel wires running from bottom to top of the action in the front view of the open piano.



These piano actions were designed to produce a certain tone in the piano. This tone is resonant and old fashioned. They are harder to work on and parts are scarce. The cabinets are often quite beautiful and antique. The internals, on the other hand, have usually not aged well. Tuning is often compromised or neglected in these pianos. **We strongly advise against buying an overdampener piano.**

#5 What is an Upright Grand?

This sounds super special, but “Upright Grand” is a just a term that was sometimes used for larger iron framed upright pianos, when iron frames were still an innovation. You will sometimes see it on the body or inside decals of antique pianos, as in this Bersin and Sons example:

Bersin & Sons
MADE BY
Steinmetz & Co.
Upright Grand
New York

Many other grandiose terms have been used, such as Parlor Grand, Concert Model, etc. These were often good pianos, but the titles were simply an aid to selling an innovation at the time.

Occasionally, a more modern piano with an especially large (and therefore resonant) body will have the term applied to it- the Kawai US50 is a good example. These pianos are big and resonant, but otherwise “normal” pianos.

#6 New Doesn't Mean Better

We touched on this point above. We can't tell you the number of people who, when looking at say, a \$5,000 fully serviced, 10 year warranted Yamaha in our store, will say "But I can get a new (insert cheap brand name) piano for the same price!". Yes- you can. It's just likely to be a much poorer quality instrument. There are many cheaper 'commodity' pianos on the market, with exotic sounding names.

A well maintained and/or expertly refurbished quality made instrument is always a better bet than a new, cheaply made instrument with inferior parts and/or construction.

Seriously, this is one area where buying secondhand can save you a tonne of money, and get you something you will adore for years to come- provided you buy from someone who has a track record, and who is prepared to give a generous guarantee that they will personally stand by.

#7 A Nice Cabinet Does Not Make a Nice Instrument

This one might seem obvious, but a pretty cabinet absolutely does not mean the piano is in good order! Where possible always, *always* have somebody qualified have a look inside the instrument and give you at least a basic, verbal appraisal of its condition. In our experience, with private sale there are usually issues that will require attention, even if the piano is decent. You want to at least know what those are before you negotiate.

#8 Don't Buy Sight Unseen

Again, it might seem obvious, but we've dealt with many people who have purchased a piano from eBay/Gumtree etc, transported it, and have then been disappointed with their purchase. Add to that the fact that it's no small business to get rid of a half tonne of wood and iron, no matter how cheap it was - it's a headache. Unless you are paying an expert to act as a buyer (we do offer this service at GPW- please make an appointment via Calendly link to discuss this option), you have to see, touch, and play the instrument yourself.

#9 Beware Brand/Origin Confusion.

Many brand names sound fancy or exotic but aren't great brands in actual fact. Quite a few cheaply made pianos have German sounding names, for example, but are not European at all. Others are known for low quality production, whilst some are decent enough, but have commonly occurring faults or issues.

Here are some common low-quality brands to be wary of:

- Compagnie Concordia
- Bord Cottage Pianos
- Thurmer (often overdamped)
- Bentley (glue issues)
- Hugo Wertheim/Hapsburg (not Australian made Wertheims, which are often quite good, but an early import, usually overdamped)
- Siewert (tuning pinblock issues)
- Lisner (1970s Chinese made- earlier German made Lisner ok)
- Aubert
- Gors & Kallmann
- Fritz Kuhla
- Albert Fahr

There's hundreds of others. Make sure you know the brand name of the piano before you seek professional advice.

#10 Watch Out For Extra Expenses

When buying from a reputable store, instruments have generally been checked, with basic repairs done, and they have had at least some tuning. At Gray's Piano World we usually tune each instrument several times before it is sold, we offer a warranty on all our stock, and a guarantee on repairs. On the other hand, when buying "in the wild" it is not unusual to find that the piano is in far worse condition than advertised, or may not have been high quality in the first place. A large number of old pianos are well overdue for a tune and service, and the cost involved in making it playable can be significant. A number of tunings may be required, and there may also be a range of repairs to be done.

Once you have bought a piano, it will need to be moved to your home, which will incur another fee. Once again, an appraisal is a good idea, so you can know what you might be up for before you purchase. Sometimes sellers will allow you to take a few photographs, which you can use to show someone knowledgeable what kind of piano you are looking at buying. If you are photographing for that purpose, ask to take photos with the top lifted, and also (if possible) with the front panel above the keyboard removed (in the case of an upright). The back of the piano is not a bad idea. The more photos the better.

Recent Client Testimonials:

"Our go-to guy"

Gavin is our go-to guy for all piano servicing and tuning needs. He's meticulous, focused and a true magician when it comes to massaging a well-loved and used piano into perfect, stable, thoroughly-tuned harmony. If what Gavin does for pianos could be done for people, this world would be a magnificent place – till then, keep going to jazz clubs to hear the perfection we can only aspire to.

Megg Evans

Manager at Bennetts Lane Jazz Club, Melbourne

"Thanks Gavin! You're the tune in our piano"

Clare Bowditch

Singer/songwriter

"It's perfect!"

Tori Amos

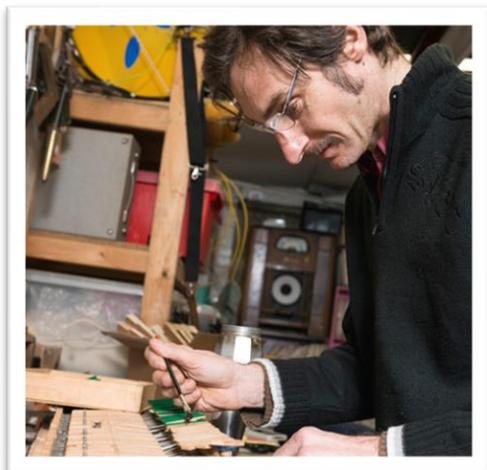
After tune to concert, Hamer Hall, 2014 Australian tour

"He's fantastic!"

Gavin has taken care of my Yamaha piano for many years and managed to stabilize it in some difficult conditions. He's fantastic!

Nat Bartsch

Pianist/composer, Melbourne



Need more help?

Book a complimentary, obligation free call to discuss your piano needs at

<https://calendly.com/grayspianoworld/15min>.

We are dedicated to helping you find your instrument-whether that's through us, or another seller.