



Left: Stuart & Sons' 102-key concert grand in Tasmanian blackheart sassafras; Right: A 97-key intermediate grand in Australian red cedar

Stuart & Sons

Australia's Snowy Mountains might seem like a surprising location for one of the world's finest piano makers, but there in the picturesque town of Tumut you can find the trailblazing workshop of Stuart & Sons.

This boutique enterprise was founded in 1990 by technician and designer Wayne Stuart, whose stated mission is to ensure that the piano keeps evolving. He specialises in creating extended compass instruments using the latest string technology to produce models with 97, 102 and 108 keys. Each of his beautifully hand-crafted instruments is made with native Australian woods, resulting in very striking casework.

Stuart studied at the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music and trained as a piano technician in Australia under the auspices of Yamaha. He went on to establish a training course for technicians in Melbourne while developing his own designs and prototypes, then continued his research at NSW's University of Newcastle. His company was consolidated through a 13-year partnership with Australia's Albert Music that ended in 2014 when Stuart & Sons became fully family owned.

Stuart believes it is 'inconceivable' to limit today's pianos to 88 keys. His largest piano to date is the 9-octave 'Big Beleura', which was unveiled in 2018 at Beleura

House and Garden in Mornington, Victoria. Design innovations required to realise this instrument include the use of composite materials to strengthen elements such as the lid, and nickel-plated wires capable of carrying a higher breaking load than traditional copper-plated wires.

Stuart & Sons' pianos are known for their enhanced tonal richness, arising from the sympathetic resonance of the extra bass strings. Australian pianist Ashley Hribar says, 'The listener *feels* the sound rather than distinguishing the notes. These vibrations give an expected dimension to sound, adding depth and warmth to the lower registers and brilliance to the higher registers.'