



SMOOTH AS TENNESSEE WHISKEY... ...BUT, STILL A FLORIDA BOY.

BY FOND KISER
PHOTOS BY

There are very few actual troubadours left these days. A lost art stolen by the modern over-produced-electronic-inventions of the music industry machine. But, Rob Ellis Peck learned from the best.

Born in Gainesville, Peck spent his younger days bouncing from Florida to Mobile, Alabama, where he spent his summers at his family's original home.



He got his first guitar when he was around eleven or twelve years old (in his mind a late start). The Beatles had just hit the scene and were on the Ed Sullivan Show and he was completely mesmerized. Later, he got his R&B blues influence in Gulf Shores, Alabama at the Flora-bama Lounge when he was only fifteen years old hanging with his older brother. However, the real bee sting happened when he saw the Allman Brothers (then known as The Allman Joys) at The Wreck Bar in Daytona Beach. Duane Allman immediately became his hero. "Every note he played was like...sweet... gold. He didn't overplay. If the song called for that note, that's what he played and nothing else," says Peck. That's where he learned about playing tastefully.

He then started playing in a bunch of bands around Gainesville—an incredible place to grow up and an inspiration in itself. Known then as Hippie City and a music Mecca most people didn't know about, Peck was in the midst of some great musicians that were going to explode out of there. He remembers going to a dance at the Women's Club all dressed up in his little suit and tie. The band performing was called the Amandae Quintet. They performed the Beatles hits "Paper Back Writer" and "Taxman" complete with all the harmonies. He stood by the stage in awe. Two of the members of that band, Bernie Leadon and Don Felder, went to California, became members of Linda Ronstandt's first backup band, and then started a band known as the Eagles. Then there was Mud Crutch, featuring Stan Lynch, Benmont Tench, and Tom Petty who left for California gold to form the Heartbreakers.

Residing just two blocks down from the Pecks was a short bully that everyone was afraid of named Stephen. Rob's older brother dated the bully's sister...Hannah Stills...as in Stephen Stills....of Crosby, Stills and Nash and he was Peck's neighbor.

Peck later scored an audition for country artist Leon Everette. He didn't think much about it when he got the gig, until he got to Nashville. All of the great players there made



his head spin. "I thought I was really good until those players quickly showed me what really good really was," he laughs. When Leon's band opened for George Jones, Peck was called to the Possum's bus. Jones told him he liked the way he played guitar, thought he'd be a great addition to his band and offered him a job. "I'm there. 'Whatever you say, Mr. Jones'" was his reply. Peck later asked Jones if he really did drive his tractor down the interstate to get a twelve pack of beer and he admitted, "Yep, it's true. I did that."

He moved permanently to St. Augustine from Gainesville in 1999, after leaving Nashville in the mid-nineties. He put a band together, had a record deal in the works and decided to move back to Nashville. Then he met a girl, fell in love and that was that, he decided to stay.

St. Augustine was different musically back then. It was very "band oriented." Now it's geared toward acoustic solo performers. There aren't as many venues that full bands can perform in these days. Part of the reason was because of the economy downturn, now the high licensing fees from ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC has really put a pinch on smaller venues.

Peck has many memories and stories from an industry that is extremely volatile. It's been his life's career. He's performed or recorded with many legends such as Bo Diddley, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Little Feat, Merle Haggard, Lou Rawls, Bonnie Raitt, and Jimmy Buffet and the Coral Reefer Band...the list goes on.

While technology has taken over and he misses the energy and spirit of a full band in

the studio and the brotherhood of being on the road constantly, Peck is still performing and bringing great music to the St. Augustine area. You can catch him at various venues around town, but every Thursday he performs at the Matanzas Inlet Bar and Grill with side man Ron Norris. You never know who'll show up and perform a couple of tunes with him. I had the honor of sitting in one Thursday when Ken Block of Sister Hazel dropped by and jammed with us. Hey, was that Ty Pennington I saw in the audience? Who cares? Rob Ellis Peck is on stage. A true Southern music man.

