



“WE REALLY PUT A LOT OF HEART AND SOUL INTO THESE THINGS.” — VINNY FODERA

They can put block inlays in the fingerboard instead of dots, pick different hardware and finishes—a lot of tone-shaping and aesthetic options are available to create an entirely unique instrument.”

The Imperial Custom shown here was built to specifications chosen by Eric Martin of Memphis’ Martin Music, “a dear friend of ours that Vin has been working with for over 20 years,” DeSalvo says. With this particular instrument, Fodera explains, “We were shooting for a very familiar tonal blend, that being a mahogany body and neck, with a maple cap and rosewood fretboard. It’s one of those time-proven magic mixtures of wood that works for a lot of people.”

Given Fodera’s reputation for building instruments that boast tonally and visually stunning—as well as often exotic—woods, the company put its own twist on the “familiar blend” used here. Thus, the one-piece mahogany body is capped with a striking 1/4-inch-thick piece of Japanese maple, “a very, very beautiful wood,” Fodera says. “It’s a hard maple, so tonally it gave us the sonic character we were looking for. Japanese maple trees tend to be small, so it’s challenging to find chunks big enough to make a guitar top. But we have dealers all over the place that know if they ever come across something like that to give us a call.”

The mahogany neck is constructed using the

three-piece quartersawn design approach that Fodera has long employed on its basses, offering increased stability and “virtually eliminating the chance of the neck ever twisting,” Fodera says. The neck is set into the body by way of Fodera’s “heel-less” dovetail joint. “So your thumb can go with great ease uninterrupted all the way up the neck, and you can actually play chords up in the highest position much easier than you can on most other similar types of guitars.” The rosewood fingerboard is a solid slab of CITES-certified Brazilian, sourced from beams used in the construction of a house. “So this particular batch was reclaimed dimensional lumber, which is kind of wild,” DeSalvo notes.

The reverence for classic six-string design with a twist is also reflected in the Imperial’s pickups. As befits an instrument with a single-cut body and maple cap, the Imperial boasts a dual-humbucker configuration, only the pickups are proprietary models designed in conjunction with Seymour Duncan. “Seymour and his team have been very good about working with us to give us something that’s a little bit different and that suits our purposes,” Fodera says. The two humbuckers in this Imperial, he continues, “are similar to Seymour Duncan’s SH-11 neck and SH-14 bridge pickups. But then we fiddle with different magnet types, different windings, and trying to shape certain frequencies. Depending on what body wood the pickups are going into, we’ll make subtle changes that are custom matched to the tone of the particular guitar.”

They’re also smartly matched to its aesthetics. The two humbuckers are set in rosewood pickup rings that complement the fingerboard, and finished with gold pickup covers that pair nicely with the gold volume and tone knobs and Sperzel locking tuners. Another nice touch is the proprietary Brazilian rosewood tailpiece,

which is fitted with a solid brass insert for extra heft. “The tailpiece bolts directly to the top of the body, so there’s great transmission of energy and vibration from the string directly into the instrument,” Fodera says. “And the design also gives the guitar a unique appearance.”

Other features contributing to the Imperial’s unique appearance are cupcake knobs (“a bit of an unusual shape, but it just seemed to fit,” Fodera says), a custom abalone butterfly logo headstock inlay, mother-of-pearl block fretboard markers, and black Anigre pin-striping around the body. Of this last attribute, Fodera explains, “The pinstripe separates the top from the body in an elegant way. It just always looked rather cheap to me to not have a laminate between the cap and the body, so we started doing it back in 1983 when no one else was doing it. Now it’s maybe a little more common. But the idea is to create contrast and to offer something that’s pleasing to the eye.”

This Imperial Custom, which is currently being offered for sale, is one of only 10 or so guitars Fodera built last year. “I don’t think we’ll build more than 25 or 30 this year,”

DeSalvo notes. “And that’s against maybe 400 basses. But we’re in the guitar space for the long haul.” As for whether Fodera will ever be as synonymous with guitars as the company is with basses? “I would like to hope so,” he says. “But what’s more important for us is that we’re recognized as a company that, whether it’s a guitar or a bass, is serious about making the best handbuilt instrument that can possibly be made.”

“We really put a lot of heart and soul into these things,” Fodera adds. “We take a lot of pride in what we do, and we don’t crank out stuff for profit, or try to do something just to make a splashy new look. We like to create instruments that really help the musician, because we’re cut from the same cloth, really. Whenever a guitar or bass player comes to the shop, they get very excited to see us do what we do. And I tell them I get the same excitement when I go to see them play. We’re part of the same circle. So it’s a beautiful feedback loop.”

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List Price: \$7,995
Fodera, fodera.com