

HALL OF FAME

THE SADOWSKY JIM HALL SIGNATURE MODEL ARCHTOP ALLOWS YOU TO COP THE CELEBRATED JAZZ GUITARIST'S PATENTED TONES – BUT PLAYING HIS LICKS PROVES RATHER MORE CHALLENGING, AS PAUL ALCANTARA DISCOVERS...

You may be familiar with ... New York-based luthier, Roger Sadowsky, from the solidbody guitars and basses that he has built for such major league players as Walter Becker (Steely Dan), Nathan East (Eric Clapton), Jason Newsted (Ozzy Osbourne), Lenny Kravitz, Chuck Rainey and Marcus Miller. Roger also works as a repair man and has looked after jazz legend Jim Hall's instruments, including his Jimmy D'Aquisto archtop, for over 15 years.

Now the two men have collaborated on the design and development of the Jim Hall Signature Model archtop we see before us. The guitar is built in Japan at the Sadowsky Tokyo workshop under the supervision of skilled luthier Yoshi Kikuchi. "Yoshi spent a year working at Sadowsky Guitars, NYC, before returning to Japan to set up and manage the Sadowsky Tokyo shop," Roger comments. "He is one of the most highly respected instrument makers in Japan and all of the guitars are personally inspected and set up by him before they are shipped." Let's take a closer look.

BODY & NECK

The Jim Hall Signature Model features a 16-inch-wide laminated body with the arch of the top and back formed from pressed plywood rather than carved from solid timber. Roger Sadowsky believes that this type of construction produces superior results to solid timber when the guitar is played through an amplifier, an opinion that is apparently shared by Jim Hall. The use of lightweight maple ply for the top and back is intended to provide more acoustic response, while

a reduced body depth (2.75 inches as opposed to the 3.375 of a Gibson ES-175) helps to control feedback.

All of the body edges are multiple bound in black and white plastic, though the fact that the binding has not been scraped clean prior to application of the clear coat creates the impression that the body is bound in wood. This effect, which is intentional, replicates the appearance of Jim Hall's original D'Aquisto archtop. The guitarist apparently visited Jimmy D'Aquisto's workshop while the luthier was working on his guitar. It was in the spray booth at the time and Jimmy commented that it would look better once the colour coat had been scraped off the binding. Jim Hall, however, liked the guitar as it was and it was left that way.

The neck, which is attached with a dovetail joint, meets the body at the 14th fret, while a rounded treble side cutaway improves access to the top end of the fingerboard. Neck and headstock are crafted from a single piece of maple, with an additional maple section fitted beneath the elevated fingerboard extension that sticks out over the body.

Roger has apparently duplicated the neck profile of Jim Hall's D'Aquisto and the result is comfortable and inviting – a little slimmer than the neck shape of a classic Gibson, and eminently playable.

The smooth black ebony fingerboard has been left plain (black side dots positioned along the white binding prevent you from getting lost), while the bound asymmetrical headstock displays the Sadowsky logo inlaid in pearl together with Jim Hall's signature in gold script. Gold Gotoh tuners with black ebony buttons and a wooden truss rod cover complete the picture.

GBINFO



SADOWSKY JIM HALL SIGNATURE MODEL

PRICE: £2950
BUILT IN: Japan
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75 inches)
NUT WIDTH: 44.5mm (1.75 inches)
STRING SPACING AT NUT: 36.8mm (1.45 inches)
BODY: Maple, 5-ply laminate
NECK: Maple
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305mm radius (12 inches)
FRETS: 21 medium
PICKUPS: 1 x Sadowsky/DiMarzio JH humbucker
CONTROLS: 1 x volume, 1 x tone
BRIDGE: Ebony
STRING SPACING AT BRIDGE: 51mm (2 inches)
MACHINEHEADS: Gotoh, gold
WEIGHT: 2.8kg (6.25lbs)
FINISHES: Nitro-cellulose 'Jim Hall violin sunburst' (shown)
CASE: Hardshell case supplied
LEFT-HANDERS: Available on special order

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■ This nitro-cellulose finish is called the 'Jim Hall violin sunburst'



■ As with most archtop bridges, the Sadowsky Jim Hall's is adjustable only for height

"THE GUITAR'S APPEARANCE IS CLEAN AND UNCLUTTERED"

All 21 frets, which extend over the fingerboard binding without Gibson style 'nibs', are expertly polished and profiled, while the nut slots are cut to the correct depth for a comfortable action in the lower positions. Taken overall, the guitar's appearance is clean and uncluttered – perhaps a nod to the minimalist aesthetics of Jim Hall's original D'Aquisto.

HARDWARE & PARTS

The choice of ebony for the pickguard, tuner buttons, control knobs, bridge and tailpiece picks up on the theme established by the fingerboard, as well as complementing the body's glossy orange-brown nitro-cellulose finish. Referred to as the 'Jim Hall violin sunburst', this finish is available only on the Jim Hall Signature Model. A virtually identical guitar called, slightly confusingly, the Jim Hall Model (which has no signature on the headstock and traditional scraped binding) can be had in blonde and various sunburst finishes.



As on most archtops, the bridge is adjustable for height only, but the upper section, which forms the saddle, is pre-compensated to provide accurate string intonation. The guitar is equipped with a single gold-plated humbucker, custom-wound for Sadowsky by DiMarzio, positioned at the end of the fingerboard.

According to Roger Sadowsky, the decision to fit a built-in rather than floating pickup was taken in part to make it easy for inquisitive players to experiment with their sounds. "As a guitar maker, it always bothered me how difficult it was for a player with a floating pickup to try a different pickup on his guitar. It is always a very labour-intensive procedure, and there are few pickup choices."

While this reviewer would agree that a built-in pickup offers far greater choice, the difficulty of replacing a floating pickup appears to be rather overstated. A floating pickup (usually attached to the pickguard or the fingerboard extension) is generally preferred on solid-topped archtops, as it obviates the need to make a hole in the guitar. The fact is (as Sadowsky points out on his website) that, in the

case of a laminated instrument, a built-in pickup has a negligible effect on either the tone or the structural integrity of the top.

The electronics are straightforward, comprising tone and volume controls that are body mounted. Top-notch components are used throughout, including high-quality potentiometers and a Switchcraft jack socket.

SOUNDS

The Jim Hall Signature Model arrived impeccably set up and plays well straight out of the case. Played acoustically, it produces a pleasing

PERFECT PICKUP

THE JH HUMBUCKER WAS DEVELOPED SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS GUITAR



■ The Jim Hall Signature Model's JH humbucker is custom-wound for Sadowsky by DiMarzio.

When designing this pickup, DiMarzio's Steve Blucher analysed the Guild/DeArmond pickup fitted to Jim Hall's Jimmy D'Aquisto guitar. The resulting pickup, which is exclusive to this guitar, is said to capture much of the original's even response and transparent sound. This month, and every month, Steve Blucher is on hand to answer your pickup queries as part of Larry DiMarzio's column in *Guitar Buyer* – see page 36 of this issue.



DETAILS

A HIGH-QUALITY ARCHTOP WITH A SMART, MODERN FEEL



■ The scratchplate is ebony, just like the fingerboard, bridge, tailpiece and tuner keys



■ Gold-plated machineheads add the finishing touch to the one-piece maple neck – nice



■ The raised fingerboard makes a cutaway even more essential for top-fret access



GBOPINION

SADOWSKY JIM HALL SIGNATURE MODEL

GOLD STARS

- ★ Easy playing experience
- ★ Top quality sounds
- ★ Classy, understated looks

BLACK MARKS

- Relatively high price

IDEAL FOR...

Serious jazz players with a taste for quality

tone with more volume than you might expect from a guitar with a laminated top. Nevertheless, it remains the sound of an unplugged electric instrument, and aside from late night practise sessions at home, I can think of few situations in which this guitar could be used productively without an amplifier.

Plugged in, the JH Signature certainly comes into its own. Tailored to complement the guitar's natural voice, the DiMarzio humbucker produces a smooth, warm tonality with outstanding balance across the instrument's entire sonic range. Single note lines jump from the speakers, while the complex chords beloved of jazz players are clearly articulated.

The volume and tone controls exhibit a smooth audio taper that eliminates the jumpiness characteristic of lesser-quality potentiometers. With a single pickup guitar this is an important consideration, allowing as it does a wide variety of subtle shadings. To be honest, the absence of a bridge pickup doesn't bother us, though if offered as an option it might broaden the model's appeal.

So how does this guitar measure up against an archtop carved from solid timber when amplified? To my ear, it presents a voice that is more assertive – more electric even – but slightly lacking the carved guitar's woody resonance and open quality. Ultimately, it's neither better nor worse, just different.

The Jim Hall Signature Model's resistance to feedback is about as good as a Gibson ES-175 (a guitar that Steve Howe somehow manages to use in a rock context) but don't expect to escape feedback problems if you intend to play at high volume levels. Having said that, you shouldn't encounter any problems at the level of the average jazz gig.

GBCONCLUSION

AN EXCELLENT JAZZ GUITAR BUT AN EXPENSIVE ONE

■ All told, the Jim Hall Signature model is a thoughtfully designed guitar that plays effortlessly and sounds very good indeed. Our only quibble is with the price. You won't get much change from three grand, which seems a lot of money for a Japanese-built laminated instrument.

Building an electric archtop instrument from laminated timber is neither new nor controversial. Gibson's ever-popular ES-175 – a favourite of players from Steve Howe and Pat Metheny to Joe Pass and indeed Jim Hall himself – has been built from maple ply since its introduction in 1949, making the Sadowsky part of a long and well established tradition. There's no question of this guitar's quality either, in terms of build or sound – those who can afford it will not be disappointed. **GB**

GBRATINGS

SADOWSKY JIM HALL SIGNATURE MODEL

BODY & NECK	★★★★
HARDWARE & PARTS	★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★
SOUNDS	★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★☆☆
GBVERDICT	★★★★