

# **FENDER® CUSTOM SHOP COMMEMORATES 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY MILESTONE WITH FOUNDERS DESIGN PROJECT DEBUTING AT 2017 WINTER NAMM**

**EXCLUSIVE COLLECTION SHOWCASES GUITARS DESIGNED BY  
EIGHT, LEGENDARY FOUNDING MASTER BUILDERS OF FENDER  
CUSTOM SHOP**

**HOLLYWOOD, CALIF. (January 19, 2017)** – In honor of Fender Custom Shop's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) and its guitar luthiery pioneers have reunited for 2017 Fender Custom Shop Founders Design: eight guitars, each designed by one of eight visionary Founding Master Builders who kick-started the iconic Custom Shop – known as the “dream factory.” One of the most exclusive and coveted collections in the Shop's history, only 30 units of each design will be built by a team of artisans at Fender Custom Shop in Corona, Calif. and released throughout 2017. The monthly rollout will begin with designs by legendary founding fathers that shaped the Custom Shop legacy, Michael Stevens and John Page in March and April – respectively – followed by creations from Founding Master Builders George Blanda, Fred Stuart, J.W. Black, Mark Kendrick, Alan Hamel and Gene Baker. Thanks to the passion, commitment and unique legacy of these Founding Master Builders who built the Custom Shop from the ground up over 30 years – it has become widely recognized as a leading epicenter of creativity and craftsmanship in the music industry, and the best Fender has to offer.

Recognizing the invaluable contribution the original Founding Master Builders have made to the luthier's art and guitar history, Fender asked each to unleash their imagination and design their dream guitar, with no limits. Alternative tone woods, hand-wound custom pickups, hybrid designs—anything they could dream up was fair game. Along the way, legendary rock and roll photographer and partner at the Morrison Hotel Gallery Henry

Diltz, who's photographed Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix and countless rock royalty, captured these illustrious instruments and their creators through his lens. In addition to Diltz' photography, Fender will curate the captivating stories of these Founding Master Builders in a documentary film highlighting Fender Custom Shop's roots. The Fender Custom Shop Founders Design 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Documentary is slated for release in February 2017.

"These Custom Shop Founding Master Builders are truly the best of the best in guitar craftsmanship worldwide," said Mike Lewis, Vice President Product Development, Fender Custom Shop. "When you look at their work side-by-side, each Founding Master Builder's design style is classic, but distinctly different. It's a lot like looking at a Monet, a Picasso – and 30 years later you can vividly see their influence in the Shop's creations – their contribution has shaped what Fender Custom Shop is known for today."

For thirty years, the Fender Custom Shop has been known for creating instruments as legendary as the players who wield and inspire them, from Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Pete Townshend to James Burton and Stevie Ray Vaughan, among many others. Working tirelessly in Corona, Calif., this dedicated band of builders lived, slept and breathed nothing but guitars and basses. Devoting themselves to combining art and science with their limitless vision and unmatched skill, the Founding Master Builders began a legacy of crafting peerless instruments that can easily stand on their own as works of art.

"Fender Custom Shop represents the very best in Fender creativity and quality," said Fender CEO Andy Mooney. "The early contributions of these Founding Master Builders started a tradition of world-class excellence at Fender and laid the foundation for the Shop's undeniable reputation for creating the world's finest custom guitars for both players and collectors."

In addition to Founders Design, a host of Fender Custom Shop 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary products are planned throughout 2017, including the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary-themed Prestige Series, also debuting at Winter NAMM, as well as the 2017 Collection and Custom Team-Built guitars, including: the Artisan, Time Machine and Postmodern Series; Limited Edition Collection, Telecaster®, Precision Bass® and HLE Strat – the very first special run by the Custom Shop; and Eric Clapton Journeyman Relic® Signature Strats, which mirror current Clapton model specs, but with all lacquer Journeyman Relic finish over an ash body. All Fender Custom

Shop guitars created in 2017 will feature the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo, making each handcrafted instrument an essential piece for any collection.

The Founders Design series ranges from approximately \$5,450.00 - \$8,400.00 and will be rolled out throughout the year at select Authorized Showcase dealers. To view the Fender Custom Shop Founders Design 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Documentary trailer, [click here](#). For more information, visit [www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com) and [www.fendercustomshop.com](http://www.fendercustomshop.com).

### **2017 Fender Custom Shop Founders Design models include:**

#### ***Michael Stevens Founders Design Esquire®: March 2017 - \$5,500.00***

The inspiration for Michael Stevens' Founders Design Esquire stems from his vintage roots at Guitar Resurrection, where he and Larry Jameson loved blonde ash Stratocasters with gold hardware; they called these instruments Mary Kayes. "Some sassafras slipped into the run of '54 Strats, early '54s, that many people, for years, have been trying to figure out what it was," he said. It is Stevens' belief that it was quartersawn, one-piece sassafras. So, instead of ash, the Founders Design Esquire is one-piece sassafras. A first glance, the front is classic Fender, with the control cavity switched backward. However, Stevens insists that players will discover other custom features once they pick up the guitar and take a closer look. Under the bridge cover is a pickup in a left-handed bridge – reversing the traditional Telecaster orientation – and when the guitar is turned over, there's a cutaway for the player's wrist and thigh, adding comfort in the sitting position. "A lot of it is ergonomic," he said. "My thing, my style, pretty much is form follows function. Bauhaus. I love those guys."

Stevens worked for Fender Custom Shop from 1986 to 1990, when he moved to Alpine, West Texas, where he again opened his own shop, primarily building guitars, basses and mandolins and offering specialty designs to players around the world. He still makes music – participating in cowboy gatherings, playing rhythm guitar and singing.

#### ***John Page Founders Design Double F-hole Esquire®: April 2017 - \$7,200.00***

John Page designed the original concept for his Founders Design Double F-Hole Thinline Esquire during his early days at the Custom Shop. For the past 30 years, this design has been called the "Page-o-caster" and only a handful were previously made. An avid

guitarist, singer and songwriter, Page wanted an electric guitar that was very acoustic and resonant, one he could write with and play without plugging in. It's always been his goal to create "uniquely familiar" instruments that inspire the player, in an effort to not lose sight of the passion for the music that is being created. The Double F-Hole Thinline Esquire has a roasted Genuine Mahogany body and natural finish. It features John Page's JP Woodtone ebony saddles, and in lieu of the original "Page-o-caster" spruce top, Page chose a highly figured koa top as a tribute to his mentor Freddie Tavares, a creator of the Fender Stratocaster. "He was my mentor," he said. "That was my little piece of Freddie that I wanted to put in there just so I never forget where I came from, and who I owe it to."

Page has now been designing and building guitars for over 40 years. Post Fender, he continues to build a limited number of custom guitars at his John Page Guitars workshop, which he founded in 2006 – nestled in the forest of Southern Oregon. In 2014, he joined forces with Howard Swimmer, Founder & CEO of HRS Unlimited, to create John Page Classic, in order to make his elite custom designs more accessible.

### ***George Blanda Founders Design Jazzmaster®: May 2017 – \$6,650.00***

As an R&D guru, Blanda's creative process has always centered on fixing players' problems – looking for a fusion of fit, form, function and emotional response to get a guitar or bass right. "I've always been a fan of the golden age of industrial design, from the '30s up to the '50s and even '60s," said Blanda. His Founders Design Jazzmaster is inspired by the classic image he has of an early '60s Jazzmaster – a white guitar with white pickups, a tortoise shell pickguard and rosewood fretboard. The Founders Design Jazzmaster with modified pickups features a White Blonde ash body, giving an all-white appearance, but with some visible wood grain. The pickguard and fretboard are both crafted from dyed and stabilized maple burl wood, which is reminiscent of tortoise shell but with more depth, movement and a splash of color. The Jazzmaster comes with a custom kit and G&G plush case.

Blanda has been a Fender employee since 1985, amassing more than 30 years at the company.

### ***Fred Stuart Founders Design Herringbone Telecaster®: June 2017 – \$8,400.00***

Fred Stuart's Founders Design Herringbone Telecaster is inspired by the pre-World War II Martin® Herringbone D28 guitar, from which he took a motif and applied it to a Telecaster. After playing in bluegrass bands over the years, he saw guitar players venturing into electric music switch from a Martin D28 to a Telecaster. Both, he says, have that kind of "initial defining quality." The Founders Design Herringbone Telecaster is made of a two-piece roasted ash '52 Telecaster body and a Bear Claw Sitka Spruce top with white herringbone-purfling binding. Other features include an original Fred Stuart design single-ply Tortoiseshell pickguard and Fred Stuart's Custom Blackguard Telecaster single-coil bridge and neck pickups. Stuart primarily focuses on aesthetics and detail in his design, applying that to the Herringbone Telecaster. "You can never put too much attention to detail," he said. "I have a motto: I'd rather be accused of copying quality than creating mediocrity."

After his work with Custom Shop from 1987 to 2001, Stuart and Alan Hamel started the A&F Guitar Company. He's since run his own shop, building, winding/making pickups, doing restorations and relicing guitars. To date, Stuart has been playing, repairing and building guitars for the likes of Jimmy Page, Billy Gibbons and others for nearly thirty years – fifteen of which were spent at Fender.

### ***J.W. Black Founders Design Stratocaster®: July 2017 - \$6,950.00***

J.W. Black always thought his time at Fender was completed, until he got the call to design a guitar for Fender Custom Shop's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017. Outside of his work with artists for Fender Custom Shop, Black built guitars for a large number of doctor/lawyer clientele. "They were a weekend warrior guitar player collector group, and when you talked to them, you knew they were making a special gift for themselves," he said. Black's Founders Design Stratocaster is inspired by this FMT "figured maple top" doctor/lawyer model he became known for. The '50s-style Stratocaster features a lightweight ash body with a Tobacco Burst color. Players will immediately notice the 5A quilt maple top true to his FMT models, alongside a 5A birdseye maple neck and '50s Stratocaster headstock. The golden hardware includes vintage-style staggered tuning machines. "It's still about Leo and how he served the musician," he said. "It's taking his greatest designs and just adding modern twists, artist input, player input, and coming up with something that honors his original concept, but brings it up to standards for the modern player."

Black worked at the Shop from 1989-1999, and since his departure from Fender in 2002, he has painted for other builders and guitar companies. He also restores pre-1969 Fender guitars for a few, select vintage guitar dealers across the country and builds traditionally-influenced, Fender-style instruments with modern touches for friends in Japan.

***Mark Kendrick Founders Design Stratocaster®: August 2017 - \$7,450.00***

Mark Kendrick looks for inspiration all around him, finding creative ideas from the sky, sunsets and sunrises – to the California coast and Technicolor movies. His Founders Design Stratocaster is an amalgam of the work he did during his time at the Custom Shop – focusing on simplicity, as well as his three core design elements: color, lines and sound. The golden teal sparkle burst with transparent walnut back and sides is inspired by the “Cholo low-rider culture” out of Santa Ana during the '70s. The Stratocaster will feature three Mark Kendrick OEM Strat pickups, and the control plate is a tip of the hat to George Fullerton, who did something similar but less characteristic to a Stratocaster pickguard, on an unreleased '50s guitar. Taking on a vintage feel, the Stratocaster features nickel/chrome hardware with vintage-style staggered tuning machines and an American Vintage Synchronized Tremolo bridge.

Kendrick officially left the Shop as a Senior Master Builder and Quality Advisor in January 2016 after working there since 1991. He still continues to pursue all things guitar, namely, his own vision of creating “wonderfully electric” guitar sounds. Under Mark Kendrick Design, he’s been working on pedals, as well as some guitars coming soon in 2017.

***Alan Hamel Founders Design Sparkle Telecaster®: September 2017 - \$6,000.00***

The Alan Hamel Founders Design Sparkle Telecaster is inspired by the signature sparkle finishes that originally brought him into the Fender Custom Shop. “Everything about this guitar was ideas that I already had running around in my head,” he said. “I didn't need to really think about it too long, because I automatically knew what I wanted to do.” In Alan’s true retro, neo-vintage style, all hardware on the alder and ash Telecaster is vintage-style chrome, except for the compensated brass bridge saddles. He also opted for his signature sparkle finish – black sparkle burst. Hamel is most-excited about the pickups; the neck

pickup is a variation of the Twisted Tele neck pickup, while the bridge pickup is a replica of an early model Broadcaster pickup with specifications coming from Hamel's research for the Blackguard book. By using a special five-way switch and wiring designed for this project, players will be able to pre-set a blend of both pickups, in addition to the standard Tele switching.

After working at the Custom Shop from 1992 to 2000, Hamel and Fred Stuart started the A&F Guitar Company, building their own guitar designs, in addition to making and rewinding pickups. In 2003, A&F folded, and Hamel began working on guitars out of his house – building and selling guitar pickups, as well as doing some restorations. Today, Hamel lives in Redlands, California and continues to find design inspiration from magazines, cars and motorcycles – a testament to his automotive roots.

### **Gene Baker Founders Design “Stelegaster”: October 2017 – \$5,450.00**

Gene Baker's Fender Custom Shop 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary “Stelegaster” was inspired by the early mashups of the Stratocaster and Telecaster from Mike Bump, his former apprentice and now-R&D guru at Fender. “I just always felt that it belongs at Fender,” he said. “When you look at the model, just about everything is the Strat and the Tele, 50/50, right up the center line – mirror images of each other when you look at it. It looks very vintage and very familiar and friendly, although it makes you take a second thinking, ‘Whoa, what is that?’” The model follows Baker's “modern vintage” style – taking the best of both models to maximize form, fit, function and flow. The Stratocaster/Telecaster body is lightweight ash with a wide-fade Chocolate 3-Tone Sunburst color. The quartersawn maple neck features a multi-tier Telecaster-over-Stratocaster headstock, bone nut and Founders Design decal with Gene Baker's signature on the back of the headstock. Baker opted for nickel/chrome hardware with vintage-style tuning machines and American Vintage Synchronized Tremolo, but chose modern Telecaster wiring.

After working at the Custom Shop from 1993 to 1999, Baker eventually left Fender in order to apply his unique expertise to his own nameplate, Baker Guitars USA, which closed in 2003. He later worked at Ernie Ball/Music Man for a year as an engineer and production trouble shooter, and opened Fine Tuned Instruments in 2004, which gave birth to his b3 Guitars brand. He was a Chief Engineer/Master Builder for Premier Builders Guild from 2009 to

2015, but retained possession of his b3 brand and joined forces in 2016 with Roscoe Guitars, where he is currently a partner.

*For technical specs, additional information on new Fender products and to find a retail partner near you, visit [www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com). Join the conversation on social media by following @Fender.*

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**Fender Media Contact:**

Christina Stejskal

Head of Communications

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation

Email: [CStejskal@fender.com](mailto:CStejskal@fender.com)

## ABOUT FENDER

Since 1946, Fender has revolutionized music and culture as one of the world's leading musical instrument manufacturers, marketers, and distributors. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC)—whose portfolio of owned and licensed brands includes Fender®, Squier®, Gretsch® guitars, Jackson®, EVH®, Charvel®, Bigsby®, and PreSonus® – follows a player-centric approach to crafting the highest-quality instruments and digital experiences across genres. Since 2015, Fender's digital arm has introduced a new ecosystem of products and interactive experiences to accompany players at every stage of their musical journey. This includes innovative apps and learning platforms designed to complement Fender guitars, amplifiers, effects pedals, accessories, and pro-audio gear, and inspire players through an immersive musical experience. FMIC is dedicated to unlocking the power of musical expression for all players, from beginners to history-making legends. In 2026, Fender celebrates 80 years of giving artists “wings to fly,” carrying on the vision of its founder, Leo Fender, and connecting players through a shared love of music.

## CONTACT DETAILS

### GLOBAL MEDIA INQUIRIES

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation  
[press@fender.com](mailto:press@fender.com)

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