

GROSH RETRO CLASSIC

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By Art Thompson

Don Grosh may be a new name to some of you, but he's been kicking up sawdust in the Southern California guitar-building scene for ten years. Don's quality instruments have become popular with several big name players including studio hotshots Randy Jacobs and Michael Landau. The Retro Classic (\$1,850; as tested with case, \$2,140), a vintage-Strat-style ax, features a lightweight, solid-alder body expertly finished in dark green metallic catalyzed lacquer. Its straight-grained maple neck has a 10"-radius rosewood fingerboard fitted with tall, immaculately finished 6105 frets. Very hip Gotoh Kluson-style locking tuners and a standard string tree complete the Headstock details. The two-screw, Gotoh fulcrum-style bridge is modified with a nylon bushing to help prevent trem arm slop. The Retro's welded truss rod is accessible from the body end of the neck without removing the pickguard- a welcome deviation from vintage specs.

The Retro has Lindy Fralin pickups in the neck and middle positions, and a specially wound 7k ohm Fralin at the bridge. The neat control scheme offers volume, tone, 5-position selector, and a blend knob in the last tone position. This allows you to mix in the bridge pickup with the neck pickup, or vice versa, depending on whether the pickup selector is in the first or fifth position. Of course, you can also have all three pickups on simultaneously in the second or fourth notches. A very cool feature!

Acoustically, the Retro is one of the beefiest and most buttery-sounding Strat-style axes we've ever heard. It really nails that aged magic usually absent in new instruments. Plugged into any of our amps, the Grosh yielded rich, complex, and incredible well-balanced tones. The Fralins are bright and sweet, and the blend control is a godsend for balancing the neck and bridge pickups. The Retro Classic is a superior choice for players who crave creamy Eric Johnson tones or for anyone who wants the sound and feel of an old Fender. This guitar plays exceedingly well, and the smooth, precise trem gave us no tuning headaches.

Don Grosh has really nailed the vintage formula, and the Retro earns our highest rating. You can follow many trails searching for a fine original or replica Strat, but it's doubtful you'll find anything that sounds or plays better than the Grosh.