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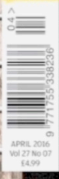
A glorious Gibson semi with five decades on the clock gets a workout

at home with Bonamassa

*Exclusive access to Joe's private collection
& the guitars that made the new album*



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at home with Bonamassa

On the eve of the release of his 12th studio solo album, *G&B* visits the hardest working guitar player in showbusiness at his California home to see the guitars that made *Blues Of Desperation* take flight...

Story Chris Vinnicombe | Photography Eleanor Jane



Practice, practice, practice. That's the old joke goes, is the way you get to Carnegie Hall. Yet after a pair of sold-out acoustic performances at the legendary Midtown Manhattan concert venue in January, the biggest challenge for Joe Bonamassa was getting back. 22-24 January 2016 saw a huge storm dump record-breaking levels of snow on the eastern US. With a New York City travel ban in place and tens of thousands of flight cancellations, in order to return to the West Coast, Bonamassa had to apply some creative thinking and drive to Boston before flying home from there.

48 hours later, in considerably sunnier conditions, it's with more than a little relief that we wind our way up his driveway in the Hollywood Hills – complete with neon, Vegas-style Welcome To Fabulous Nerdville' sign – safe in the knowledge that the guitarist is behind the front door. Described by Bonamassa as “more of a house now than it ever was,” the property was formerly owned by both songwriter/producer Oliver Leiber and Buckcherry's Keith Nelson and was the scene of Rod Stewart album sessions during Leiber's tenure. These days, it's home to one of the finest guitar collections on the face of the earth. As we lose ourselves in a view





that stretches all the way to Downtown Los Angeles and the ocean beyond, our host is on the telephone closing yet another deal for a rare vintage piece. Today, it's a 1959 DeArmond R5T amplifier.

Of course, this isn't just a social visit, and the business at hand is to discuss and photograph the instruments that Bonamassa used on his latest studio long-player, *Blues Of Deception*. Recorded with two drummers at Grand Victor Sound (the former RCA Studio A) in Nashville — a decision designed by producer and long-time collaborator Kevin Shirley to “put the cat amongst the pigeons” and push Joe out of his comfort zone — the album also represents another first for the star: there are no Marshalls on it.

“It’s weird because I’ve been a Marshall guy for most of my career,” Joe acknowledges, “but there wasn’t the right song.” Instead, most of *Blues Of*

“It’s the loudest rig I’ve ever used. It will shake the ground. There was plaster coming off in the studio”

Deception features his much-talked-about, all-vintage tweed Fender stage rig, which comprises a pair of high-power ‘59 Twins and a pair of Bassmans. “It’s the loudest rig I’ve ever used,” he enthuses. “It’s even louder than the Marshalls and the Dumbles. It will shake the ground. So much so, there was plaster coming off in the studio; every day, there’d be like a layer of dust on top of the amps. One Twin is really the only thing mic’d, but having it all in the room and a couple of room mics just created this cacophony.”

So much for the whole theory about small amps being better for recording, then? “Most of my albums have been recorded

with high-powered amps.” Bonamassa replies, “with the one exception this time: a fuzzy bit on a song called *Mountain Climbing*. The main sound is basically the Firebird and the Twins and the Bassmans, but I also used a ‘35 Champ, and the weird thing about a ‘35 Champ versus a ‘56 or ‘57 is smaller. They were smaller in ‘55, so it’s the same power as a normal Champ and it has this very condensed and punchy sound. I used a brown Deluxe for something, but generally what was happening was that, because the big room in RCA is so big, the low-power amps were sounding too compressed in the track.

“A couple of Rod Stewart records were recorded in this house and there’s still PVC pipe running into the bedroom. They recorded drums in the living room. If you were recording an amp in this kitchen, it’s a very small space. You can get away with a 20- or 30-watt >

Below left: Who GAS Vegas - the light show. Joe begins at 5:30 every evening. Opposite and above right: This 1952 Noctar features heavily on the new album and is “all stock except for the PAF that somebody put in the front. If you’re a Keith Richards fan you’re in love! Because of the humbucker in the front it’s out of phase in the middle, so it does the Jimmy Page thing really well. And the flat pole pickup is wound super-hot. I love guitars that are either mint or like this. The sins have already been committed before I purchased it! It’s one of the coolest ones I’ve ever seen. I’ve had it for over a year and I’ve used it a lot. Somebody had it since the seventies and it walked into Guitar Center in Hollywood!”