



FIT TO A T

ASHER MASTER SERIES T-DELUXE

{ BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK }

BILL ASHER BUILT his first guitar—a hand-tooled Strat-style body bolted to a Charvel replacement neck—in woodshop class at his Los Angeles high school. After graduating in 1982, he immediately set to work making a name for himself as a repairman to guitarists in the fertile L.A. music scene, eventually building up a clientele list that included the likes of Jackson Browne. By

the early Nineties, Asher was running the Topanga repair shop of renowned luthier Rick Turner and working on guitars for artists like Fleetwood Mac and Crosby, Stills & Nash. In 1996, he opened up his own shop in Santa Cruz, and the following year he crafted the first instrument to bear his surname on its headstock—a lap steel for singer-guitarist, and Weissenborn enthusiast, Ben Harper.

“I had restored a few Weissenborns over the years,” Asher says of the highly-sought acoustic lap steels from the Twenties and Thirties, “and [Harper] was looking for someone who understood them. From there, we discussed the possibility of making an electric guitar version of a Weissenborn. I built a prototype and he flipped out. He

ordered a few more, and then we did a run of 70 of what was his first signature model.”

While Asher today is still known for his innovative lap steels, he has since built up an impressive and diverse line of standard guitar models as well. Among these is his T-Deluxe, a single-cutaway, Tele-style instrument he first conceived in the early 2000s. “The T-Deluxe is something I wanted to develop for guys who love the simple two single-coil pickup design of a Tele but who didn’t want the typical Fender Tele twang,” he says. “My goal was to offer something more versatile.” He achieved this goal by introducing some unique design elements, such as including a six-position Varitone switch alongside the single volume and tone knobs, and

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designing proprietary blade pickups, in conjunction with Pete Bilotto of Vintage Vibe, for greater range.

Now, Asher has ventured even further out with the Master Series T-Deluxe model. These guitars, he says, “are built to what I feel is a more ‘custom-shop’ aesthetic level, with unique woods and designs, and higher-end materials.” The Master Series T-Deluxe shown here boasts a swamp ash body topped with a beautifully figured piece of koa, a quartersawn rock maple neck, and an Indian rosewood fretboard. High-end appointments include celluloid tortoiseshell binding with half herringbone trim, custom-made Tone-Guard numbered volume and tone knobs, Waverly tuners with snakewood buttons, a sterling-silver pickup selector switch tip with an amber top, matching imported tortoiseshell pickguard and pickup covers, and a Glendale Tele-style bridge with a cut treble-side sidewall.

The result is an instrument on which every aesthetic detail is carefully tended to. The same can be said for its tone. Regarding the sound of the two T-Blade pickups, Asher says, “A lot of people modify their Teles to broaden the range, so I made a bridge pickup that has fatter midrange and is honkier and bluesier sounding. And the neck has a lot of clear bell tones on that low

end, with treble that stays pretty sparkly.”

The six-position Varitone switch, meanwhile, “acts as a nice, subtle EQ,” Asher says. “In the full clockwise position it’s basically bypassed. As you click back through the other five positions, it creates almost like a wah effect—some top end comes off but the midrange increases a little bit. So even rolled back all the way the guitar doesn’t get as dark or lose as much volume as it would from turning down a stock tone knob.”

Asher also incorporates several other unique touches on the T-Deluxe, including a .070-thick ebony headstock faceplate (“I believe it really adds more neck sustain and strength,” he says), and his practice of brushing a bit of fresh lacquer into the neck pocket before joining the neck to the body. “It’s a little trick I learned from doing repairs on vintage guitars,” he says. “I would notice that even after taking the screws out it was hard to get the necks off because the lacquers had melded together. So I find that adding some of my own really locks the pieces together and helps with stability.”

This type of care and attention to detail extends beyond the T-Deluxe and to every facet of Asher’s business. He builds roughly 70 guitars per year out of his shop, now based in Culver City, and it’s a true family

operation—wife Jessica handles the front-of-house business, and Asher’s brother and brother-in-law join him in the shop. But even with such a modest staff and output, Asher points out that “we’re doing about 11 different guitar and lap-steel models, which offers a lot of variety with very limited production. I don’t do a lot of multiples of the same thing. With the Master Series, I’ll probably make only about 10 or 12 a year.” The T-Deluxe model, he adds, can be custom ordered, though some, like the one shown here, “are just designs and combinations that I’ve been inspired to do on my own.”

At the end of the day, that inspiration is at the heart of Asher’s work. “This is my passion, and I’ve been at it for over 30 years now,” he says. Due to his many years of experience, he adds with a laugh, “When people walk into my shop I think they expect to see a Geppetto-type guy with glasses and a grey beard. But I started in this world when I was very young—just out of high school. And there’s nothing else I’ve ever wanted to do since. This is my true calling.”

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LIST PRICES: Starting at \$2,530; as shown, \$5,800

Asher Guitars & Lap Steels,
asherguitars.com