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ALEMBIC™ Featured Custom

March 2003

The Big Bass



The idea for this bass started when Yahya took a trip to Guitar Showcase in San Jose. There he tried and was quite taken with a short scale Brown Bass. He loved the wood combination and the deep bass response. Once he decided to get a custom built instrument, he took a trip up to the factory and selected the woods for this month's Featured Custom.

While at the Alembic shop, Yahya played one of our Sterling 25th Anniversary basses. That was enough to convince him to upgrade to the Ebony neck laminates, but that original Brown Bass concept was still strong in his mind. He then decided to blend these basses into a completely unique custom work of art.



Another inspiration from the Sterling Bass was the addition of the Stinger Point carving. It's like our Heart Omega with the center rib jutting past the delicate Omega tips. While the Stinger may look fragile, it's actually quite strong with the combinaton of the laminations and end grain.

This view also shows some of the typical characteristics of the Myrtle core. The overall color is a cold light brown with a slight greenish cast. Myrtle also has a lovely silky sheen that is offset with darker streaking. It's also known as Pepperwood, because of the spicy aroma while working it and is the source of bay leaves for cooking.



In keeping with the original Brown Bass inspiration, the main neck component is Mahogany. Mahogany generally yields a rounder, warmer tone when used as a neck wood on Alembics. Any time you introduce Ebony neck laminations, they pretty much take over the sound with their massive sustain and super solid, even response. We noticed this bass had all the typical characteristics of the Ebony neck, but the rounded sound from the Mahogany wan't completely overpowered. Lastly, two Maple laminates help to keep the highs intact.

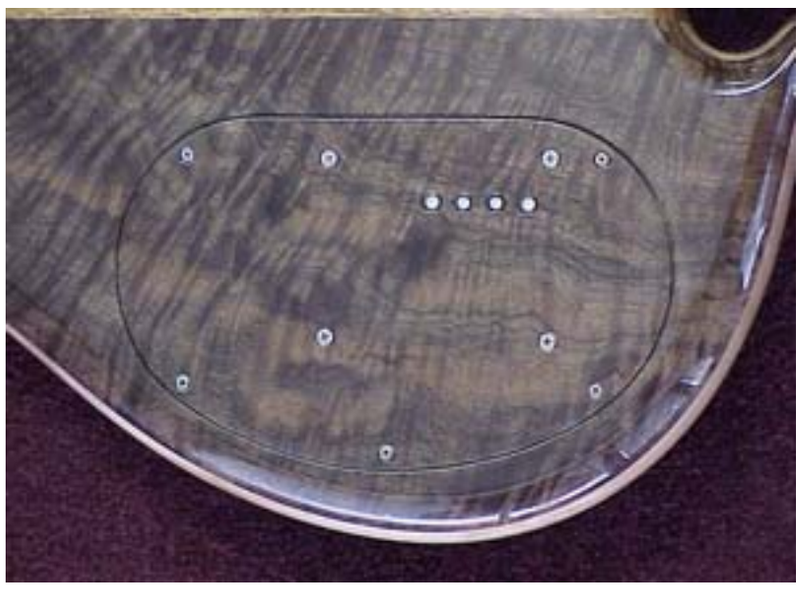
Along the margin between the neck and body transition is also where the satin neck feel ends and blends in to the high gloss finish of the body. The satin feel is actually carefully sanded with very fine sandpaper to create a series of long fine micro scratches that act as a track for the palm of the fretting hand. It's smooth, and fast doesn't begin to describe it.



The classic Alembic Crown peghead shape was an easy decision. This one is special because the drilling pattern is reversed so the B string has a longer pull. We also made the veneers for the peghead from the same wood as the top and back of the body. The front of the peghead is bookmatched, which is standard for all Series II basses.

The finishing touch is an inlaid sterling silver Alembic logo with mother of pearl and abalone inlaid below the finish. The abalone is especially beautiful, with a strong opalescence and gentle wavy pattern that echoes the grain of the bass.

A fixed nut is a bit of nostalgia, remembering that the bass that inspired this custom was made in 1974, before we invented our adjustable nut.



Another nostalgic feature is the backplate arrangement. Our older instruments had all the electronics housed under one plate, with a battery plate on the neck. later, to make our instruments lighter weight, we made the bodies thinner and spread the electronics between two plates. Yahya wasn't afraid of a heavy instrument (in fact he ordered this specifically with a solid core), and liked the idea of only one electronics backplate.

We construct the plate before the body is glued together. Bob scroll saws the shape from the backlaminate and reserves the fall out. While the bass is under construction, Kris makes the backplate by slicing a veneer from the plate. Then he makes "Alembic plywood" from Maple and Purpleheart to mount the decorative veneer. The underside of the plate is also the fancy Walnut, but it will never be seen under the thick silver shielding.

The cavity holds standard Series II electronics with the addition of a bass and treble cut and boost control for each pickup. With five controls for each pickup, the degree of fine tuning is astounding and especially useful when recording.

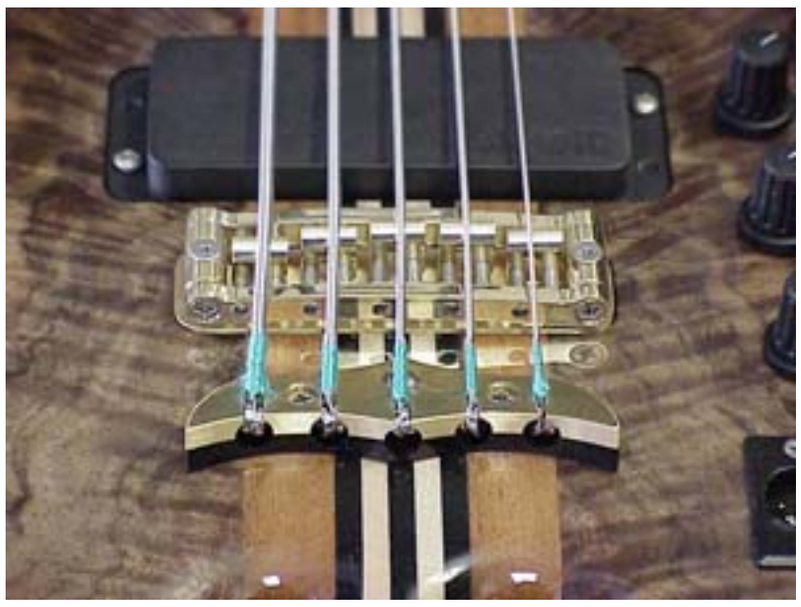
Not shown in this picture is the battery plate on the neck. It was left in brass to accept a custom personal engraving.



While picking out the wood for his bass, Yahya also spied a lonley fingerboard sitting off to the side. This Gabon Ebony has some lighter streaks that we only use on request from a customer. A few weeks after we started building this bass, another customer selecting wood for the top of his guitar noticed Yahya's bass under construction, and changed his order to use one of these fingerboards.

That's not an optical illusion - those are very tiny mandolin frets. With a

light touch, you can almost convince your audience you're playing a fretless! Mandolin frets will wear out more quickly than our standard jumbo frets, but there is no substitute for the sound.



Just like our basses of old, this one uses a wooden shim under the tailpiece. In the old days, it was out of necessity we couldn't cut the thick brass easily by hand. We've been using a computer controlled milling machine since 1979, which makes short work of the tailpiece carving. Now we use the wooden shim just because it looks so cool.

Another little detail is the bridge. This uses our new style concealed hardware rails that are curved and flare out to meet the spacing barrels on either end.


Peghead


Fixed_nut


Inlaid_logo


Side


Stinger


Curved_bridge


Walnut_top





SPECIFICATIONS

- 5-string Series II
- Custom electronics with added bass and treble controls for each pickup
- Custom body shape
- Superb Walnut top and back
- Myrtle core, no body accents
- Continuous Wood backplate
- Streak Ebony fingerboard
- Mahogany, Ebony and Maple neck
- Side LEDs in red
- Fixed nut, curved rail bridge
- Inlaid logo with shell
- Gold Schaller tuners



Price available on request.