





REMEMBERING EVH

We all suffered a loss late last year
with Edward Van Halen's passing.
I think that everyone who ever
met him probably has a story.
Here are a few of mine.

– Larry DiMarzio

Text by **Larry DiMarzio**
with **Steve Blucher**, **Greg Di Benedetto** and **Eric Kirkland**
Design: **Michael Mesker**

Photos ©1990-1993 **Larry DiMarzio**



MEETING VAN HALEN

In the late spring of 1989 I got a call from Greg Di Benedetto, the publisher of *Guitar World* magazine, asking me if I wanted to go to Los Angeles to shoot Eddie Van Halen for an upcoming cover. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance. I had already done photos and several covers for GW. Photo shoots were fun for me and a step outside of my regular job of running DiMarzio.

I contacted Van Halen's publicist, Maureen O'Conner, to work out the details and I asked how much time I would have to photograph Eddie. She replied, "He doesn't like doing photos - maybe half an hour," so I planned accordingly.

The shoot was scheduled for August 15th, 1989 and there was a lot to organize so I got to Los Angeles a week early. At the last minute, the shoot got bumped to Aug 18th - my 40th birthday - and I thought, "How cool!"

Dave Weideman, Guitar Center's artist relations, was the first to arrive at the studio bringing a vintage Fender Tweed Deluxe with a Variac transformer mounted on the bottom of the cabinet, and an Airline guitar.

I laughed when I saw the old beat up Deluxe, it's one of my favorite amps. I still own the one I played in bars in the early 70s, and the Super Distortion® pickup was invented on that amp ... but that's another story. Dave told me that it was an amp Eddie had used (not sure on what).

Eddie arrived in an open bed pickup truck with the FrankenStrat, a Teisco Spectrum 5, and a striped Kramer with 5150 written on it (none in cases) all tossed on a blanket in the back of the flat bed.

Side note: *The Teisco can be seen in Van Halen's music video "Finish What You Started," and there seems to be an old Tweed Amp in the video too, but it looked bigger than the Deluxe.*

When we shook hands, I was surprised by how strong Eddie's grip was but it made sense: it's Eddie Van Halen - of course he has strong hands but this wasn't just a strong hand shake, it was different. I asked him if he preferred "Ed" "Eddie," or "Edward." He said he didn't care.

I moved the guitars onto the set and after some quick introductions to my crew, Eddie went into the dressing room for hair and makeup.

Maureen had suggested keeping everything simple so I'd arranged pizzas and had an assortment of beer.

The shoot went wonderfully and Eddie stayed for hours, much to my surprise.



Left: Greg Di Benedetto, EVH, Joe Bosso at the shoot.
Right: The photo that became the *Guitar World* February 1990 cover.

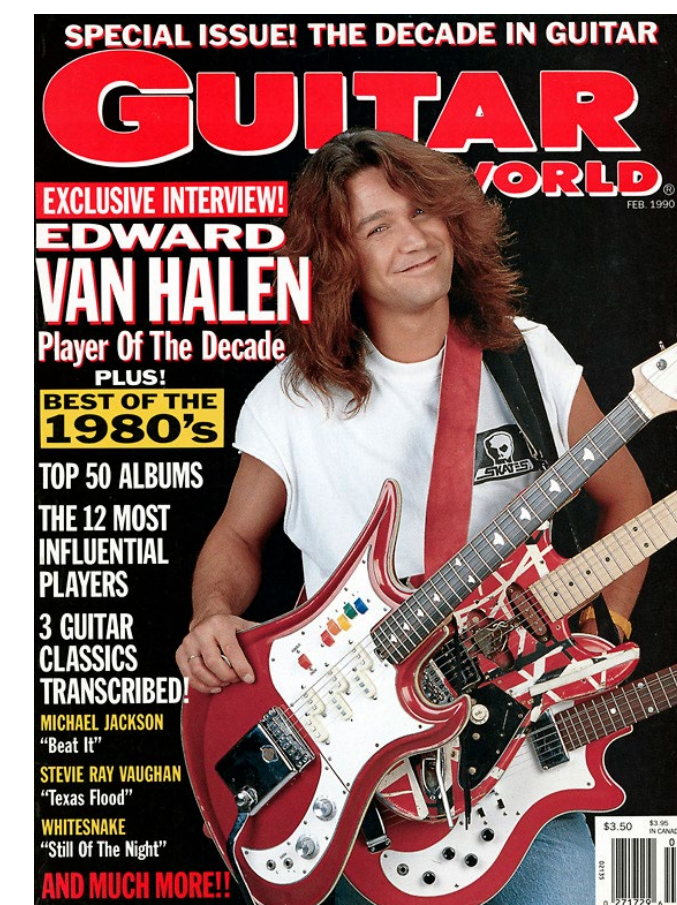




Greg had an advance copy of Jeff Beck's *Guitar Shop* on cassette and played it during the photo shoot. We talked guitars, gear, pizza, Jimmy Page, and Beck while Eddie played along with the cassette.

Eddie liked the pizza so much he took all the leftovers home at the end of the day.

The Van Halen cover of *Guitar World* was the best selling issue of the year. It was Di Benedetto's idea to put three guitars around Eddie's neck for some of the photos and one wound up being the cover. Another photo from the shoot (Eddie with the three guitars and sunglasses) has been in the front window of Guitar Center on Sunset for over 20 years - a present from me to Dave Weideman for helping out.





“Greg had an advance copy of Jeff Beck’s *Guitar Shop* on cassette and played it during the photo shoot. We talked guitars, gear, pizza, Jimmy Page, and Beck while Eddie played along with the cassette.”

Right: Eddie with the Tiesco 5; the self-built 5150 guitar that had Eddie’s reference pickup for the Music Man design; and an early ‘60s Airline guitar.





THE MUSIC MAN/ DIMARZIO GUITAR

About six months after the *Guitar World* issue came out, I got a call from Sterling Ball asking me if I'd be interested in designing pickups for a Music Man and Eddie Van Halen guitar. I asked, "How much do I have to pay you?" and Sterling laughed.



Above: Eddie's workbench. 5150 Studio, Los Angeles, CA 1993
Previous Page: Larry photographs the guitar room upstairs at 5150, Los Angeles, CA 1993

He pointed out that DiMarzio would be competing with other pickup brands to see what Eddie liked best in the new guitar. "Ultimately, Music Man will have to go with whatever Eddie wants. If DiMarzio can't build him exactly what he needs, then we will have to go with another company."

Sterling wanted to keep the guitar production limited (about 1,000 for the first year) in order to maintain the quality.

DiMarzio had already worked with Music Man on the Steve Morse guitar and Sterling was well aware of our work with Steve Vai, Yngwie Malmsteen, and Joe Satriani on other signature guitar projects.

Sterling had one request: that the pickups for the new guitar would be exclusive to the Music Man guitar. DiMarzio wouldn't sell these exact pickups as part of our pickup line (as we usually had done) or to any other guitar company.

I was confident that DiMarzio could build pickups that Eddie would like and we made a gentleman's agreement. Then Sterling told me the final piece - he had already gotten Hartley Peavey on board to develop Eddie's amp. It was brilliant! It was the complete wraparound package.

Ernie Ball was already making Eddie's 5150 strings. Now DiMarzio and Music Man would be teamed to handle the guitar development, and the 5150 amp was with Peavey.

As it turned out, the amps wouldn't be finished for the release of the guitar but arrived about two years later.

© Larry DiMarzio

THE GUITAR TEAM

There was tremendous interest in Eddie's sound, and players had been studying everything about him for years. His tone spawned a decades-long debate that continues to this day. Were his amps modified by some electronics wizard? Was there something special about his personally built and sometimes chiseled-at-home guitars? What was the secret sauce that remained out of reach?

Up to this point, Eddie's own stable of favored instruments was varied at best, including his original FrankenStrat, **a Stratocaster with (according to Wayne Charvel) a DiMarzio Super Distortion® in the bridge**, an Ibanez Destroyer, a Steinberger GL-2, and a Baretta-style Kramer. However, this was going to be different. The Music Man Van Halen guitar was going to be a ground up build, and the new guitar was going to include a neck pickup.

As it turned out there was even more going on and ... you had to include Eddie. He knew the sound he was going for, often intuitively, and he'd been experimenting and tinkering with his guitars, effects, and amps for years. Ed played total electric guitar, and he made every piece of gear a part of his sound. Our job was to get from Eddie's mind through his hands into the pickups, across the amplifier, and out the speakers. And that's not counting the wood, a tremolo and the occasional power drill. Additionally, we had to figure out what would make it all work even better.

Early in the project, I decided to buy a guitar. I called Dudley Gimpel at Music Man to arrange it and asked, "So what does it look like?"



© Larry DiMarzio



© Larry DiMarzio

He said it was kind of like a Tele but "with sex appeal" - a maple top, binding, two humbuckers, one volume control (labeled "Tone") and a Floyd Rose bridge. That wasn't what I was expecting so I said, "Make mine black." But the sum was far greater than the oddly described parts.

The Floyd Rose bridge was short-lived however, only the first 20 or so Music Man guitars have Floyds.

Fender had started distributing Floyd Rose bridges at the time but Dan Smith (Fender VP) didn't want to sell the bridges to Music Man. He had pitched Eddie for a Fender guitar but lost out to Music Man.

As it happened, I was in Los Angeles for a photo shoot and had planned a visit to the Fender factory to discuss selling them our hum-canceling Strat pickups for a new line of guitars. Dan and I knew each other from his guitar shop in Rochester, New York, and I'd sold him lots of DiMarzio pickups. On the drive, I suggested that he reconsider supplying bridges to Music Man since Eddie was one of the main reasons for Floyd's success, but Dan was adamant about not selling them to Music Man. In the end, Eddie liked the sound of the licensed Gotoh better than the Schaller Floyd Rose.

The Music Man guitar building team was impressive starting with Sterling Ball and Dudley Gimpel. Sterling (Ernie Ball's son) was born into our industry. He's a bass and guitar player, had the knowledge that only an insider can have, and Music Man was already building beautiful guitars and basses before the Van Halen project began.

Dudley had worked at Knut-Koupee Music before coming to California and joining the prestigious Valley Arts Guitar Shop prior to going to

Music Man. He was well-acquainted with all the California builders and modern approaches to guitar design.

Steve Blucher worked at New York City's Guitar Lab, Alex Music, Carl Thompson, and started at DiMarzio in 1973. He designed his first pickup, the X2N®, for DiMarzio in 1979 and created numerous other pickups for the company.

And me. I invented replacement guitar pickups and by 1973 had already released the Super Distortion®, Dual Sound®, Model One™ Bass, Fat Strat (now the FS1™), Pre BS Tele (now the Pre B-1™). I invented and designed the ClipLock® guitar strap, designed replacement necks, bridges and bodies, and more.

We were all committed to do our very best to build a guitar that Eddie would be proud to play.

When I interviewed Eddie for **Young Guitar** Japan (1991) he told me that he wanted to be able to go into a music store anywhere in the world and take a Music Man VH off the wall and play it on stage that night.

I knew that was Sterling's rule. The guitars had to be set up exactly how Eddie liked them and ready to play out of the box.

Eddie was committed to giving guitar players quality and their money's worth. I was grateful to be a part of the team.

BUILDING THE PICKUPS

The first few pickups samples we sent to Music Man weren't hitting the mark and I was becoming concerned. I asked Steve Blucher, our chief technician, to fly to Los Angeles in order



Young Guitar photos © William Hames



Young Guitar photos © William Hames



Young Guitar photos © William Hames

to get a better idea of what Eddie wanted. By that time the pickup shootouts had narrowed to between Seymour Duncan and DiMarzio. I was confident that Steve could turn the Van Halen sound into a physical reality but there had to be some face-to-face interaction. Just sending samples wasn't going to cut it on the Van Halen project.

When Steve arrived in Los Angeles, Dudley picked Steve up in his T-top Corvette and the adventure began.

When they got to 5150 there were several unfinished Music Man prototype guitars (some with pickups and some without), a vintage red Tele with binding, an original late 50s Cherry Sunburst Les Paul, plus the striped 5150 guitar with a damaged pickup that Eddie loved. Sterling and Eddie were in the control room listening to test tracks for the next album.

Steve Blucher: Ed surprised me by asking, "Did you bring a winding machine to make the pickups?" I explained that I was there to get a better idea of what he wanted but did have several prototype pickups for him to try out.

Ed was playing through a Soldano SLO-100 amp with a note taped on the front that said anyone who changed the control settings would be fired immediately.

The first thing I heard at the studio was a track using the neck position in one of the Music Man prototypes. Ed said he really liked the sound. The sound was very processed (chorus and delay) and the actual sound quality of the pickup was hard to discern. The pickup was a Duncan Custom Custom (medium output, very warm sound, Alnico 2 magnet). My initial idea of the neck pickup sound Ed wanted immediately went out the window. I still thought it might be

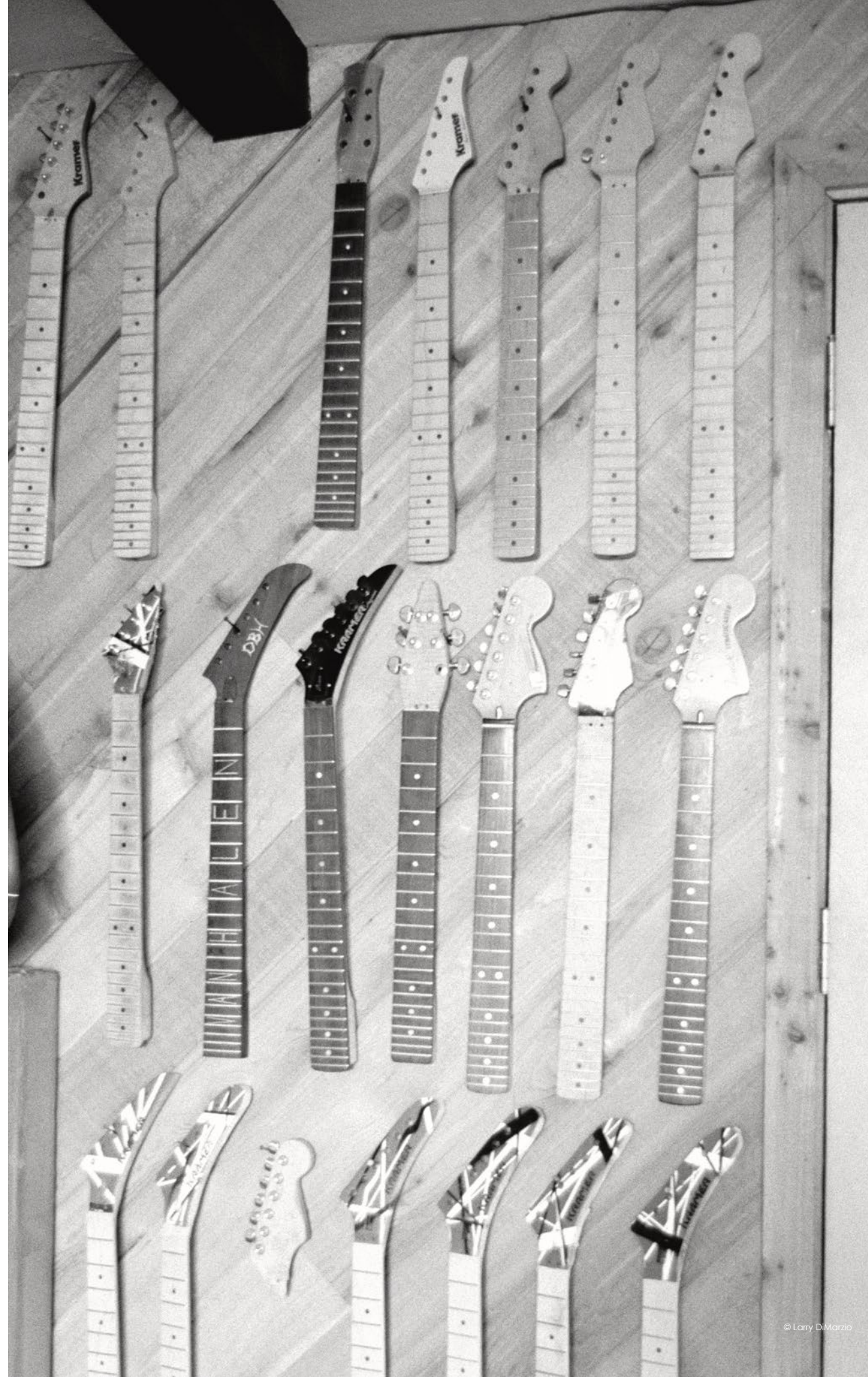
useful to install a prototype of what eventually became The Humbucker From Hell® in one of the Music Mans. It was a lot brighter and cleaner than the Duncan, and a lot different from anything I'd previously heard of Ed's playing. It also cut through the effects better. Ed shook his head and said, "Nah." I also brought a bunch of capacitors, to use as high-pass filters on the neck pickup to cut down on mud, and a PAF Pro® for reference and a Double Whammy™ for the bridge.

Ed had commented in several interviews that he had avoided using a neck pickup because EQing an amp for the bridge pickup always made the neck pickup sound like mud. That caused me to assume (incorrectly, it turned out) that the neck pickup needed to be very bright.

Ed liked the sound of the Custom Custom in the neck position of the Music Man prototype and was reluctant to change it. He suggested that the production guitar could have a Duncan in the neck and a DiMarzio in the bridge. Sterling said that DiMarzio should be given the opportunity to supply both. I think he liked the fact that we wanted to go the extra mile to make Ed happy and not just pull something off the shelf.

Ed plugged in his main touring guitar, the striped 5150, so we could hear the bridge pickup as a reference. The guitar had a damaged Duncan JB in the bridge and a Kramer neck. This became the starting point for the bridge pickup sound he wanted.

Ed told me the pickup changed after the high "E" string had caught under the lip of one of the coils during a show. The sound changed in a way he liked, and this became his favorite pickup.



When we compared it with a stock JB in one of the Music Man prototypes, Ed didn't like it as much. The damaged JB sounded more solid and focused, especially in the mids, and the highs were fatter.

Ed wanted me to make the new DiMarzio bridge pickup to be as good or better than the damaged JB.

After assuring him I wouldn't change or damage it, I asked Ed if he would let me remove the pickup to measure it. The DC resistance of a JB reads about 16.4K Ohms. Ed's pickup measured 180K Ohms! Measuring the coils individually produced a normal reading on one coil (8K Ohms) and about 160K Ohms on the other. (Something peculiar happened when they were connected.) I think the 160K coil, being neither open nor shorted out, was functioning as an inductor as well as a standard coil. The damaged coil was clearly functioning, as the pickup still cancelled 60-cycle hum as well.

Larry DiMarzio: When Steve told me that the pickup still worked but was reading 180K, I said, "Great, we're going to build Eddie Van Halen a broken pickup?"

SB: At some point in the afternoon, everyone in the studio took a break and went outside. (I remember some talk about doing wheelies in the parking lot.) I stayed in the studio and took the opportunity to check out the red striped guitar. What struck me immediately was how easily it played and how good it sounded acoustically; and the guitar had great sustain up and down the neck.

The neck was very straight, and the action was low. The frets were pretty worn, but there was no pitting and no string buzz. Acoustically, the guitar had a very even balance both across the strings and all the way up the neck.



This kind of response generally only happens when a guitar has been played for a long time.

The studio day ended when Valerie came over from the house, telling Ed that dinner would be ready soon.

HALF WAY THERE...

LD: When Steve got back to New York, all new prototyping got underway. We ended up with 5 bridge prototypes and 6 neck prototype pickups, and everything was rushed to Music Man as soon as they were finished. Within a few days, one of the new neck prototypes hit the mark displacing the Custom Custom. I felt Duncan was using AL2 to mimic old demagnetized Gibson pickups, but every time Eddie got a drill near it, the pickup died. The new DiMarzio neck pickup incorporated an invention that Steve devised to reduce string-pull and soften the magnetic field.

SB: Ed was happy with the softer and quieter sound of the Alnico 2 in the neck position. My thinking was AL2 was unstable, and when Ed ran a power drill or Ebow over the guitar, the pickup would begin to demagnetize. The solution was to use a fully charged AL5 magnet but create air gaps to separate the magnet away from the pole pieces. This new design yielded the same gauss at the pole piece as AL2 while producing a stable magnetic field at the same time.

The air gap pickup had another benefit, it was clearer and more open than an AL2 pickup. I felt that would be a better choice for Ed's neck position and DiMarzio got a patent for the new invention. (DiMarzio US Patent Number US5399802A.)

Side note: We've continued to use the same or additional patent technology on lots of other DiMarzio designs over the years: *Air Norton™*, *Air Zone™*, *Air Classic™*, *PAF® 36th Anniversary*, and *PAF® Bridge* model (DP103 & DP223), *Fortitude™ Bridge*, *LiquiFire™*, *Pandemonium™ Neck*, *AT-1™*, and Ibanez Kiko Loureiro signature guitar pickups.

SB: Although the new bridge samples were better, Ed still preferred the damaged pickup.

LD: Steve got to work on two new bridge designs. One included an idea he had for unbalancing the coils (pickup A) and the other was a more traditional winding style (pickup B). Both had more of the mids and warm highs that Ed wanted, and magnetically both used fully charged AL5 without an air gap.

DiMarzio had a test guitar that let you pull pickups in and out quickly and we compared them before sending them to Eddie. I thought Steve's new designs were the best that I heard and much better than the JB that was also being considered.

I liked the "E", "B", and "G" strings on the JB but the wound strings got too muddy for my taste. Both of Steve's new designs kept the wound strings pristine by comparison.

I preferred the mixed coil version (pickup A) and bet Steve that would be Ed's choice.





THE FINAL CHOICE


LD: Sterling told me that both of the new bridge pickups were loaded into Music Man guitars and Ed really liked both of the new pickups. Dudley, Sterling, Eddie and Steve Lukather were all playing the guitars. They were stuck and Ed couldn't make up his mind which he liked better. He was switching back and forth and Luke said "One, that one" pointing at the the guitar with Pickup B. So pickup A was rejected by a hair and it was Steve Lukather who made the final call. (Luke still has the number 3 Music Man Van Halen.)

I loved pickup A, the one that wasn't chosen, and released it as part of the DiMarzio line later that year naming it **The Tone Zone®**.

SB: The Tone Zone® is louder, but the pickup in the Music Man has warmer, more focused mids, pretty similar to the damaged pickup I heard at the studio.

MM/EVH Bridge
US Pat. 5,39,9802


Output: 345
DC Resistance: ~17K Ohms



Bass: 8.5
Mid: 8
Treble: 5.5

The Tone Zone®
US Pat. 4,501,185

Output: 375
DC Resistance: ~17.3K Ohms



Bass: 8.5
Mid: 8.5
Treble: 5

LD: Steve's new design (pickup A) also received a patent (DiMarzio US Pat. Number US4501185A).

ALL THE PIECES COME TOGETHER

The body shape started out as kind of like a Tele with a twist of Les Paul. Although Eddie did bring some sketches to Music Man, they were disregarded early in the design stage. I think he was happy to turn the body shape over to Music Man and then make corrections from there.

I think his favorite FrankenStrat had a basswood body, and Music Man made about 4 test guitars with different woods for Eddie to try. He chose the bass and maple combination as his favorite. The maple top was added mostly for cosmetic reasons. It's about 1/8 inch thick, but it does add some brightness to the sound.

The maple neck had an asymmetrical shape and was duplicated from Eddie's favorite Kramer neck shape. I have the feeling that the Kramer neck that he liked might have been out of spec. Namely: carved off center so the upper and lower radius were out of alignment. Eddie may have also taken sandpaper to it, which might further account for the shape.

Music Man duplicated the neck shape by using a 3 Axis CNC machine. There's a pattern cloning feature that uses a probe that allowed them to take his original neck and create an X, Y, Z computer file that reproduced the shape to be cut by the CNC.

Eddie oil finished his necks as he had been doing for years. Music Man used a gunstock oil and wax finish for their guitars to duplicate the feel of Eddie's neck.

Ed mentioned that the heel-to-neck joint was getting in the way when he played high on the



neck. Dudley modified the design to become the 5-bolt neck mount with a new carved heel to body contour.

The pickup placements were arrived at by experiment. There was a lot of trial and error, with Eddie saying when it was right - so those were his choices. The same process was used for the location of the volume pot and pickup selector switch.

The truss rod adjustment wheel at the bottom of the neck has been used on Music Man instruments since 1985.

Eddie wanted the pickups mounted directly to the body of the guitar using no mounting rings and no pickguard. This was how he had mounted pickups in the FrankenStrat. He said he could hear a difference between the direct mount versus pickguard or mounting rings.

Side note: A few NAMM Shows ago, Hartley Peavey and I were exchanging Eddie stories. Hartley told me that when he was working on Eddie's speaker cabinets, Eddie could hear the difference between a plywood and a particle board cabinet. Eddie insisted that his cabinets had to be plywood. They did blind-fold tests and he could pick the plywood every time. His ears were that good.

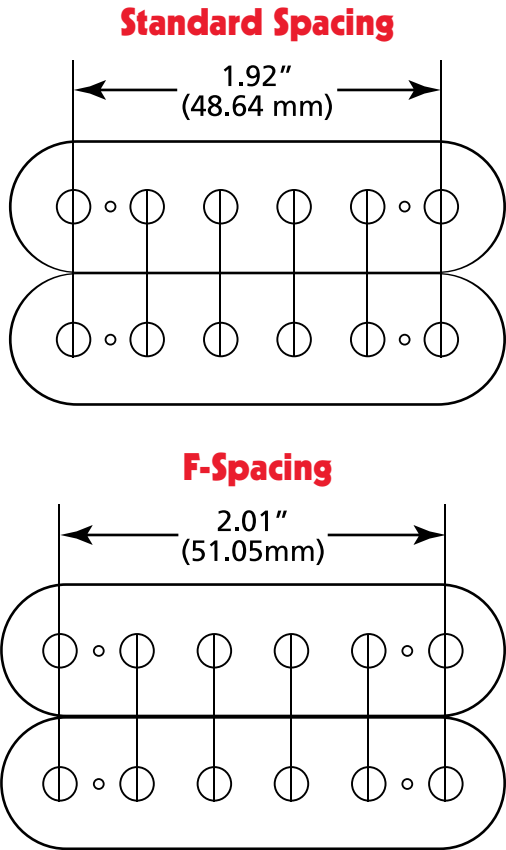
The pickups in the Music Man guitar are not height adjustable and are intentionally set a bit low. Pickup height was arrived at by trial and error with Eddie making all the choices. Eddie would say he wanted the pickup a little higher or lower, and then it was tested.

The Soldano amp had tons of gain and keeping the pickups lower let the amp do more of the work. Keeping the pickups on the low side also had the advantage of getting a cleaner



sound by just rolling the guitar volume back slightly. The super high gain stage was duplicated in the Peavey 5150 amps as well.

The bridge pickup is a DiMarzio F-Spaced and the neck is our Standard Spaced pickup. (See template below). DiMarzio was making wider spaced humbuckers before the Van Halen project. The F-Spaced pickups align better with the strings, and the wider dimension was created for Fender and Floyd Rose-style bridges. Eddie had twisted his bridge pickup slightly clockwise to get a better string balance from the bridge position since it was a Standard spaced humbucker.



Eddie didn't want a tone control on the guitar because he didn't use it, but leaving it out does change the sound of the pickup slightly - something I learned back in 1983 when I built Earl Slick's guitars for David Bowie's "Serious Moonlight" Tour.

SHOOT THE SHOW

THE NEXT GUITAR WORLD COVER

The Van Halen band was on tour, doing sold-out concerts when I got a call from Greg Di Benedetto to do another cover shoot. I happily agreed and arrangements were made for me to go to the show at the Hartford Civic Center in Connecticut.



Left: Eddie's guitar boat.
Top: Matt Bruck's workbench.
Bottom: Eddie's rig.

My plan was to shoot Eddie before the concert on stage with his new guitar and a mountain of Peavey amps in the background. I loaded up the company van with a ton of photo gear, my assistant, and a hair and makeup person, and we were off to Hartford.

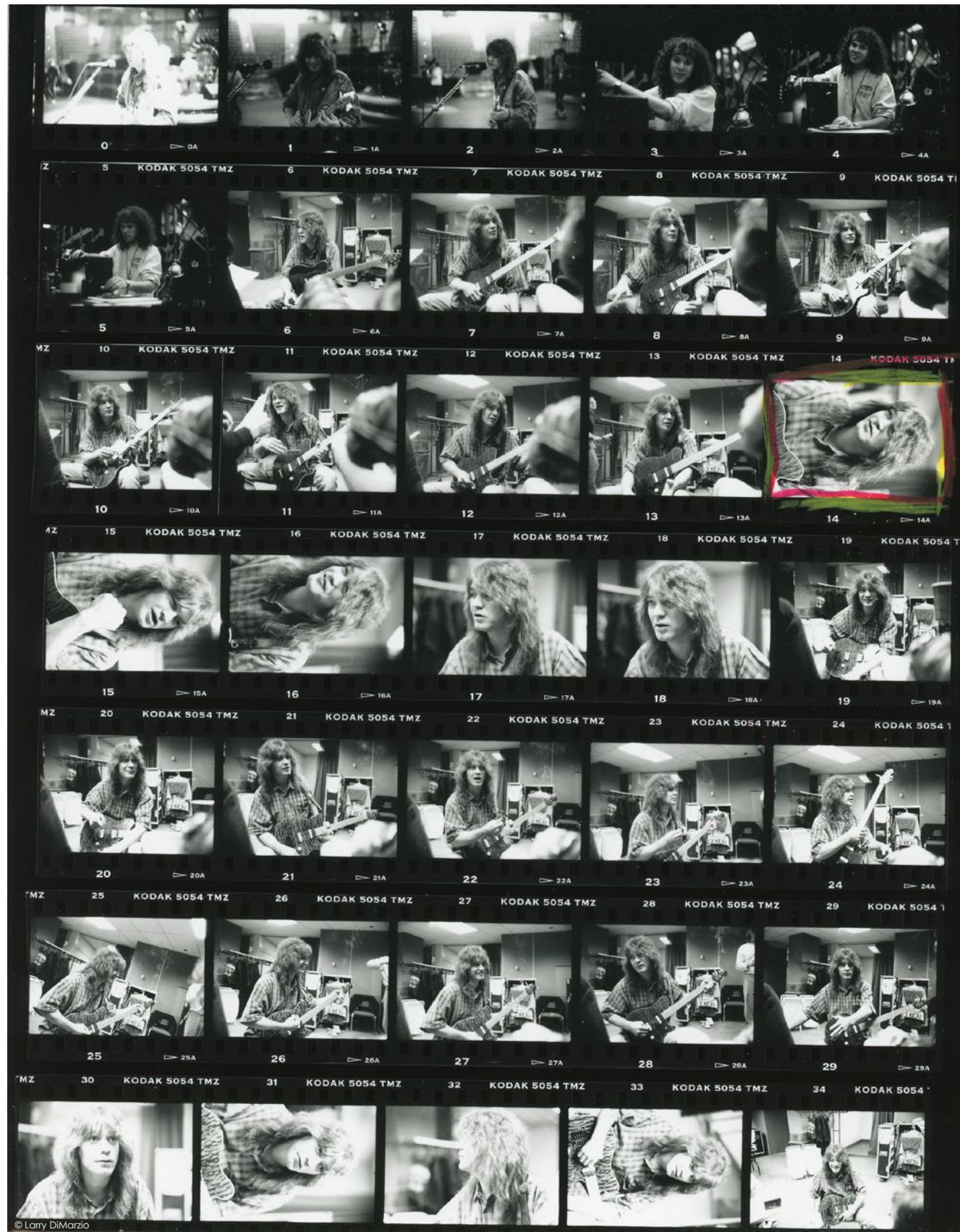
I got to the venue, went to security and said, "I'm with the band." Security was great, and all our passes were already there. I went backstage to catch up with Matt Bruck, Eddie's guitar tech, and he told me that Eddie was very happy with the guitars and pickups and everything was working well for the live shows - the real test.

I started taking backstage gear photos and about four hours later, the opening band started sound check but still no Eddie.

By now Di Benedetto and Brad Tolinski, *Guitar World's* editor, had arrived and we were talking in the dressing room when Eddie arrived. He looked at us and said, "Hi," and asked, "What are you guys doing here?"

We quickly found out that no one had told Eddie that I was shooting the cover that day. He was late and had to do sound check and there was no time before the show for any of the photos as I had planned.

Eddie must have seen the "Oh shit" look on my face and told me to talk to Ed Leffler, Van Halen's manager. I asked Mr. Leffler if I could do the shoot with Eddie after the show and he told me there wasn't time. They were scheduled to leave for the next city immediately after the show finished.

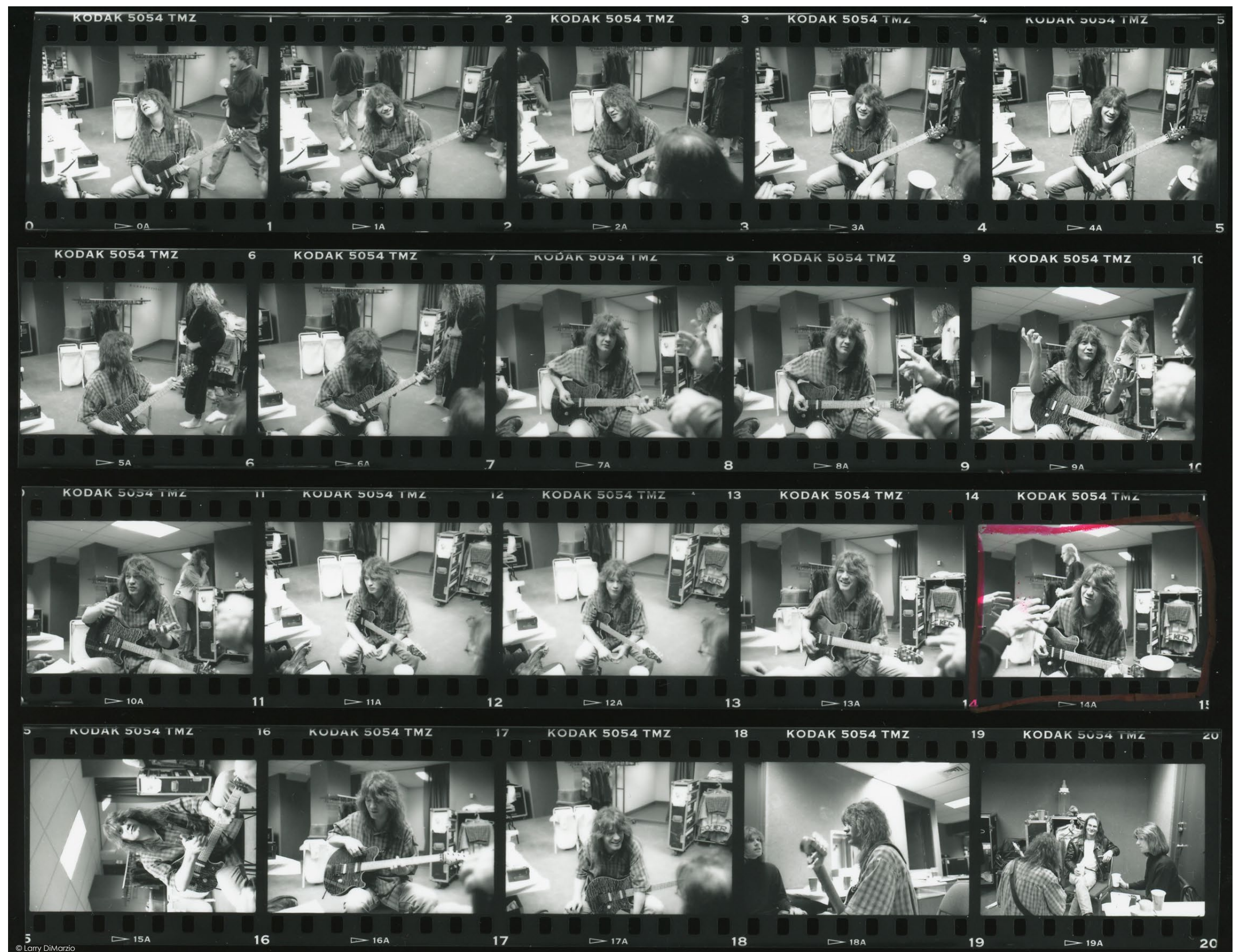


“We quickly found out that no one had told Eddie that I was shooting the cover that day. He was late and had to do sound check and there was no time before the show for any of the photos as I had planned.”

The late Ed Leffler was a no nonsense kind of guy and told me to “shoot the show.” I explained that I don’t usually shoot live shows and he told me once again to “shoot the show.” I asked if I could shoot more than the first three songs. He told me that he didn’t care if I got on stage with the band! I got the feeling that I should shut up and “shoot the show.” I did get his approval to come back if I didn’t get what I needed.

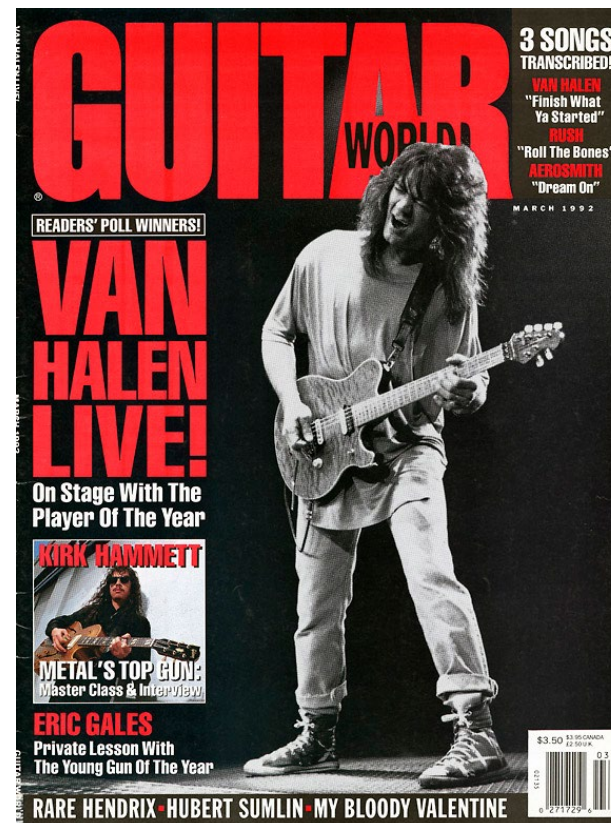
Luckily for me David Bertinelli, Valerie’s brother, and I had been talking photography backstage earlier. He was shooting the band for the tour and offered to give me the heads up for the songs that Eddie usually did jumps during the show. (Thank you David.)

I headed for the pit with my assistant, David, and a bunch of other photographers hoping to get a shot that was good enough for the cover of *Guitar World* magazine. Di Benedetto and Tolinski headed for “Anthony’s Bar,” on Michael Anthony’s side of the stage.









“ I’d been around a bunch of big acts but nothing prepared me for Van Halen ‘For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge’ live. It was electrifying magic.”

From the moment that the band hit the stage, the crowd exploded and it was nonstop for the entire show. I was in front of the stage between the band, barricades, and an audience of 15,000 screaming fans that knew all the words. I’m not sure what was louder: the PA or the crowd.

I quickly decided to shoot most of the show with black and white film and no flash. I didn’t want to disrupt what was happening on stage. My assistant kept reloading my cameras so I could keep shooting.

At the end of the show, I went backstage to say my goodbyes and Eddie came over and asked if I got what I needed. I told him I thought so. He wanted to know how the show was, and told me that he was nervous because he knew I was shooting him. Then he opened a bottle of vodka and handed it to me for first sip. We passed it back and forth, and I felt honored.





A DAY ON TOUR WITH VAN HALEN

October 1991 show at the Hartford Civic Centre

Greg Di Benedetto: There's one story from this night that stood out the most to me. It was when I was at the bottom of the steps the moment the band descended from the stage after their last song and are handed robes. No one else was really around, just the stage manager, so I felt like I was invading some sacred space, nevertheless I was left alone. I soon realized this was as close as you can get for a sense of what these guys feel like with a crowd of 15,000 cheering you back on the stage. The adrenaline, the sheer power of that moment was intoxicating, *addictive*. I was in close proximity to greatness - that very moment that determines why greatness is deserved. Eddie, of course, was the greatest. To think any artist that experienced this every *night* could explain the many bad habits associated with rock 'n' roll's tendency to keep the high going. Don't let it come down. But what happened actually brought a sense of reality to that moment having been on the inside of this show. Throughout the evening Brad and I were floating around the entire venue, back stage, back of house, even *under the stage* at Mike's "Anthony's Bar," an ad-hoc bar lounge replete



with Go-go dancers and its own music playing, various guests, girls milling around and Mike Anthony serving Jack shots - all while the other members performed their solo spots just above on the stage! I couldn't believe how cool this was. The upshot was, we weren't really watching the show closely - we are hanging. Having seen them many times, it was more interesting for us to have a different kind of experience, we were *on the inside* after all.

So, at that precise moment the band came off the stage, I was already standing under the stage, a few feet from the stage manager assisting handing them their robes, when each band member dripping with sweat and adrenaline spiking, came down the steps. I can't remember the order, but Eddie, I believe must have been last. When Alex came down maybe first or second, I said, "Great show!" He replied, "Well Ed had a rough night" and that he couldn't hear monitors, or some cues - something to that effect. It was brief, but to the point. Eddie now descending the steps, gets his robe and approaches in my direction. What do I say to the greatest rock guitarist coming off his stage and 15,000 strong chanting: "EDDIE, EDDIE, EDDIE..." greatness in process, right? Well, I could have had the typical knee jerk reaction in that second or two. On the one hand, I felt bad because I didn't really watch the show. On the other, if he thought I was just another "kisser," I would look bad. No matter what I say it will be insincere. Saying nothing would be a worst case I felt. My instincts kicked in, I say with a fairly assertive tone, "Rough night huh?" He's now passed by me, saying nothing. Maybe it was so bad he didn't want to be reminded? Perhaps he felt I actually may have *noticed* his deficient night? Now about ten feet past me, and it appeared he had a moment to think of what to say, he turns around, points right at

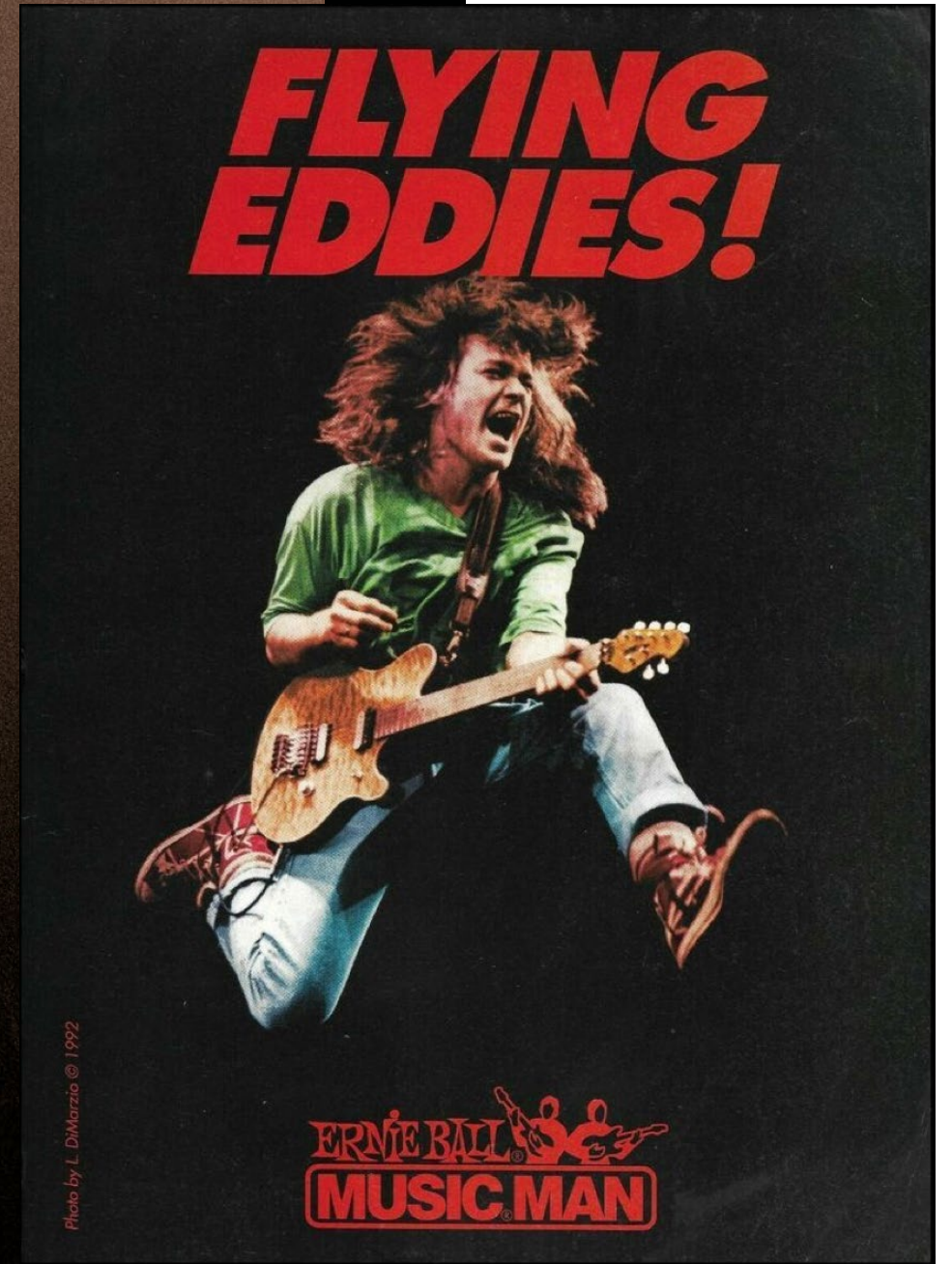




me and says fairly loudly, with a more assertive tone than mine, "*And thanks, thanks for being a real mother*****.*" I felt vindicated, but bad at the same time. I knew I made the right call, but only with the confidence from Alex tipping me off. Still, it was kind of crazy to actually tell a G.O.A.T. he had an off night in that powerful moment when 15,000 screaming fans above thought otherwise!

Bringing it even more down to earth was Eddie having confided in us that he was actually nervous having been interviewed earlier and being photographed by Larry for the cover. Who would imagine? He's likely done this countless times. Nevertheless, it was the first time we did his interview and photoshoot on a show night. I mean, Larry was in his face the whole show from the pit. This happened only one other time, years later, when I was with a colleague from the magazine watching Slash in a rehearsal, when he said, "I was nervous just having you guys from Guitar World here!" But knowing Eddie, who could do on stage what no one else on earth could, would be nervous as a result of us, is something I found hard to imagine. All I can say is, thank you in return Ed, for being a "*real mother*****.*"





Larry's live photo of Eddie was later used by Ernie Ball Music Man to advertise the guitar.



SHOOTING AT 5150

THE 1993-94 GUITAR WORLD BUYERS GUIDE COVER

The 1992 Van Halen Live cover was the best-selling issue of the year for Guitar World, and I got another call to shoot Eddie at his 5150 Studio for their 1993-94 Buyer's Guide cover.

I contacted Matt Bruck in advance and asked if I could do a studio walk through about a week before the official shoot to help me develop a concept and work through any potential lighting problems there might be at the studio.

5150 Studio was across a private road from Eddie's house and was on the Studio City side of Coldwater Canyon, a dream location. Although I'd been there previously for the *Young Guitar* magazine interview (April 1991 issue), the drive up that day was particularly beautiful. It was like a Hollywood movie - loaded with twists, turns, mansions, security gates, and the smell of eucalyptus.



Matt gave me a complete studio tour plus the upstairs workshop and gear storage area, which was a guitar player's dream. Eddie had everything. There were bodies, necks, speakers, vintage guitars, rare guitars, amps, pedals, effects ... his collection was impressive. If you could think of it, I'm pretty sure there was at least one there. It added to my understanding of how extensive Eddie's gear experiments were.

I decided to shoot the cover in the recording space and surround Eddie with a circle of guitars, basses, and amps. I explained my idea to Matt and when I arrived the morning of the shoot, everything was there only needing minor fine adjustments. (Thanks Matt.)





© Larry DiMarzio



© Larry DiMarzio

This time everything went as planned and I nailed the cover early in the shoot. Since there was time, I asked Eddie if we could go outside to get some of that wonderful California natural light in the photos. I added a series of hand close-ups since every guitar player had questions about his style, and I recalled my first handshake with him.

I can relate it to the feeling of when I was bitten by a baby tiger. I'd been bitten by dogs and cats but the tiger had a bone, tendon, muscle, neurotransmitter connection that just said "tiger." In Eddie's case that power might have been the result of a billion up down strokes with a guitar pick, but there it was.

I was deeply saddened to learn of Eddie's untimely passing. I've heard stories that Eddie could be difficult but I never experienced anything like that in my dealings with him.

My attitude is I was crew. I was there to do my job and do it to the best of my ability. The Van Halen guitar project is something that I was proud to be a part of. The smiles in the photos are real and the jumps aren't Photoshopped.

He was a singular talent and changed the landscape of electric guitar playing forever.

Rest in peace Edward Van Halen.











WINNING THE BID ON THE SIGNED VAN HALEN GUITAR

In 1994, I got a call from Sterling Ball inviting me to a benefit auction for the UCLA Medical Center for Pediatric Kidney Research at the Los Angeles Hard Rock Cafe and Van Halen was going to play live.

Walking into the Hard Rock that night was a bit like a NAMM show but with a huge dose of Hollywood. It was an invitation only event and the guests included Steve Lukather, Albert Lee, Steve Morse, the Van Halen band, much of the Music Man staff, Guitar Center's executives, and a smattering of actors and actresses, Valerie Bertinelli, plus family and friends.

I had my eye on the Trans Gold Van Halen guitar that was signed by the entire band, and was the last guitar being auctioned.

Eventually the bidding got down to just me and Larry Thomas, then president of Guitar Center.

I saw him turn and ask Dave Weideman who the guy was that kept raising the bid on the Van Halen guitar, and he graciously stopped bidding at \$4,500. So, I won the guitar.

At the end of the night, Eddie asked Sterling who had bought his guitar and Sterling pointed to me. Eddie picked it up and played it and told me it was a really good one.

I put together a book of my guitarist photos **Guitar Wizards** that was published in 1993 with *Player Magazine* (Japan), and I donated all the profits to UCLA Medical Center for Pediatric Kidney Research.

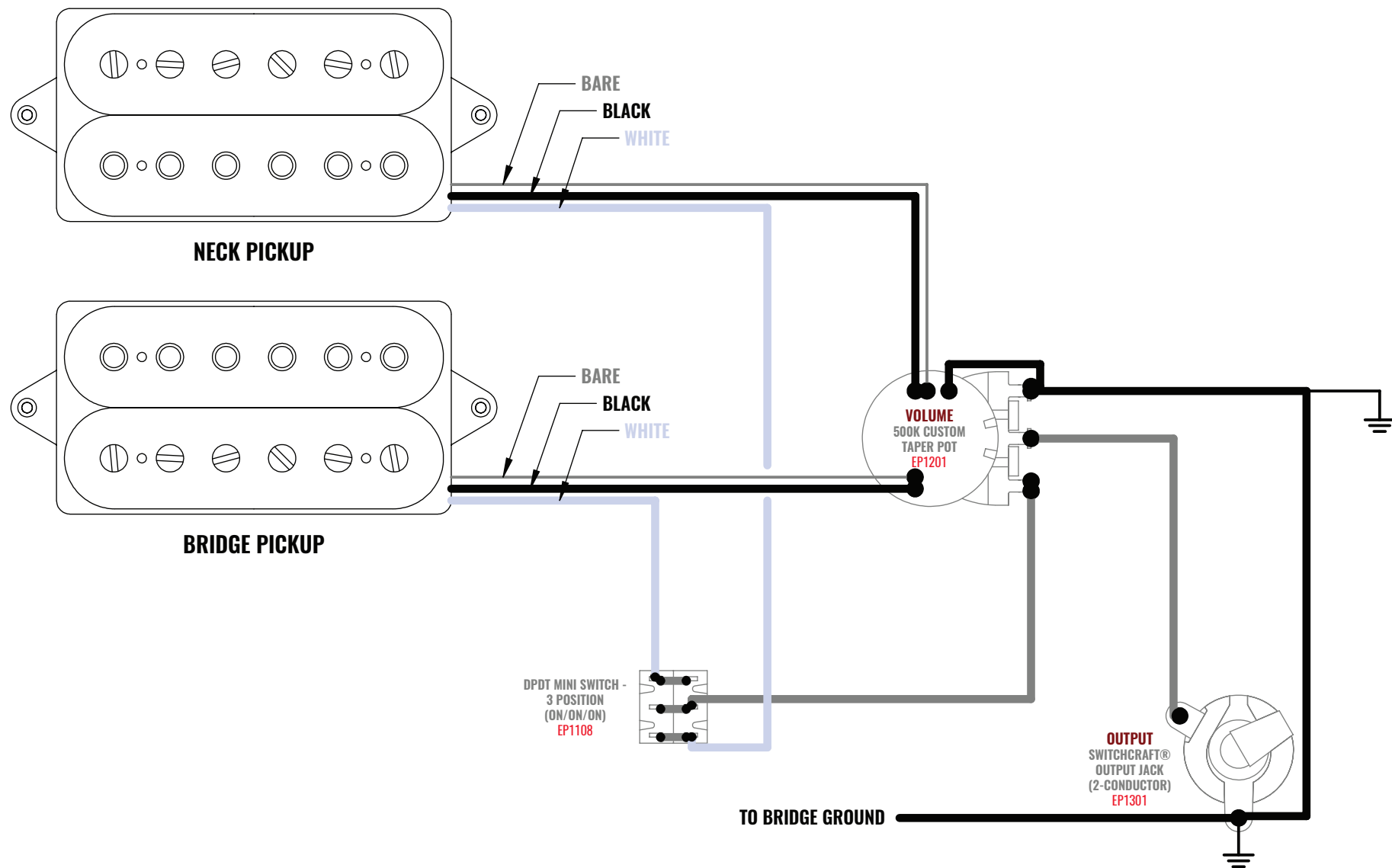




DiMarzio, Inc. 1388 Richmond Terrace, PO Box 100387, Staten Island, NY 10310
Tel. General: (718) 981-9286 • Toll Free: (800) 221-6468 • Tech Support: (718) 816-8112 • Email: tech@dimarzio.com

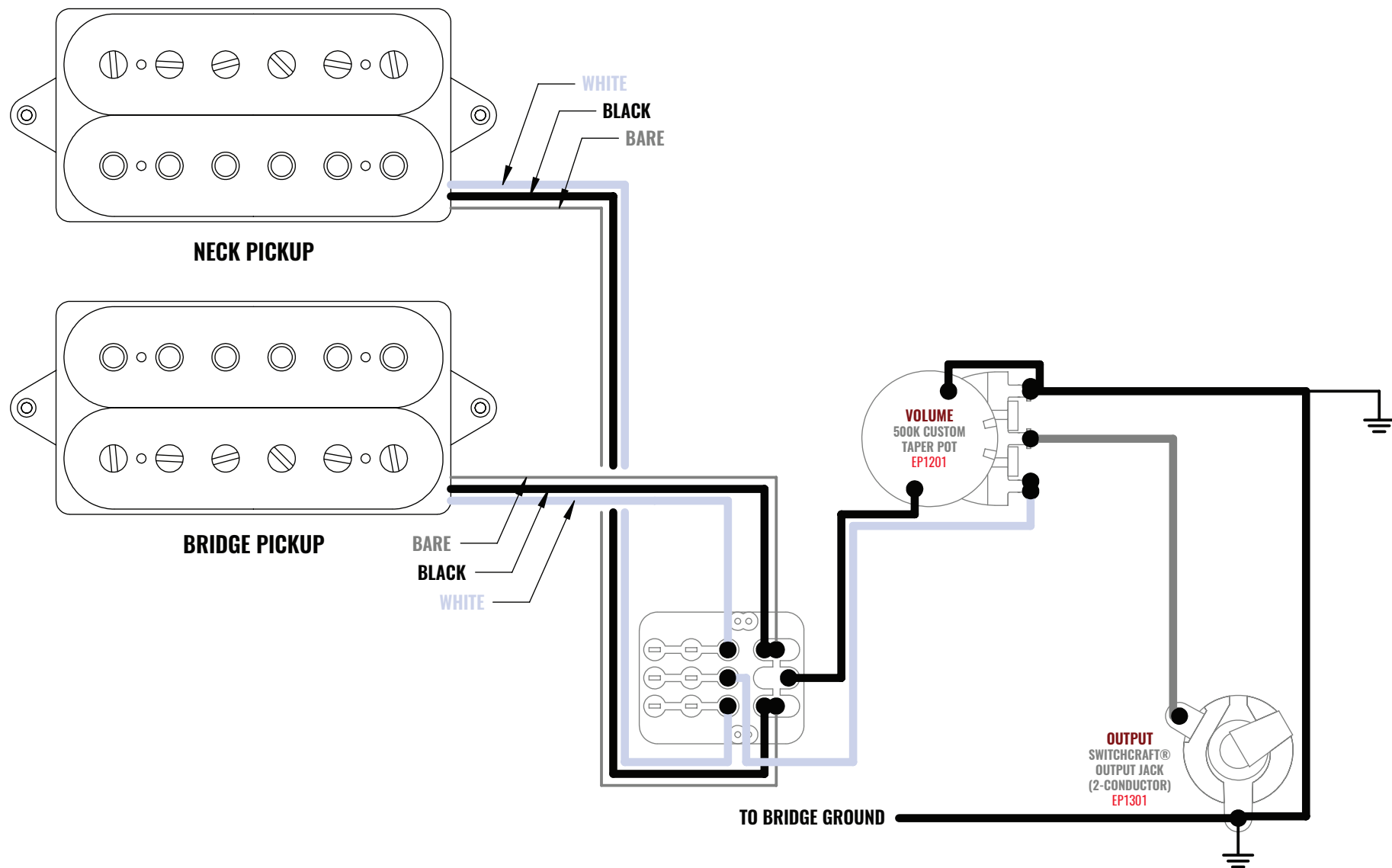
All photos by Larry DiMarzio, except pages 20-21 by William Hames/Young Guitar magazine.
©2021 DiMarzio, Inc. All rights reserved.
Any reproduction in part or as a whole without the written permission of DiMarzio, Inc. is prohibited.

www.dimarzio.com



Ernie Ball® Music Man® Eddie Van Halen

This wiring is based on the original 2 conductor pickups. The current pickups are now 4 conductor.



Ernie Ball® Music Man® Eddie Van Halen 2

This wiring is based on the original 2 conductor pickups. The current pickups are now 4 conductor.