



Elrick 5 Gold Standard

Chicago bassist/luthier Robert Elrick has been building custom electric basses since 1992. Dissatisfied with instruments available at the time, Rob decided to build his own, using skills he developed while earning his BFA in Ceramics at Detroit's Center for Creative Studies. Since then, Robert has continued to play and build in the Chicago area, and he now produces about six instruments per month in his one-man shop.

We often see basses that seem built to show off wood-working skills—not the ability to build a great musical instrument. Rob's basses are examples of fine lutherie, but sound and playability come first. For our test bass, Elrick chose a light swamp-ash body with a bookmatched buckeye burl top that exhibits traces of flame and spalt. Rob has a simple philosophy regarding wood combinations: "Tops can be chosen to tonally affect the body wood—adding a maple top on a light ash body increases top-end response—or to be more of a decorative element. The buckeye burl's weight and density is similar to the ash core and doesn't affect the ash's warmth and punch." The sound of our tester reflected Robert's careful planning: warm, even, and full of fretless growl. The body was coated in a hand-rubbed urethane/oil finish that felt smooth and organic. Though not as durable as a polyester finish, urethane/oil allows the wood to breathe (increasing the frequency range) and can be easily re-applied when needed.

Our Elrick 5's neck was made of three pieces of graphite-reinforced, quartersawn maple topped with a 1/4" fingerboard of rare pink ivorywood, selected for its unique tone and durability. Pink ivorywood sounds similar to ebony but without the brittle top end. Like most high-end basses, our tester came equipped with premium Hipshot Ultralight gears and a quick-release Hipshot B-Type bridge made of aluminum, a metal that enhances low-end clarity. Standard surface-mounted strap buttons would disrupt the graceful curves, so Elrick uses flush-mounted Dunlop Strap Locks. (Don't forget your strap with the matching male locking mechanism; a standard strap will not work.) A nearly straight neck and low action, combined with a thin, well-carved neck, kept staffers reaching for the Elrick. Even without lines, our tester was easier to play in tune than most fretless basses.

The optional Bartolini soapbars, which sound warmer and bigger than the standard J-coil pickups, are a perfect match for the Elrick. The stock Bartolini NTMB circuit has separate volume, blend, treble, mid, and bass controls and sits in a carefully shielded and well-designed control cavity. The control cover (artfully cut from the rear lower bout) is also shielded with long-lasting copper tape. There are two switches mounted near the bridge: One selects active or passive operation, and the other switches the midrange frequency point among 250Hz, 500Hz, or 800Hz. (The midrange control knob cuts or boosts the selected frequency.) An internal trim pot adjusts overall output. We coaxed our favorite tone out of the Elrick 5 with the following settings: blend knob favoring the bridge pickup, treble and bass controls flat, and midrange slightly boosted with the switch set at 250Hz. The result was a fatter and more focused Jaco sound. Our tester was voiced perfectly for a folk-rock song recorded onto a Tascam 788 hard-disk recorder along with acoustic guitar and percussion tracks. The melodic line benefited from the Elrick's focused and supportive sound. At a rehearsal with guitar, drums, and a vocalist/keyboardist, notes blossomed when we plucked near the end of the fingerboard on a ballad.

The Gold Standard 5 is expensive—but the precise woodworking, top-of-the-line hardware and electronics, and pro setup earn every penny. Elrick balances art with functionality, creating a player's bass that looks as good as it sounds.

—Scott Shiraki



Elrick cuts the control-cavity cover from the same piece of ash as the body.

TECH SPECS

Made in: USA

List price: \$2,500 (\$3,600 as tested)

Hardshell case: Included

Warranty: Lifetime limited

Weight: 8 lbs

Options: Lined or unlined fretless (no charge); bubinga or wenge fingerboard (no charge); ebony fingerboard (\$250); pink ivorywood fingerboard (\$400); 34"- or 36"-scale (\$250), left-handed (\$350); polyurethane lacquer finishes (\$600); Bartolini soapbar pickups (\$200); curly or quilted maple (\$400); buckeye burl, walnut burl, maple burl, spalted-maple burl, or zebrawood (\$500); other woods available by special request

Other models: 4-, 5-, 6-, and 7-string Thru-Neck, Hybrid, Hybrid Semi-hollow, New Jazz Standard (4- and 5-string only), Piccolo 4- and 8-string

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