



ELRICK EXPAT NJ5

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

I FEEL FOR SOME BOUTIQUE LUTHIERS. THEY SPEND years formalizing and refining their instrument designs, meticulously realizing their unique vision, eschewing more lucrative gigs on an honorable quest to satisfy their creativity. And then everyone wants them to build a Jazz bass. I've got nothing against J-style basses; in fact, I own two and play them all the time. It's just that their dominance can obligate all but the most die-hard individualist luthiers to go down that path. And there are a few ways down the path: Some of the world's great builders aim to perfect the Fender-style J bass—guys like Roger Sadowsky, Mike Lull, Jimmy Coppolo, Dan Lakin, and

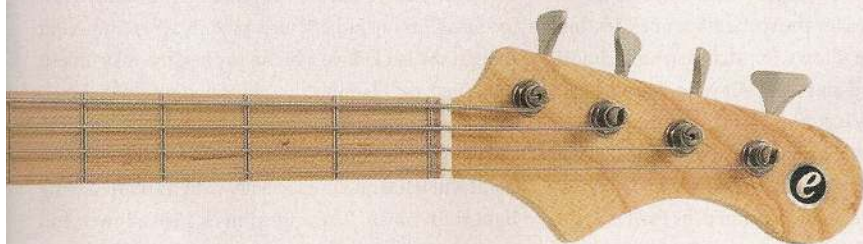
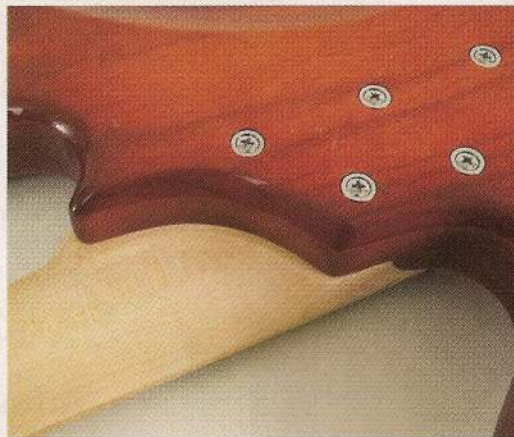
Carey Nordstrand come to mind, not to mention Fender itself. Others, like Chicago luthier Rob Elrick, seek to pick up a few important cues from the original, but put execute them with a more liberated design vocabulary. The new Expat NJ5 (for "New Jazz Standard") basses take some of Elrick's J-style approach from his U.S.-built NJS J basses, but are made in the Czech Republic from American components to keep costs down. Elrick touts, among other things, that the Czech instruments allow him to offer a much more cost-effective J-style bass with a lacquer finish, a feature that isn't cost-effective in his U.S. shop.

Among bass-importing countries, the Czech Republic has a strong reputation. The quality and consistency of our test Elricks reveals why. Each was flawlessly assembled and finished with an unimpeachable attention to detail. Their fretwork was exquisite and each arrived with a comfy medium-low setup that didn't budge during testing. I dug the Hipshot hardware and Dunlop strap buttons; the cheap-feeling knobs, on the other hand, need

The Elrick's zero-fret makes open strings sound like their fretted equivalents.



The Expats have a fantastically accessible high register, thanks to this well-designed neck joint.



to go. The electronics are your basic Bartolini rig: linear hum-cancelling J-style pickups and a 3-band EQ with active/passive and midrange-frequency switching governed by push-pull pots.

The Expats' contour is J-esque, but it takes welcome liberties with the original design. The deeply carved six-bolt neck joint made high-register playing a snap. The zero-fret improved consistency between open-string and fretted notes. On my lap, the 5-string felt a tad neck-heavy, but both basses are quite light and felt comfortable on a strap. Both instruments had nice, wide string spacing for digging in, and the fingerboards' protrusion from the top at the neck joint made for excellent thumb anchorage. The Elricks' neck profile, especially the 5'er, was chunkier than I expected, given their heritage.

ABROAD TONE

Despite the different fingerboard composition between our 4- and 5-string testers, they sounded virtually identical. Both Expats were poised, balanced, and precise. They don't sound at all like vintage J-Basses, but they do offer hi-fi versions of many classic J-style tones, including a woody neck-pickup bark, full-bodied blended-pickup thumb, and nasal bridge-pickup burp. Their top-to-bottom evenness was exceptional, including below the lowest notes of the

5-string's B string. There's a reason Bartolini has been around so long; its preamp works smoothly and musically, and the added control over midrange frequency offers a welcome additional layer of versatility. Both basses really shimmered when slapped—pops were especially brilliant and laced with tickly treble. Played pickstyle in a rock setting, they're a little too polite to be gut-busting and aggressive, though.

The Elrick Expats lose nothing in their overseas origination, and are virtually without flaw. I'd recommend them for those who need a modern, active-style J-Bass palette, but still want something slightly left-of-center. They're well built and broadly capable, and would be an excellent go-to all-rounder, especially if you favor detailed and well-textured tone.

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ELRICK EXPAT NJS

List 4-string, \$2,500; 5-string, \$2,750

Street 4-string, \$2,000; 5-string, \$2,200

Pros Smooth and balanced tone with good versatility and killing slap capability

Cons Ditch the cheap-o knobs

Bottom line The Expats deliver high-end construction and precise, modern tone at a nice price.

Scale length 34"

Body Swamp ash

Neck Three-piece quartersawn maple with Indian rosewood or quartersawn maple fingerboard

Hardware Hipshot tuners and bridge; Dunlop strap-lock-compatible strap buttons

Pickups Bartolini hum-cancelling J-Bass

Electronics Bartolini HR-5.2 preamp with mid-frequency selection (250Hz–800Hz)

Nut Corian

Finish Lacquer

Case Elrick Zero Gravity ultralight case included

Weight 5-string, 8.2 lbs; 4-string, 7.3 lbs

Made in Czech Republic

Warranty Lifetime limited to original owner

Contact

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