

And Bonamassa's guitars have never been more articulate, speaking throughout the tunes in big, clear, warm, perfectly burnished tones that convey the joy, loss and hope in the songs' lyrics. In part, that's because he varied his usual Marshall, Dumble and Van Wheelton Twinkleland amp diet for the sessions, adding new Dumbles—ultimately employing four Overdrive Specials—and, more important, a juicy main course of vintage Fenders including a 1965 Twin Reverb, a 1962 Vibroverb, a 1962 Deluxe, a 1958 Twin and a 1962 Reverb.

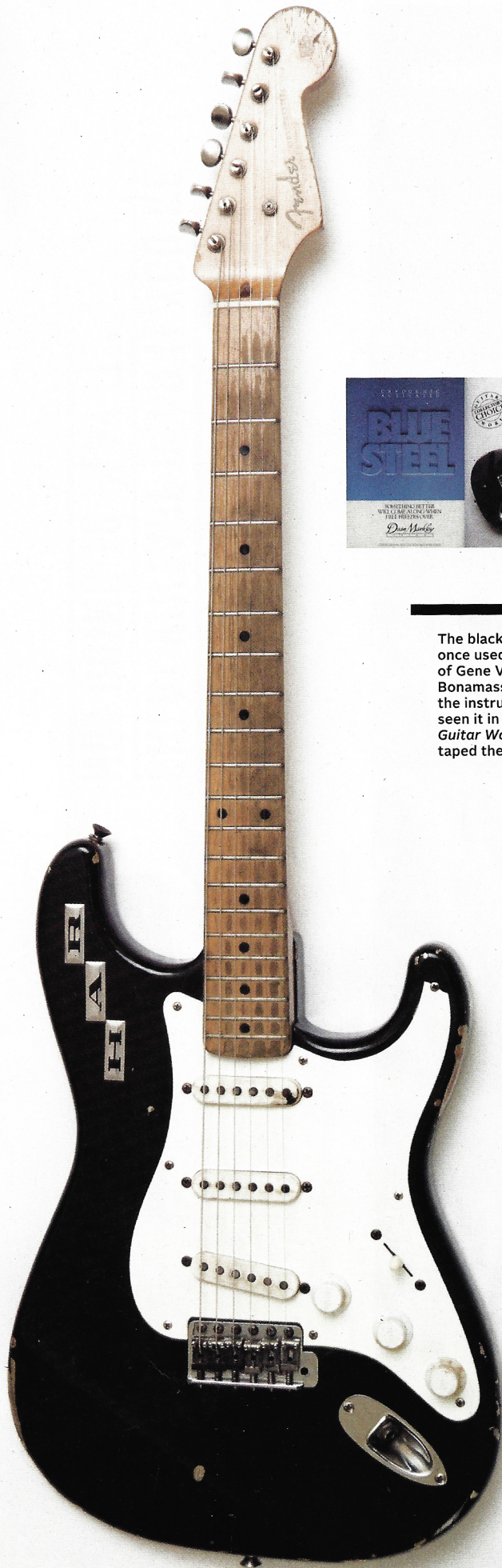
"The sound of the Fenders was so inspiring that, for the first time in 15 years, I'm changing up my road rig and going out with all Fenders," Bonamassa says. "I'm going to have to work a little harder, but the warmth and the presence is worth forcing myself to make it work."

"Plus, every few years I feel like I need to throw a firecracker into my life, musically and otherwise," he adds. "In the last year a lot has happened in my personal life, too. A relationship I was in for four years broke up, I moved house... I fear being complacent. If I feel like things are getting into a routine, I want them to be different. I need to keep improving and keep moving forward."

Another change on *Different Shades of Blue* was the increased presence of Stratocasters—a 1956 blonde Strat, a 1963 sunburst and a 1965 in Lake Placid Blue. "I know people associate me with the Les Paul, and I am a Les Paul guy to the bone," Bonamassa says. "I love my vintage Les Pauls, I love my signature models with Gibson, and I think Gibson is making some of the best guitars they've ever made right now. But I also love the sound of a great Strat. To me, that classic Les Paul tone and that classic Strat sound cover pretty much everything I could ever want to play."

When Bonamassa moved earlier this year he looked at 18 homes and rejected most of them because they weren't large enough to accommodate his still-growing collection of guitars and amps. His latest acquisitions have been Fenders. In addition to the amps, he's just purchased a personal Holy Grail guitar: a 1962 blonde-over-ash Stratocaster just like the one he sold nearly 20 years ago to finance a move from upstate New York to the Big Apple. "After searching for that guitar for years, two popped up in the same week," Bonamassa says. He bought both.

He also partnered with a friend to acquire a black 1955 Stratocaster that was used by Howard Reed when he was a member of rock and roll pioneer Gene Vincent's Blue Caps. "When I was a kid that black Strat was featured as a poster in the April 1988 issue of *Guitar World*," he says. "I cut the



The black 1955 Stratocaster once used by Howard Reed of Gene Vincent's Blue Caps. Bonamassa recently purchased the instrument. He'd originally seen it in the April 1988 issue of *Guitar World* (above), and had taped the photo on his wall.