



In the second installment of our Guitar Insider with Jon Suhr, Ken Volpe spends some time talking with our Insider about the woods used to build electric guitars and the tonal qualities produced from each.

John, what are the different types of commonly used tone woods for necks and fingerboards ?

Maple, Maple with Pau Ferro, Maple with Indian Rosewood, Maple with African Rosewood, Maple with Brazilian Rosewood.

Tell us about the specific qualities of each of these neck and fingerboard woods.

Maple - Maple has a unique tone, strong in the midrange with a sweet spanky high end. Maple will cut through when you need it and it is never muddy on the bass. Maple is good for overdrive with good harmonics. It's excellent on a Basswood back Quilt Maple bent-top Standard: very ballsy. If the finish is kept thin on Maple the tone is strong in the upper mids, not too much presence and a dry clear bass. The idea that maple is bright comes from the days of heavily lacquered / polyester finishes. At that point you are listening to the finish, not the wood.

Maple with Pau Ferro – Quarter sawn Pau Ferro has the good properties of Ebony but seems to be more reliable and stable. Pau Ferro is a tight-grained hardwood with excellent clarity on the "chunk" tones when using gain, especially when teamed up with an alder body. In overdrive mode it has a fatter low end and more pronounced sparkle when compared to Maple. It adds excellent definition to the notes, especially when using overdriven tones. This combination is strong in the lower mids and bass with some scooped mids. Pau Ferro is also known as Morado Santos or Bolivian Rosewood. Solid Pau Ferro necks have a great articulate tone but can be harder to find and never should be painted, just light oil.

Maple with Indian Rosewood – Very common choice, sweet and warm with some sparkle on the top end, Indian Rosewood is probably one of the most popular fingerboard woods. It is open grained with colors ranging from brown black to red brown. Warm and fat, it is not too bright and not too dark - very neutral, it does however have more "sizzle" than 1-piece Maple necks.

Maple with African Rosewood – African Rosewood is rich in color: red brown with interesting patterns to sometimes almost black. Wide frequency response - brilliant highs and punchy lows. It is tight-grained Rosewood similar to Brazilian Rosewood. This fingerboard wood is good with darker sounding body woods and humbucker settings. Exhibits a strong upper midrange and

extra presence, it's slappy. The African is very similar to Brazilian in color and tone.

Maple with Brazilian Rosewood – Limited in legal availability, Brazilian Rosewood has the characteristics of Indian and Madagascar rolled into one. It doesn't have as much brights as the Madagascar and is more crisp than Indian. It is best not used on Ash unless you like brights or you compensate in some other way like using darker sounding pickups or bridge.