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# Git Guitarist

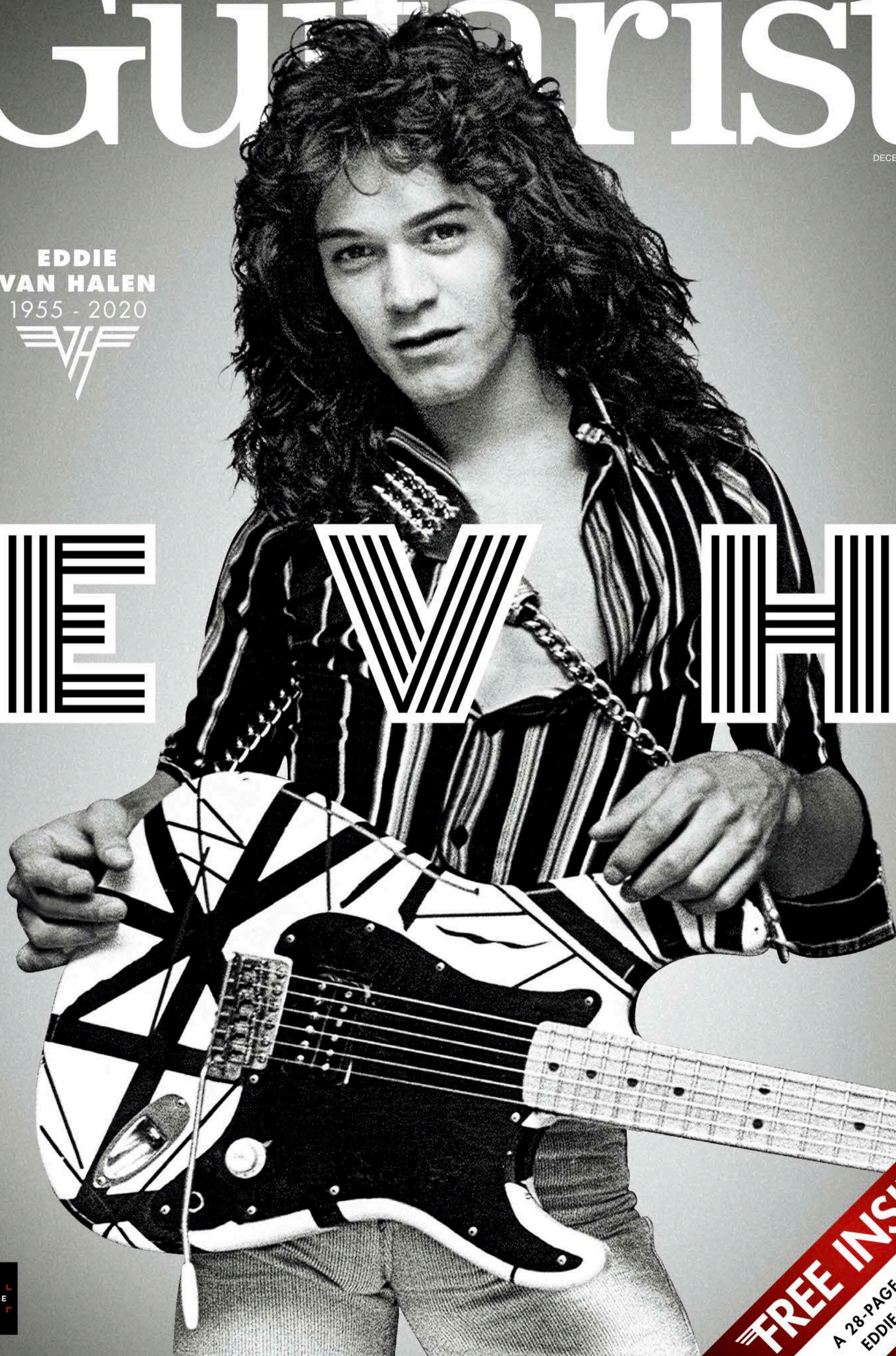
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**EDDIE  
VAN HALEN**  
1955 - 2020



# EVH

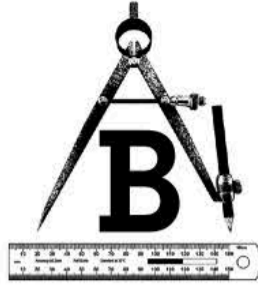


**FREE INSIDE!**  
A 28-PAGE SALUTE TO  
EDDIE VAN HALEN



FUTURE





« BLUEPRINT »

# ON THE CASE

Ever found traditional guitar cases a pain to carry?  
Don't trust gigbags to protect your beloved guitar?  
Don't worry, Wolfie Ritter thinks he's designed something better  
than either one with the Wolfmeister Gig-Shells...

Words Jamie Dickson

**I**t wasn't the easiest of debuts, Wolfgang 'Wolfie' Ritter admits. Last January he took his fledgling company Wolfmeister to NAMM for the first time, returning with armfuls of orders for his innovative Gig-Shells. These high-end guitar cases are designed to offer better protection than a traditional hard case but in a form as portable as a gigbag. Made entirely by hand in India, they look as beautiful as the instruments they contain. With all this in his favour, conditions seemed perfect for Wolfie's labour-of-love business to flourish. Then Covid-19 hit.

"It was absolutely quiet for about five months, because we had to shut the workshop," Wolfie recalls. "India was particularly crazy because the prime minister went on TV and said, 'Everybody home right now.' He basically gave 1.2 billion people four hours' notice to get home and then the place was shut down for four or five months. So the panic was massive, obviously."

Some people might have been tempted to put the whole project on ice at this point – but Wolfie had already taken several leaps of faith to get that far, so he wasn't about to let a mere global pandemic halt him.



Wolfie Ritter's obsession for guitars eventually pulled him away from the London rat-race to Australia, where he conceived a guitar-case worthy of its high-end passengers

"We started manufacturing again a few weeks ago, but under great difficulty because all our suppliers shut down, so no-one had any material to give us," he says. "And that's important for this line of handmade cases, because they rely on really high-quality materials. So, yeah, it was crazy and it's still very difficult – but we've started producing again."

Now based in Australia, Ritter was formerly a high-flying creative in London's

advertising industry. His offices were based near the famed music stores of Denmark Street and, with temptation so close at hand, his passion for guitars soon became an addiction.

"I love guitars and I've always collected them from a very early point," he says. "So I used to go down to Denmark Street every lunchtime, to the point where the guys in No. Tom and Regent Sounds must have been fed up with the sight of me! I was almost part of the furniture. I was mainly looking at the secondhand guitars that came in and I always bought a guitar, played it a while and if I didn't like it, I brought it back and got something else instead. So I loved that."

"But that meant I was carrying around a lot of guitars in their original hard cases, which is difficult in a taxi and nearly impossible on the Tube. I always hated the look of gigbags, though, so I just couldn't bring myself to carry a guitar around in what seemed to me to be just a black plastic bag. For a Fender Custom Shop Strat or vintage guitar to have that plastic bag... it just doesn't go together!" he laughs.

"So I think that was actually where the idea for Gig-Shells was born," he explains. "I wanted to create a case that people didn't have to hide – because cases and



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"You could drop it on its side  
down a set of stairs without  
harm to the instrument.  
It protects the guitar from  
reaction force coming  
from any direction"  
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The Wolfmeister Gig-Shells  
are handmade in Kolkata,  
India, by an ethical and  
eco-friendly company, with  
whom Wolfie spent three  
years developing the  
design of the cases





**1.** A hugely experienced Indian company took on the task of hand-crafting Wolfmeister's Gig-Shells and added its experience to the long R&D process

**2.** Canvas and leather form the beautiful exterior of this Leo-model Gig-Shell. But what lies beneath is what really counts

**3.** Wolfmeister specified that the top-quality leather was sourced from cattle killed for the meat industry, not purely for hide

**4.** The leather is carefully stitched, completing the artisan feel and functionality of each Gig-Shell. The top-of-the-line models are full leather but the majority of the range is canvas and leather



gigbags usually end up in the garage stored away, or in a dark corner. But I wanted my case to be good enough to actually display alongside the guitar."

While he was mulling this problem, Wolfie's wife persuaded him to quit the rat-race and emigrate to Australia. Being very much at home in London, he was initially reluctant to leave for more than a couple of years – but to his surprise he fell in love with the Australian lifestyle and decided to stay. He took another stressful job in advertising Down Under, but couldn't shake the feeling that it was now or never if he were to pursue his passion for guitars further.

"I started thinking about setting up my own business making guitar cases," he says, "and somehow this idea started growing in my head that actually I could do it better than what's currently in the market."

Wolfie says he started with the premise that traditional hard cases are unwieldy and often not particularly good at protecting guitars.

"Most people feel that the instrument is protected in a traditional rectangular hard

case because they're so heavy and solid, being made out of wood. But the fact is, the guitar is completely loose inside the case and the neck only has two very fine contact points at the top and the bottom – there's no proper neck support."

Gigbags weren't a good alternative, either, he concluded, because he found them ugly and even less effective at protecting guitars. So he decided to design a new type of case that would combine the classic looks of a hard case with the portability of a gigbag while providing excellent protection for the guitar. There was just one problem.

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"Most people feel the instrument is protected in a traditional hard case... But the guitar is completely loose inside"

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"I had no idea how to do it," he laughs. "I had a background in engineering from when I was in university, so that helped a lot – but I didn't have any contacts in the industry. I didn't even know how to find the right people to help me build this thing."

Fortune favours the brave, however, and while chatting to a friend he discovered the man's family in India ran a huge bag-making firm, which supplied, among other things, most of the jute-fibre bags-for-life sold in British supermarkets. He entered discussions with the company and discovered that they also had a fashion division that made bags from high-end materials and were strongly committed to sustainable manufacturing.

"Everything they do is completely eco-friendly: all the materials they use are 100 per cent recyclable, biodegradable and sustainable," Wolfie says. "They only use azo-free dyes and they are a zero-carbon company. It's a reputable company that cares for its employees – there are 8,000 plus people working in it and throughout the five months they had to close down, they paid every single worker full wages."

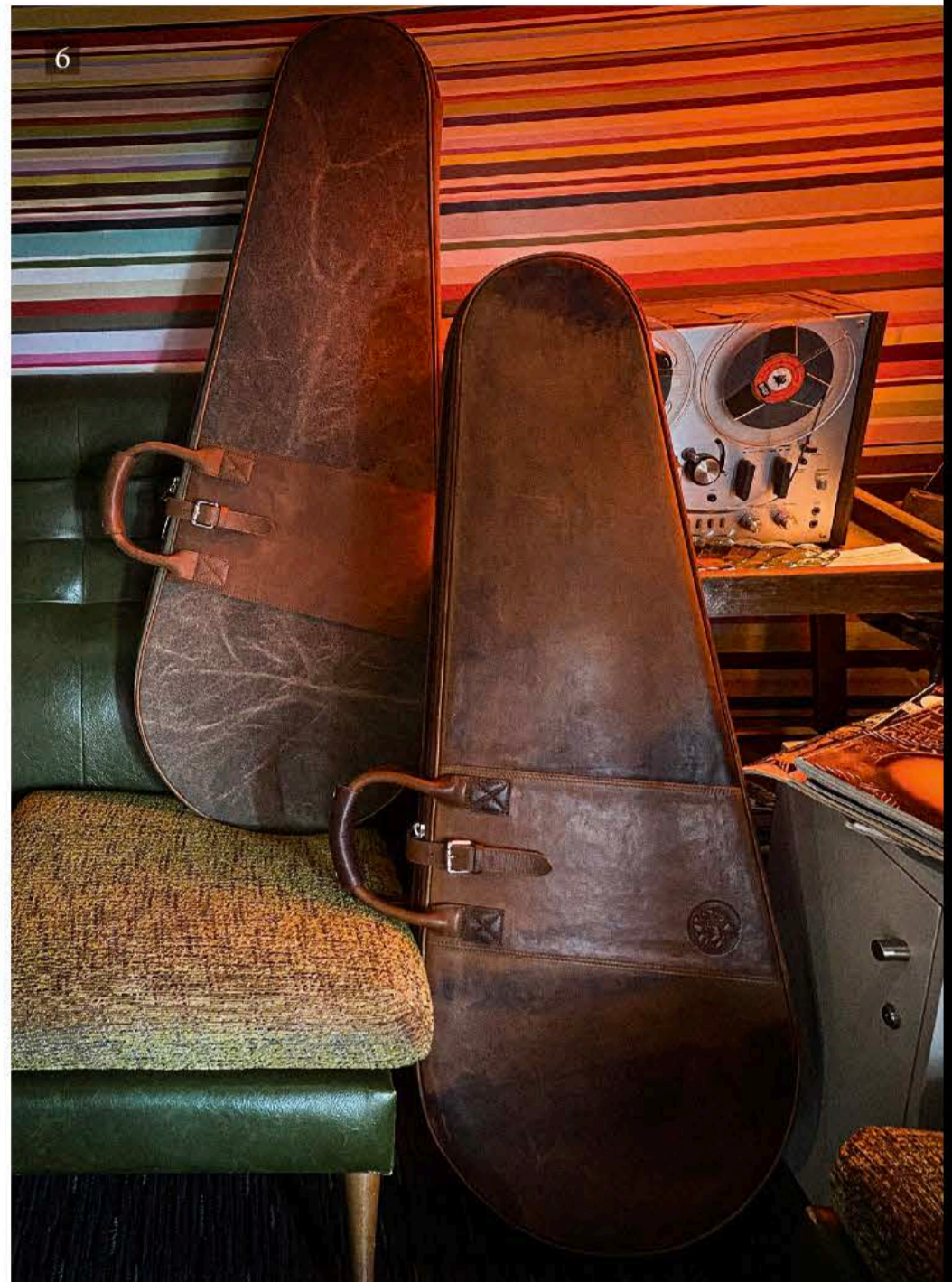




5. The outer layer of canvas and leather sits on top of a multi-layered shell in which rubber, unbreakable plastic, foam and paper composite all form part of a unique protection system

6. The concept behind Wolfmeister's Gig-Shells is to create a protective case that looks as good as the guitar it holds, hence the emphasis on artisan, handmade production

7. Manufacturing has recently resumed in India so Wolfie Ritter hopes to build on his NAMM success in coming months



After talking his plans through with the company and finding them enthusiastic about the project, Wolfie realised he'd found the right maker. Now came the hard part: to construct a bag as portable and light as a gigbag but tougher than a hard case.

"The first problem in the whole protection thing is that corners mean breaking points," Wolfie recalls. "So I decided to go for a perfect teardrop shape. I mean, there are loads of teardrop-shaped cases out there, but they're all somehow flattened off on the top and bottom – but mine are completely round like a perfect egg. This is really to avoid breaking points.

"So then I thought, 'Okay, how thin can I make this thing?' And the first idea I had was actually to use two sheets of carbon fibre in a clamshell shape that would be strong but also flex and absorb impact to a degree. So that was the first idea I looked into, but it was just unaffordable because the carbon fibre sheet itself cost \$600 to produce."

In the end, Ritter spent three years in R&D with the Indian company, working

as far as possible with natural materials and avoiding plastics except where no commercially viable alternative could be found. Working by trial and error, then, they eventually hit upon a layered protection system.

"We found the best design was a combination of five different-density materials," he explains. "At first, we tried heavy foam and heavy rubber alone and that was obviously not good enough. We then added a sheet of plastic to the rubber, but we had massive problems with deformation. In the end, after God knows how many tries, we ended up with a five-layer design.

"We now have foam inside, for softness and to really enclose the guitar properly, then a thick sheet of rubber, then an unbreakable sheet of plastic that's still very thin. And then there's a thinner sheet of rubber and finally a paper-compound material. We tried that out because we had massive problems fitting the canvas and leather to the outside of the case without it making ripples in the fabric that were very unsightly."

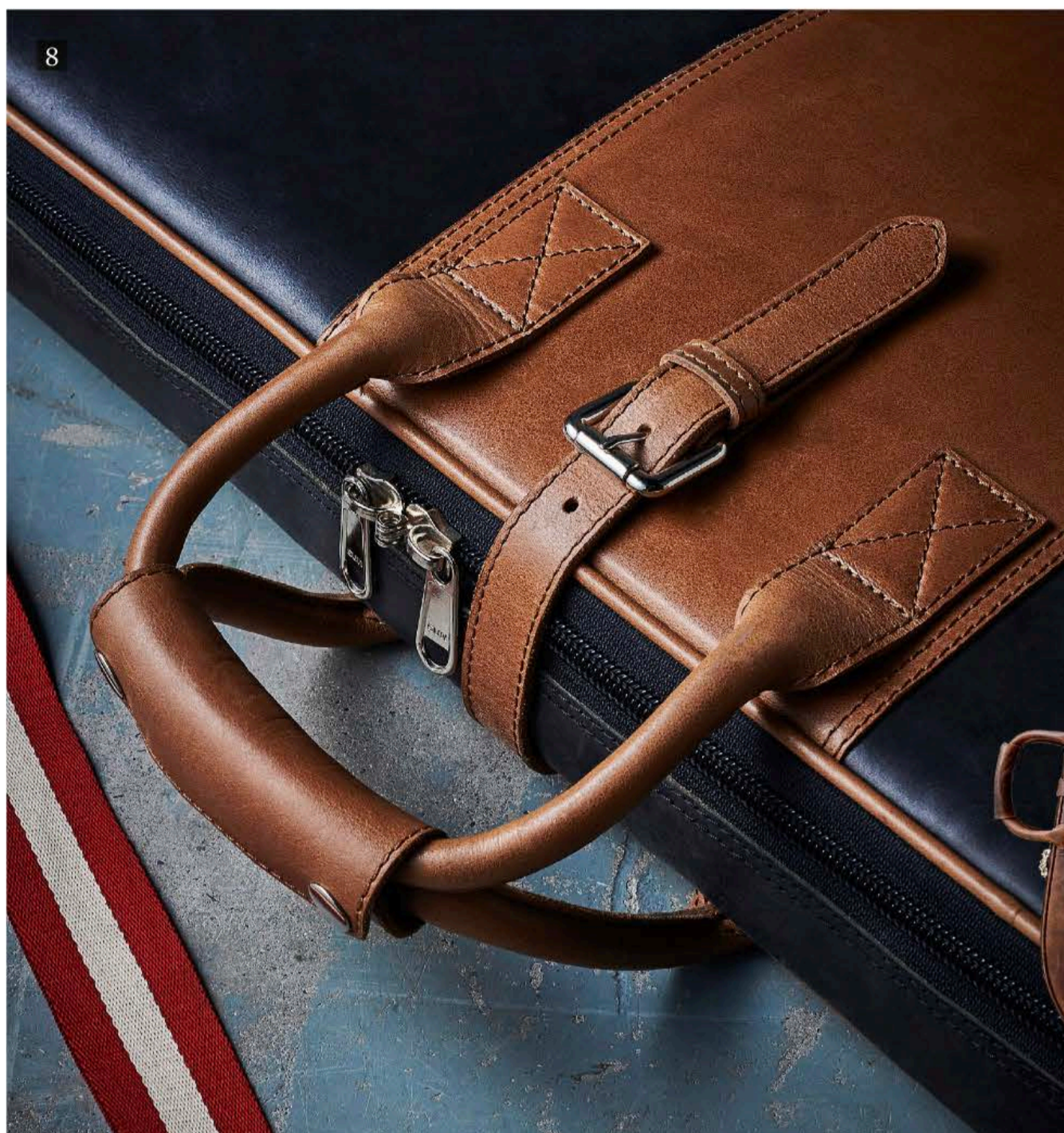
The other essential thing the Gig-Shell had to achieve was stop the guitar from moving around inside the case during any sort of transit.

"It's a huge part of the whole protection system because the guitar should not move within the case," Wolfie explains. "If you look at other cases that are not completely fitted to the guitar, the body is actually loose in the case. The neck may be strapped to the neck support, but the body is still really loose – and the body is really heavy. So if you dropped that case, the guitar still moves inside and gets damaged if there is a hard impact. So we're now using two straps – one for the neck and one for the body – which completely immobilises the guitar in the centre of the case."

Combined with an impact-absorbing 'crumple' zone around the zipped edge of the bag, Wolfie found this multi-level design provided surprising levels of protection without adding bulk.

"You could hit it with a hammer right on the top or you could drop it on its side down a set of stairs without harm to the





8. Aside from the neat and strong stitching of handles and other leather parts, the edge of the case forms an impact-absorbing zone

9. Classic styles for classic models: the Wolfmeister range caters to Fender, PRS and Gibson styles but drop them a line and they'll be glad to advise on fit



instrument,” Wolfie says. “It protects the guitar from reaction force coming from any direction.”

With the core of his protection system devised, Wolfie then built it into a range of bags that he has dubbed ‘Gig-Shells’, which were initially designed to fit Fender electrics, Gibson SGs and most PRS electrics. With the addition of a new ‘Lester’ model to the line-up, however, Wolfmeister now offers a dedicated bag for Gibson Les Paul players as well.

“I called the first model we made the Leo because it is designed to hold Fender guitars with a straight neck,” he tells us. “A Les Paul does actually fit in there and you can carry one around in the Leo case if you want – but it’s not optimal. So that’s why we then created a dedicated Les Paul case called the Lester, which is a lot deeper and has a lot more protection all around. You need that because from body to neck you’ve got a back-angle and then neck to headstock you’ve got another back-angle to support. We also put a little cushion under the body, so that the body doesn’t float in the air.”

Wolfie adds that there is also a bass guitar case named the Carol (after Carol Kaye) that fits nearly all mainstream bass designs, including Rickenbackers.

Wolfie says that he plans to evolve the Gig-Shell concept into a range of entry-level bags in the future, but admits that his commitment to making sustainable products from high-quality materials means Gig-Shells remain premium products for the time being. He argues that the payoff is a product that lasts for life, looks amazing and doesn’t screw over the people making it.

“The most expensive material we use is actually the interior lining in some of the cases,” he says, by way of illustrating

“With this product we support communities in India and create job opportunities”

the point. “It’s a handwoven, natural-fibre product that costs me \$24 a meter. And I need two meters for one bag, which means that’s \$50 just for the lining in production. So that obviously all adds up. But the good thing with this handloom product is that we support communities in India and create job opportunities, because that material is woven by craftsmen and craftswomen in small villages. So it’s not coming from a big textiles plant.”

The Gig-Shell range of bags can be ordered direct from Wolfmeister’s website and ship worldwide. The range starts at \$395 (US dollars) for the Johnny model, which features a hard-wearing ballistic nylon finish (the only inorganic covering in the range) and a slinky ‘soft jute’ interior. The canvas-and-leather Leo model, meanwhile, comes in at \$595 and then at the top of the tree a full-leather Leo or Lester model with handloom lining costs \$750. Not cheap, then, but worthy carriages for your beloved electric and made without exploitation of either the planet or people. **G**

[www.thewolfmeister.com](http://www.thewolfmeister.com)