

GUITAR GEAR

JOIN THE JGT NEWSLETTER

Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model – An Elite Instrument Without The Sticker Shock

Published 29 mins ago on July 6, 2022 By Brad Jeter



Jazz Guitar Today contributor Brad Jeter reviews the Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model and explains why elite instruments matter.

Why do elite instruments matter? Considering most are out of reach financially of many if not most players, what do they bring to the guitar playing community as a whole? My short answer is that they do matter: They matter a lot, actually.

Elite is simply a descriptor often used to describe someone or something that is the best in class. Something superior in a way that, collectively, is recognized as the creme-de-la-creme. In the simplest terms, as applies to guitars, let's just say that it means a superior instrument in materials, construction and playability.

Large manufacturers often do offer their own specially branded elite instruments. With few exceptions, large manufacturers' attempts at san pareil instruments often, if not usually, fail to achieve the level of construction and playability of the dedicated luthiers output.

A truly elite instrument is one that does not prioritize the bottom line.

Obviously the bottom line is something that has to be considered by anyone producing a product for consumers but in my experience, a dedicated luthier first concern and commitment is to consistently producing the finest product he or she places their name on.

The independent luthier also has the freedom (and business risk) of not having to follow mandates and rules that they themselves have not established. Risks are taken and new approaches to design and execution can be explored. This leads to innovation and the ability to not compromise under someone else's terms.

This freedom creates the state-of-the-art. It creates timeless instruments that are easily recognized for their superiority of materials, build, playability and aesthetics. Roger Sadowsky needs little introduction. He has been recognized for decades as a luthier who brings innovation and an uncompromising quality to the more discerning and seasoned player.



Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model – Photo credit Brad Jeter

The guitar under review is the Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model. This is an instrument whose design is a result of listening to professional players and their preferences and wishes. The professional player who might have to juggle three or four sessions a day. The professional player who has to juggle a session and a gig or gigs. The professional player that wants an instrument that is built to last and endure the realities of dragging your gear all over town. The professional player who wants an instrument that is streamlined, compact and—most importantly—not in least bit compromised in the all important areas of playability and tone.

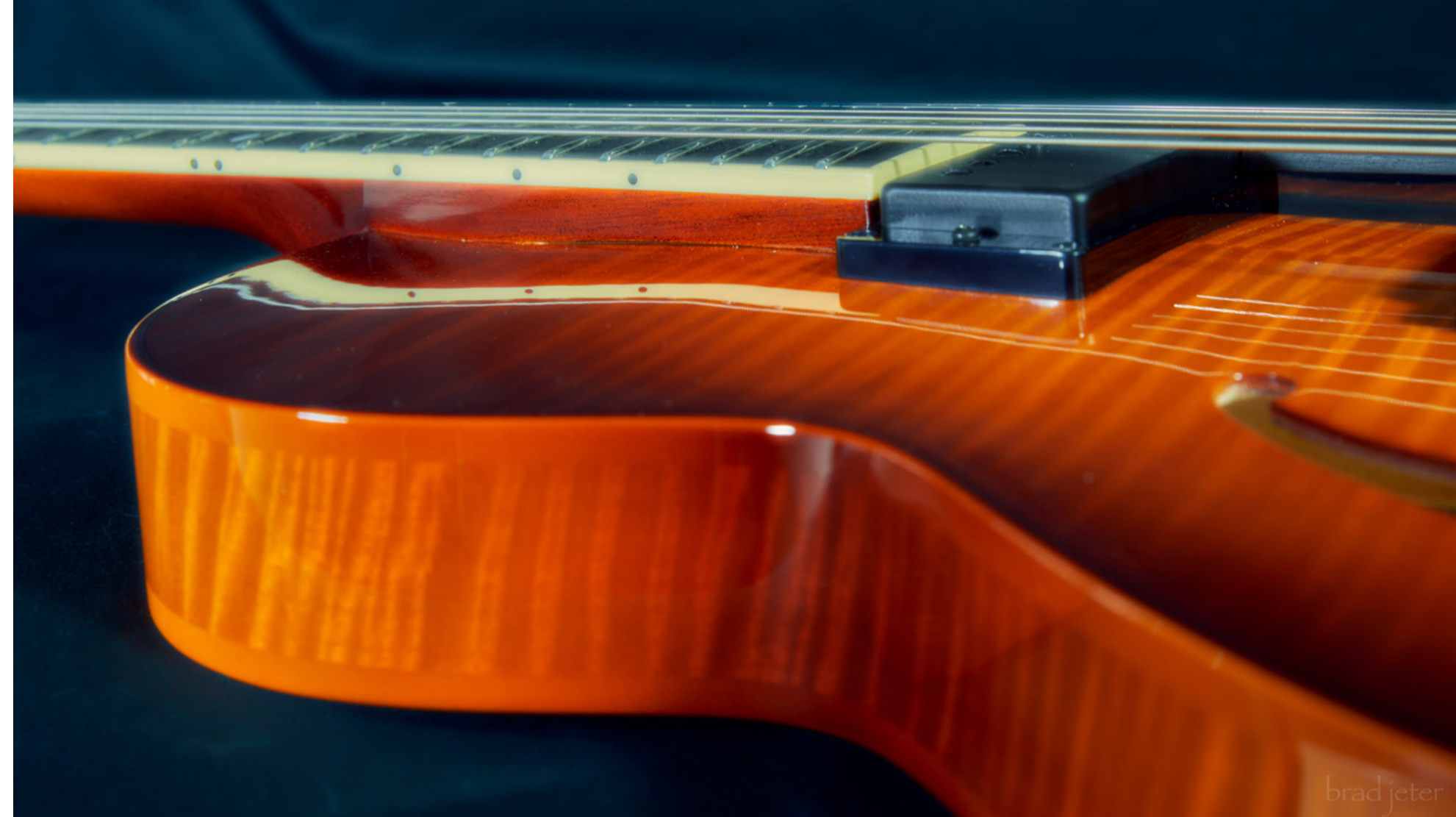
This is why I think the Frank Vignola Model is an elite instrument: it checks off all those boxes and serves the industry as to what can be accomplished when form integrates seamlessly with function. This is why elite instruments ultimately matter: it drives the industry with expectation. These instruments continually set the bar for innovation and value.

As a quick aside, if you are familiar with my reviews, you know I don't do dimensional measurements (i.e., neck widths and depths at various arbitrary points, resistive values of electronics, etc.) If those things are of interest to you, those are usually available by the builder on their website. Numbers really don't add up to much as far as how an instrument feels or responds to me. I am far more interested in the bond you or I, as a player, form with the guitar. Having said that, let's get into the Frank Vignola Signature.

I have had the pleasure of seeing Frank Vignola play in person. Simply put, he is a consummate musician that should be on everyone's short list of important contemporary jazz guitarists active today.

The first thing that struck me when I took this guitar out of the case is just how beautiful it is. It is quite stunning actually. The finish is an example of what a master craftsman strives for. The shading of the burst is sublime and the finish is very consistent and thin in application—not too little or too much, just right. I can't imagine this finish having any sonic impact whatsoever. The wood "breathes" freely which is immediately evident with the first strum. I know this might sound a bit fluffy or, somewhat, nondescript but anyone who has ever played a guitar that seemed to be dipped in a vat of goo knows exactly what I mean. I never could understand those overly thick poly finishes that were so prevalent starting in the 90s. I won't mention names but I think some of you will know exactly who I mean.

The woods used for the Frank Vignola Model are superb in both aesthetic quality and tone. Well chosen and executed, the body sports a 5-ply maple laminate that rings true but also effectively dampens unwanted resonances when amplified. The top layer is what I would describe as a moderate flame.



Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model – Photo credit Brad Jeter

The body dimensions reflect a desire to make it compact, comfortable while not compromising on a full, rich tone. Sadowsky decided on a 15" bout with a 1-3/4" body depth. It is immediately familiar and unique at the same time when taken in hand.

This, combined with a fast, comfortable mahogany/ebony neck is just a simple pleasure to experience. The 12" radius neck contour conjures a Goldilocks analogy: not too thin, not too thick, just right. I have fairly large hands and I had no issues with this carve. I have a broad range of neck profiles that I have come to prefer over the years for particular style instruments, and this neck falls right into the middle for me. I think anyone other than having bear claws for hands, will appreciate how well this neck just gets out of the way and just lets you play. The frets are medium/jumbo and are finished to perfection. Glassy smooth and each one firmly and properly seated, there are no surprises anywhere on this neck. All notes ring true with no hint of buzzing or dead-spots anywhere.

The tuners are smooth and precise—combined with a beautifully cut and polished nut and similarly refined ebony bridge and tailpiece, tuning to pitch and staying there is a breeze.

The pickups are described as vintage PAF-style. That is kind of a catch-all phrase I never really cared for but I completely understand why it is used. In the broadest of terms, it lets you know that it is wide-range, dynamic and harmonically rich pickup. Again, as Goldilocks would say, not to hot, not to weak, just right. The black covers really add a nice pop to the visuals.

Another thing I really appreciate is the minimalist controls—a shared volume and tone. Yes, in absolute terms, it is not offer as broad of a spectrum as separate controls, but I feel that all the usable tones are there with only the most extreme and rarely used are missing. By having a well paired set of pickups—and these are—a very broad and usable palette is at your command.



Sadowsky Frank Vignola Model – Photo credit Brad Jeter

One thing I would like to mention is what adding a bridge pickup to an instrument of this type achieves. To my ears, by adding a bridge pickup to a semi-hollow or hollow body guitar can have a very noticeable and appreciated result. I think it adds a bit of clarity and definition to the overall sound. I think notes develop a more articulate rise-time when the strings are plucked. I say this because I have been fortunate to compare the same basic model guitars over the years in both configurations. In other words, all else being equal, the addition of the bridge pickup changes the physics of the top resonance. I have heard this many times and, again, I believe it to be a very positive choice. I love Wes but I don't want to always be locked in to that tone.

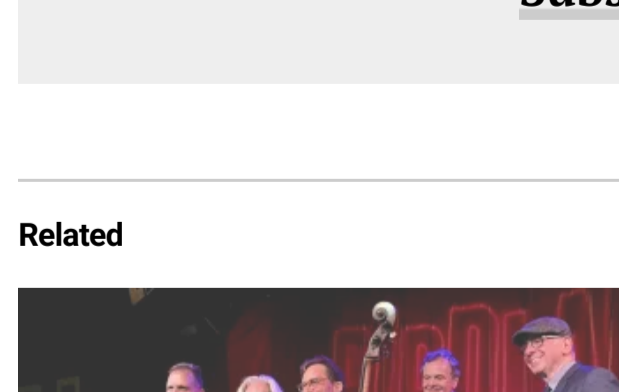
This guitar can easily be a "forever" guitar for the serious guitarist that has worked hard to develop and refine their playing.

It will compliment you at every step of your journey. It will appeal to the seasoned professional as well as the intermediate player looking to be inspired to pick up the guitar and play. A great instrument not only lets the mind/body connection be as unencumbered as possible, it makes you strive to be a little bit better every day.

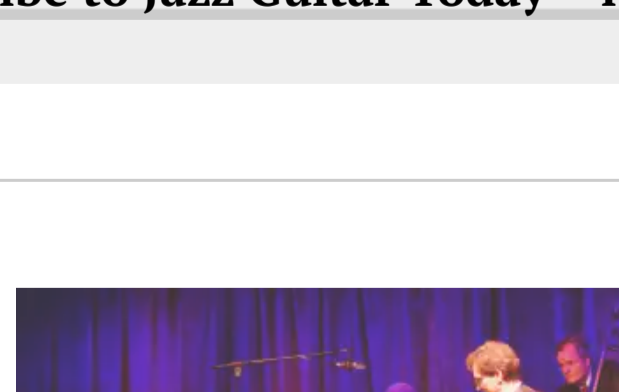
So, yes, this is an elite instrument in the purist sense. It sets the bar for innovation and what can be achieved for what is ultimately, a very reasonable investment for such a well thought out, immaculately constructed and mellifluous guitar. If you get the chance to try a Frank Vignola Model, or any Sadowsky guitar for that matter, I think you will come away very impressed from the experience.

Subscribe to Jazz Guitar Today – it's FREE!

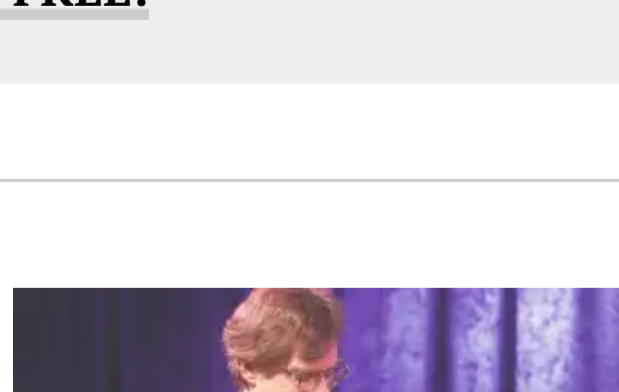
Related



Janis Siegel Joins Frank Vignola And Band At The Birdland June 23, 2022



Martin Taylor Joins Vignola and Bruno For 'Guitar Night At The Birdland' May 20, 2022



Don't Miss Frank Vignola's Guitar Nights At The Birdland April 5, 2022

RELATED TOPICS: #SADOWSKY GUITARS

DONT MISS

An Inside Look: A Special Collection Of D'Aquisto Guitars

TRENDING



New JGT Lesson, Exploring The Complexities Of Coltrane's "Moment's Notice"



New JGT Lesson, Davy Mooney Delves Into "Stablemates"



New JGT Lesson, Davy Mooney Explores Joe Henderson's "Punjab"



Janis Siegel Joins Frank Vignola And Band At The Birdland

Newsletter subscription form with 'Subscribe' button and 'LATEST' / 'POPULAR' categories.

Star icon and 'SUBSCRIBE AND GET A FREE E-BOOK! Click Here' button.

Artist of the Week section for Hector Manuel Quintana.

Spotify logo and 'JGT Playlist of the Week Updated Each Monday' text.