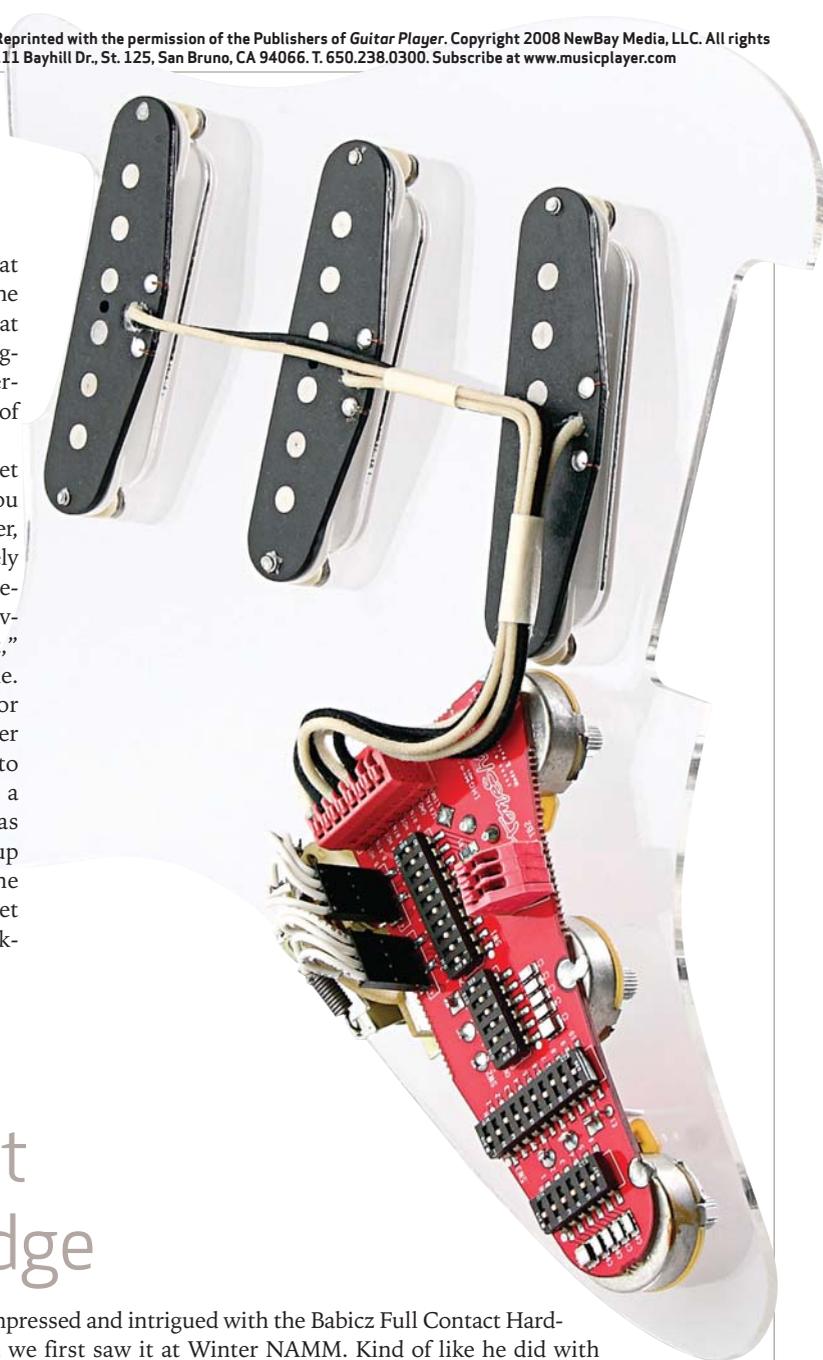


Acme Tone Shaper

Anyone who has ever looked at a Strat and wondered what other sounds might be lurking in there should check out the Tone Shaper. This is a passive, solderless control assembly that allows you to choose between a ton of different pickup configurations, volume and tone knob options, series/parallel operation, and more. It's all ingeniously controlled by a matrix of DIP switches and it adds up to a tweaker's paradise.

Our test unit came loaded in a '60s-reissue Strat, with a set of Seymour Duncan Custom Shop single-coils, although you can order it without pickups or with a variety of Duncan, Fender, Fralin, Van Zandt, or Suhr pickups. The DIP switches definitely took a little getting used to, and are tough for my aging eyeballs to see, but I actually found this system pretty easy to navigate. The first thing I did was switch in the "Volume Kit," which mitigates treble loss when you turn down the volume. Easy and effective. Then I reconfigured the tone knobs for neck/bridge+middle operation. Nice! Then I went for Blender wiring, which, after clicking a few switches, allowed me to select the neck pickup and blend in the bridge—a little or a lot—or choose the bridge and middle and then blend in as much of the neck pickup as I wanted. It was easy to set it up for series/parallel operation, which gives you access to the Brian May-approved bridge and middle in series, a total secret weapon tone. This is a brilliant way to learn about tone, pickups, and wiring.

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Babicz Full Contact Hardware Tele Bridge



We were impressed and intrigued with the Babicz Full Contact Hardware when we first saw it at Winter NAMM. Kind of like he did with his acoustic designs, Jeff Babicz wanted to try to improve upon some time-honored electric concepts, particularly where bridge designs were concerned. He wanted to achieve a more direct string-to-body coupling while still allowing height and intonation adjustment. This would eliminate the air gap between the height adjustment screws on a Tele for better transfer of tone—particularly on the fundamental—for, in Babicz's words, "the least amount of acoustical impedance."

We put his creation to the test on a gorgeous-sounding three-saddle Squier Tele. Installation was pretty straightforward. We had the old bridge off, the new bridge on, and the guitar set up and intonated in under an hour. String height adjustment is accomplished with an ingenious cam mechanism that maintains 100 percent contact at all times. Once the height is set and the string is intonated, everything locks

down tight with the supplied Allen wrench. From a tonal standpoint, we noticed that the entire guitar was slightly brighter and livelier. Strumming it acoustically revealed a ringy, resonant quality that, while there before, was more pronounced now. What was most striking, however, was the way notes rang together on extended voicings. Major 7ths and 9ths had a clarity and a separation between the notes that we found fascinating. To be fair, our test guitar was already awesome. But we've all played guitars that were a struggle to intonate, adjust, or just sounded dead. That's where the Babicz FCH bridge would really shine and would represent an upgrade in every single respect.

CONTACT babiczguitars.com