

New York State Of Mind





History, heritage and some serious marketing: D'Angelico has it all. Here, we have a new 'classic archtop' and a familiar-looking semi-hollow double-cut

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D'ANGELICO EX-59 STANDARD & EX-DC STANDARD £1,349 & £1,349

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What You Need To Know

- 1 D'Angelico – as in John?**
Yes, if you're going to resurrect the past, do it with a big name. John D'Angelico was certainly that. He made archtops from 1932 until he died in 1964 – a believed total of 1,164 instruments in all that started off very similarly to Gibson's classic L-5 but morphed into a more distinctive, quite ornamented style as seen with his two most famous designs, the Excel and New Yorker.
- 2 So, jazz boxes, right?**
Back at that time, yes, but today's D'Angelico models – primarily made in Korea with a USA 'custom shop' – are broader in style and include flat-top acoustics, too.
- 3 Why should we be interested?**
Aside from awakening your inner jazz self, it's good craft at sensible prices covering hollow and semi-solid designs that more and more players seem to be turning to.

While the archtop hollowbody and its 'modernised' centre-blocked thinline have moved in and out of fashion over the years, in today's over-filled market where every stylistic niche is seemingly covered, the once-called 'jazzbox' seems nicely anchored with numerous mainstream brands offering a pretty wide choice of style and price. D'Angelico's guitars are manufactured in Korea – as are Guild's Newark St Collection – and they typify that country of origin, coming with a price tag that sits between lower-cost Chinese and Indonesian archtops and semis from the likes of Gretsch and Epiphone, and the higher-priced USA-made Gibsons or harder-to-find Japanese makes such as Yamaha.

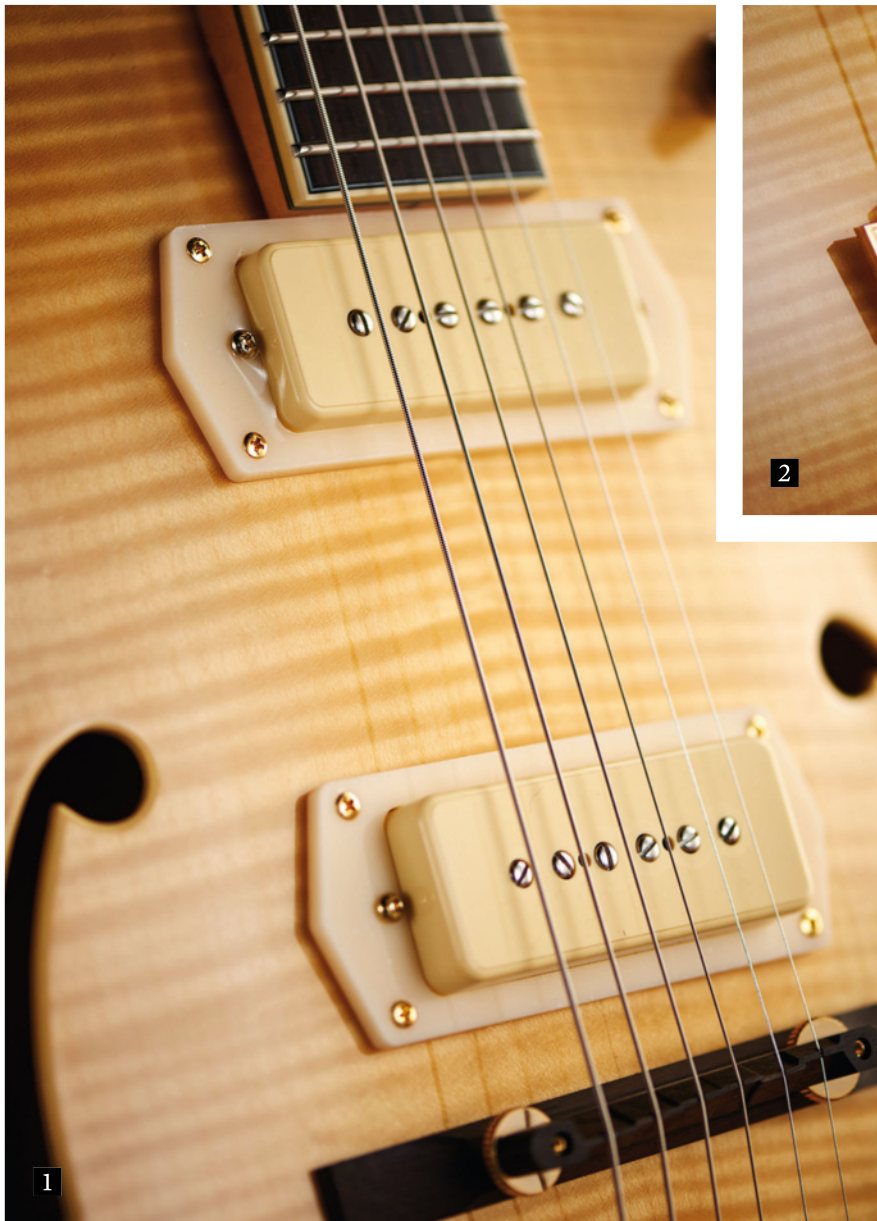
Originally conceived in the jazz age by John D'Angelico, these guitars have been reissued on occasion over the years. Then, back in 2011, the brand was kick-started again and today has quite serious presence and a number of top-line users, including Bob Weir, Susan Tedeschi and Brad Whitford, not to mention Lake Street Dive's Mike 'McDuck' Olson.

Our sumptuous EX-59 Standard comes in at 17 inches wide and three inches deep (at the rim), and was apparently originally designed by John D'Angelico in 1959. We'll take the new D'Angelico company's word for that, although in the excellent tome of the life and work of John D'Angelico, *Acquired Of The Angels* by Paul William Schmidt, we learn that D'Angelico favoured the simple nature of the humble acoustic. In the book, James D'Aquisto – who had

worked with D'Angelico and continued building as his 'successor' after D'Angelico's death – states: "John didn't care at all about pickups and he didn't make a guitar designed for a pickup, he just made an acoustic guitar. For players that wanted an electric guitar, he braced and carved the instrument to accommodate the pickups."

In many ways, the actual heritage is a little irrelevant. D'Angelico made his instruments from solid woods, not laminates like this 'Excel' EX-59. But there's still plenty of D'Angelico-isms on display here. Take that large headstock, which is some 210mm in length from behind the bone nut (which, incidentally, is left with over-sharp edges). Then there's the open tip that features the distinctive inset metal 'finial', which adds opulence aplenty and is clearly inspired by the architecture of New York's skyline, along with the polished aluminium truss rod cover. Despite the size of the head, it's actually pretty trim in depth at 13mm, probably out of necessity. Again, it seems the architecture of Manhattan has influenced the 'Stairstep' tailpiece, which also seems oversized, but is matched by the Grover Imperial tuners with their own 'stepped' buttons. Hardware, as you'd expect is all gold-plated.

The EX-59 may look like a museum piece today, but it would hardly have been cutting edge even back in 1959. Rock 'n' roll had exploded, the solidbody electric guitar was gaining popularity, and the jazz age was nearing its end. Meanwhile, over at Gibson, Ted McCarty and his team had bridged the gap between the old and new with the



1. A hollow body with P-90s is a classic combination used by numerous jazz legends. Here, the single coils are height adjustable as well

2. The 'Stairstep' tailpiece is one of many features

that sets D'Angelico apart from more generic archtops

3. It's unusual to see a three-way rotary pickup selector instead of the more common toggle switches. It does the job, though!

ES-335 – which is where our EX-DC comes in. D'Angelico is one of many, many brands who has 'borrowed' from the ES-335 over the years and we doubt it will be the last. The EX-DC has zero D'Angelico heritage – aside from the headstock, that is, which gives the guitar a rather old-fashioned appearance. Its bridge and tailpiece are standard fare (though a Stairstep tailpiece version is offered, see specs on p103), and like the ES-335, of course, we have a Gibson scale length along with dual humbuckers (by Kent Armstrong) and the classic four-control layout.

Those of you with a knob fetish will enjoy both of these guitars, especially the EX-DC with its classy ebony-like control knobs and three thin inlaid strips for position markers. And, before you run to the hills, the EX-DC is offered in more conservative colours than just our showy Surf Green on review here.

If your stylistic roots lie in the jazz world with players such as Grant Green and Kenny Burrell, you'll 'get' the EX-59 immediately

Sounds

If you're into detuned metal styles, you probably won't have read this far, but outside of that heavily-gained genre, either one – or both – of these guitars is hugely usable for the modern player. If your stylistic roots lie in the jazz world with players such as Grant Green and Kenny Burrell, you'll 'get' the EX-59 immediately.

Despite its size and depth (it's pretty weighty, too), it feels so 'right' played seated – for practice or performance – with more than enough acoustic volume for the former and probably enough to put a mic in front of it to capture an earlier acoustic archtop vibe on your recordings. The unpinned wooden bridge seems to help a shorter, more clipped sustain and 'woodiness'.

The cutaway certainly extends the range, though this is far from a high-fret noodler. Those of us who are used to Gibson's four-control layout might feel shortchanged by the single master volume and tone controls, and the rotary pickup switch is not as fast in use compared with a toggle – but, again, for the style it all suits.

The EX-DC, of course, is a very different beast. Its trimmer depth (43mm at the rim) and double-cutaway shape are way easier to manage on a strap, but it suffers



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4. There are plenty of nice details on both our review models, not least the multi-bound body edges and distinctive pickupguard seen here

5. That big D'Angelico headstock is a real throwback to the jazz age. It also helps the seated balance on this centre-blocked semi

6. Kent Armstrong's pickups are well respected in the jazz world. These vintage-y humbuckers are key to the versatility of this guitar

the ill of many a modern thinline in that it's quite heavy. Still, it balances nicely seated, not least with the help of that elongated headstock – which isn't always the case with heavier-bodied ES-335-alikes.

Necks on both are pretty similar with a deep-ish, slightly square-shouldered 'C', and fretting is from a medium/heavy gauge that seems a bit 'rock' – okay on the EX-DC, but a little out of style on the EX-59.

Plugged in, we get a good idea of the transition from the hollowbody (with just dual top braces) to the thinline with its solid maple centre block and the single-coil P-90, to the humbucker. The EX-59 aims for that shorter sustaining 'plunk' of an archtop hollowbody, which is perfectly suited to these P-90s. In neck position and set clean, we're back in the jazz age with the mix providing a little texture and added clarity. The bridge pickup alone sounds a little

The EX-DC is the near-perfect guitar for the player who needs to cover a lot of styles or wants to take just one guitar to a gig

underpowered as supplied, but if older jazzier and bluesier styles are your bag, you perhaps need to reset that to balance with the neck pickup as we only have a single master volume control. Voiced on its own, however, the bridge pickup works well, especially for recording, to create a gritty, slightly crunchy voice – but, as ever, good luck with the feedback!

The EX-DC illustrates what thousands of players already know: the ES-335 is hugely versatile! Clean, there's a little more sustain, more 'solidbody' to the character yet the tonality would easily suit your jazz gig. But kick in some gain and we're into near-perfect blues ballad soloing territory. The bridge avoids sounds too spiky and is vintage-y and clear enough for some authentic country swing and rockabilly lines through a clean amp, but totally rocks it with some classic rock-era gain. Musical feedback is easily induced for those wilder moments, too. The pickup mix remains a rhythm player's home, with dual volumes and tones to subtly alter the character: Motown, funk, soul or far more contemporary effected voices all work superbly. It's the near-perfect guitar for the player who needs to cover a lot of styles or wants to take just one guitar to a gig.



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Verdict

There is certainly plenty of quality choice in these styles available out there, and with brands such as Guild champing at the bit, D'Angelico does have serious competition, especially if you're partial to your reissue-style guitars from yesteryear. Yet the EX-59 has all you'd need to pander to your serious jazz obsession: the hollowbody/single coil mix is just so evocative plugged in. On the downside, it's a little heavy and, by design, a big ol' bird to wield.

The EX-DC has even more competition to fight than its sibling, but it's the versatility of its style that makes it shine, not to mention the attraction of those colour choices and *that* headstock, which adds a far-from-generic spin to the guitar. It's a class act that feels very road-worthy: a real journeyman's guitar with plenty of style. Serious guitars for serious players. **G**



D'ANGELICO EX-59 STANDARD

PRICE: £1,349 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Korea

TYPE: 17" wide single-cutaway hollowbody archtop electric

BODY: Laminated flame maple

NECK: Maple with walnut centre strip, 'slim C-shape' profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.45mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, mother-of-pearl block inlays, 305mm (approx 12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo

HARDWARE: Rosewood bridge with D'Angelico Stairstep tailpiece, Grover Imperial Super-Rotomatic tuners, gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x P-90 single coils, 3-way rotary pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.42/7.53

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: EX-59 Deluxe with dual Seymour Duncan DA-59 'buckers and six-way switching will be available later this year (£TBC)

LEFT-HANDERS: Not this model, but the EXL-1 and EX-DH are both offered left-handed at £1,499 each

FINISHES: Natural Tint (as reviewed), Sunburst, Black, Grey Black



D'ANGELICO EX-DC STANDARD

PRICE: £1,349 (inc case)

ORIGIN: Korea

TYPE: 16" wide double-cutaway thinline electric with centre block

BODY: Laminated flame maple

NECK: Maple with walnut centre strip, slim C-shape profile, glued-in

SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.5mm

FINGERBOARD: Bound rosewood, mother-of-pearl block inlays, 305mm (approx 12") radius

FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo

HARDWARE: Tune-o-matic-style bridge with stud tailpiece, Grover Imperial Super-Rotomatic tuners, gold-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm

ELECTRICS: 2x Kent Armstrong humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume and tone controls

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 4/8.83

OPTIONS: The Stairstep tailpiece version costs £1,449

RANGE OPTIONS: The EX-DC Deluxe adds numerous upgrades, including Seymour Duncan DA-59 humbuckers, locking tuners and graphite nut. Available later this year (£TBC)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, in Natural Tint and Vintage Sunburst only, same price

FINISHES: Surf Green (as reviewed) Natural Tint, Vintage Sunburst, Cherry, White, Black, Grey Black



8/10

PROS Nicely made, classy-looking hollowbody inspired by the great John D'Angelico

CONS A little weighty and, yes, it's a full-size hollowbody!

9/10

PROS A classy spin on the classic ES-335 with expanded colour options and versatile sounds

CONS A little weighty; trimmer pricing would make it a no-brainer