

Design Icon: Gibson Les Paul

By Paul Bazeley

Plug in and turn the volume up to eleven. A design icon guitar used by musical legends, the Gibson Les Paul.



Gibson Custom 50th Anniversary 1959 Les Paul Standard (body)

The story of the Les Paul begins when Fender released the Telecaster, a guitar made from a solid body. Gibson saw this and decided they needed to gain some of the market share of solid body guitars. At this point, they approached the musician Les Paul to help them design some solid body electric guitars. Funnily enough, a few years prior to this, Les Paul had actually approached the company with the idea of building a solid body electric guitar and was in fact ridiculed by the company.

Nevertheless, the thought of increased sales meant Gibson had a change of heart and the first Gibson Les Paul was released in 1952. To this day it is still unclear who designed most of the guitar. Gibson claim they had pretty much finished the guitar and asked Paul to add some finishing touches to it and then endorse it, however, Les Paul claims he already had ideas for certain aspects of the guitar and that Gibson gave him the overall decision of how the guitar was designed.

Over the next few years, the original gold top design received a few minor changes but stayed true to the original 52 model and the Les Paul Custom and the Les Paul junior were also added to the range, although it is the Les Paul standard which has remained the stand-out of the range. In 1958 the sunburst models began to appear as the gold top design was phased out, it is the sunburst model that still remains heavily popular today.

Although, the sunburst Les Paul may be a design icon now yet originally the sales and popularity were poor. Although over 58 and 60 small changes were made, changes which many guitarists believe make this era of guitars some of the most playable and most valuable, Gibson actually dropped the Les Paul from its catalogue entirely in 1960.

Fast forward almost a decade later, in the late 1960s, and the Gibson Les Paul cemented itself in history. Some of the most influential guitar players of the time, such as Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page, began to use the guitar and eventually, the guitar became a prominent choice for many guitarists.

Now the guitar is considered one of the most versatile and Les Paul Standards have been used by Paul McCartney, Slash, Lenny Kravitz, Hank Williams, Keith Richards, Pete Townshend, Dave Grohl, Sheryl Crow, Bob Marley, Mick Jones and Marc Bolan.

Since it was first made in 1952, there have been many varieties of the Les Paul made, including many signature models, some more sought after than

others. However, one thing has remained and that is its legacy since it was picked up in the late 1960s the guitar has been used by some of the greatest musicians in the world.

Les Paul sadly passed away in August 2009 due to complications with pneumonia, yet his legacy will live on not just in people's minds but through all the songs that have included a Les Paul guitar. Whether you're a professional guitarist or just someone sat at home trying to play the guitar, if you are lucky enough to pick up a Gibson Les Paul just take a moment to realise you aren't just holding a great guitar, you are holding a piece of music history.