

# Les Paul Guitars Buying Guide

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## How to Choose the Les Paul That's Right for You

You're gearing up to buy a Les Paul. Congratulations! It's a terrific guitar with a great history. The [Gibson Les Paul](#) electric guitar was introduced in 1952 when [Gibson](#) decided it needed a solidbody guitar to counter the [Fender Telecaster](#). Working with legendary guitarist and multitrack recording inventor Les Paul, Gibson created the first Les Paul Model with the distinctive look of a mahogany body and a beautiful carved maple top that mimicked the look of Gibson's archtop guitars.

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Gibson BurstBucker Pro Humbucker Pickup

In 1957, the Les Paul (and subsequently all electric guitars) was significantly improved with the addition of the newly designed dual-coil "humbucker" pickup, which eliminated electrical hum that that single-coil pickups were prone to produce.



Gibson Custom Shop 1954 Les Paul Goldtop VOS Electric Guitar

Since then, Gibson has continued adding to the [Gibson Les Paul](#) line, experimenting with new feature combinations and innovations. Today, the Gibson Custom Shop reissues historically accurate replicas of vintage Les Pauls, making these most prized and sought-after guitars available to today's discerning players and enthusiastic supporters.

## Which Les Paul Is For You?


With so many Les Pauls to choose from, how do know which one you really need? Since 1952, at least 127 models with the Les Paul name have been released. And at Musician's Friend we typically offer 85 to 90 different variations of Les Paul models (not including left-handed versions).

This Les Paul Buyer's Guide will give you the information you need to make the best choice by covering these topics:

Find out why Les Paul guitars are so popular and who plays them.

Learn the family histories of the major models so you can tell a Custom from a Standard.

Become familiar with the features that go into a Les Paul, so you can decide which guitar has the features you want.

	<h2>Why Are Les Paul Guitars So Popular?</h2> <p>Just about every notable rock guitarist has used a Les Paul from Beck, Page, and Clapton to Slash and Zakk Wylde. A testament to its versatility, the Les Paul has also been used by players in other genres such as blues (Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker), jazz (Les Paul-of course!-John McLaughlin), and country (Charlie Daniels, Brooks &amp; Dunn). Here are the four main reasons for the Les Paul's popularity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Looks</li><li>2. Sound</li><li>3. Playability</li><li>4. Historical value</li></ol>
<p>Gibson Les Paul Supreme Figured Electric Guitar</p>	

## Why Do You Want A Les Paul?

You may be just getting started as a guitarist and want to play a guitar that's well known. You may be a performer who wants a guitar that plays and sounds great. Or you may be a collector who appreciates the history and the beauty of a classic [Gibson Les Paul](#). Or you could answer to all three descriptions. You may not even harbor any of these feelings, but are simply attracted to a Les Paul for some indefinable reason—such as love at first sight.

## Basic Les Paul Description

Although there are many variations and exceptions, let's start with a list of typical Les Paul features:

Single cutaway	Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Electric Guitar
Solid body - made of a mahogany back and a carved maple top	
Set-in mahogany neck	
Rosewood fingerboard	
Lacquer finish	
2 humbucker pickups	
Fixed bridge	
2 tone, 2 volume controls	
3-way pickup switch	
22 frets	
24-3/4" scale length	

You may already be aware of some exceptions: a Les Paul bass, the 1970 Jumbo flattop acoustic, the one-pickup LP Junior, and the double-cutaway SG-style Les Paul, to name a few. But for our purposes, we'll build on the basic Les Paul to see how features and appointments have been added.

## The Features That Help You Tell Les Pauls Apart

Where and how the Les Paul is made, the materials used, and the decorative and functional features are all used to tell one Les Paul from another.

Here is a list of features and choices for most Les Paul guitars.

### Les Paul Features:

**Top** - most Les Pauls have a carved maple top in one of the following styles:

## Les Paul Guitars Buying Guide

???-Flame Top (Rated A to -AAAA maple for amount of figure)

???-Plain Top

???-Quilt Top

???-Solid Finish

???

1. **Finish color** - Choices vary according to model

2.

Neck-usually mahogany

Profile - choose shape of neck:

???-Rounded '50s neck or

???-Slim-taper '60s neck

???

???

**Fingerboard (also called fretboard)**

???-Rosewood or ebony

Inlays - three basic types:

???-Dot

???-Trapezoid

???-Block

???

???

**2 pickups** (usually humbucker)

???-Modern Gibson pickups: 490R, 490T, 496R, 498T, 500T

???-P-90 (single coil)

Historic humbuckers:

???-Burstbucker Type 1, 2, 3

???-BurstBucker Pro

???-'57 Classic

???-'57 Classic Plus

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??-Mini-Humbucker

???

???

**Binding** (if there is binding). Colors and number of plies varies by model.

??-Body

??-Neck

??-Headstock

???

### **Hardware**

Plating finish choices:

??-Nickel

??-Chrome

??-Gold

???

### **Bridge/Tailpiece**

??-Wraparound (one piece bridge/tailpiece)

??-Tune-O-Matic/Stopbar

???

### **Knobs**

??-Top Hat

??-Speed

???

### **Tuners**

??-Schaller

??-Kluson

??-Grover

???

???

Bear in mind, that if you have the money, you can order a [Gibson Les Paul](#) built to your specifications from the Gibson Custom Shop.

## Les Paul Family History

There are three models of the Les Paul at the root of the Les Paul family history: the original Les Paul Model, the Les Paul Custom, and the Les Paul Special.

### Gibson Les Paul Family Timeline

1952	The Les Paul Model (called "Goldtop" because of its gold finish)
1954	Les Paul Custom and Les Paul Junior
1955	Les Paul Special
1958-1960	Les Paul Standard (often called "Sunburst") - replaced Goldtop



Gibson Custom 1952 Les Paul Goldtop Reissue Electric Guitar

Gibson Custom 1954 Les Paul Custom Electric Guitar

Gibson Custom 1958 Les Paul Standard Electric Guitar

Gibson Custom 1960 Les Paul Special Single Cutaway VOS Electric Guitar

## Some notable additions to the Les Paul line:

1961-1962	Les Paul SG Custom
1969	Les Paul Deluxe
1976	The Les Paul Standard Reissue
1990	Les Paul Classic

## Gibson USA

As the name indicates, [Gibson Les Pauls](#) are manufactured in the United States.

Today, the three basic families are the [Gibson Les Paul Studio](#), Les Paul Standard, and Les Paul Custom (a rough way of looking at them would be Good, Better, and Best). We'll start with the Les Paul that sets the standard . . . the Les Paul Standard.

Gibson Les Paul Standard '50s Neck Electric Guitar

### Les Paul Standard

Modern version of the '58 and '59 LP, re-introduced in 1976.

Same appointments as '58/'59, e.g., binding over the ends of frets

AA maple top - figured, or what many call "flamed"

BurstBucker Pro pickups with Alnico 5 magnets - a nearly exact reproduction of the original "Patent Applied For" pickup including mismatched windings, and using wire from original vendor.

Gibson Les Paul Studio

## Les Paul Studio

Same construction as Les Paul Standard in a somewhat stripped-down version

Differences: 490R/498T pickups

No binding

Decal instead of pearl logo on headstock

No figured top - Single A maple

Rounded '50s neck (although somewhat slimmed down)

Gibson Custom Les Paul Custom Electric Guitar

## Les Paul Custom

Made by Gibson Custom Shop

'50s or '60s profile neck

Uses same 3/8" carved maple top

'57 Classic pickups - like original specs of 1957 "Patent Applied For" pickups

Essentially same as 1958 Les Paul Standard (mahogany body/maple top) but with additional appointments:

?? Ebony fingerboard

?? Pearl block inlays

?? Gold hardware

?? 7-ply binding on top

?? 5-ply binding on back

?? 7-ply binding on headstock

## Additional Models

In addition to the three basic LP models, there are several other models you should become familiar with:

Gibson Les Paul Classic Electric Guitar

### **Les Paul Classic - the "hot rod" Les Paul with the hottest pickups**

496R and 500T with ceramic ringed magnets for higher output and more highs (not as much bottom as Alnico, e.g., BurstBucker)

Same construction as LP Standard

\$300 - \$400 less than LP Standard

Single A maple - no figure ("flame")

'60s neck - slimmer and flatter

Same appointments as Les Paul Standard - same binding

Amber is injected into the top to make it look aged

Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Electric Guitar

### **Les Paul Deluxe**

Introduced in 1969 with mini-humbuckers

Exclusive to Musician's Friend

Single A maple top

'59 rounded neck profile

Gibson Les Paul Special Faded Electric Guitar with Humbuckers

### **Les Paul Special**

Stripped down version of LP Standard - no binding

Does not have carved maple top, has one piece

flat-surface mahogany body

Gibson Les Paul Supreme Electric Guitar

## Les Paul Supreme

As the name indicates, the top-of-the-line in appointments (even more than Les Paul Custom)

Unlike the Custom, the Les Paul Supreme is not built at the Gibson Custom Shop, so it is less costly to make.

Body made from 3 pieces of wood: AAA carved flamed maple top, carved flamed back, and mahogany between the two.

Custom binding

Pearl-on-ebony fingerboard

Gold frets

Weight-relief holes

## Variations

By adding a feature or features not normally found on an existing Les Paul model, Gibson has spun off new models. For example, just changing the wood on the top can create new models. By adding a AAA maple top to a Les Paul Standard (which normally has AA maple), Gibson created the Les Paul Standard Premium Plus. Or by bumping up the maple top on the Supreme from AAA to AAAA, they created the Les Paul Supreme Figured. So the key to understanding the various offshoot models is knowing what feature has been added.

Gibson Les Paul Supreme Figured Electric Guitar

## Gibson Custom Shop

**Gibson** was the first major guitar manufacturer to establish a custom shop outside of its regular production line. The guitars produced by the Custom Shop are the result of even more expert, hands-on craftsmanship. And the materials used are even more select. For example, Gibson USA recently received a shipment of 200,000 board feet of mahogany. Of that, only 14,000 board feet (or 7%) was accepted for use in production models. From the mahogany that was accepted by Gibson USA, the Gibson Custom Shop was even more selective-"hyper selective"-in choosing only the highest quality mahogany.

Gibson Custom 1959 Les Paul Standard VOS Electric Guitar

## VOS Reissues

To satisfy the exacting demands of collectors and other Les Paul enthusiasts, the Gibson Custom Shop debuted its VOS series of reissues in 2005. Vintage Original Spec series instruments receive a special nitrocellulose finish treatment yielding the patina of a gently aged vintage guitar. Careful handcrafting enhances comfort and playability. Each VOS model has a solid mahogany back; historically accurate long-neck tenon for strength and sustain; and period-correct neck profile, hardware (such as green tuning keys), and electronics such as CTS pots and bumblebee capacitors.

Gibson Custom Zakk Wylde Signature Les Paul Electric Guitar - Bull's Eye

### Signature Models

Usually guitars created with the input or specifications of a famous artist is called a "signature" model. The Gibson Custom Shop has produced a number of signature Les Pauls built to the exacting personal preferences of famous guitarists beginning with the Jimmy Page Les Paul in 1995. More recent signature Les Pauls include the Zakk Wylde Signature Les Paul - Bull's Eye, and the Billie Joe Armstrong Signature Les Paul Junior.

## Epiphone Les Pauls

Just about every [Gibson Les Paul](#) model has a "cousin" that bears the Epiphone name on the headstock. Epiphone got its name from its founder, Epaminodas Stathopoulos, known as "Epi." In the 1930s, Epiphone was a competitor to Gibson, with the two companies going head-to-head with archtop guitars and pickups. In 1957, Gibson acquired Epiphone. In addition to high-quality standup basses, famous guitars from the Epiphone line include the Casino used by The Beatles. Les Paul's early efforts at making a solidbody electric guitar incorporated Epiphone guitars.

Epiphone Les Paul Standard Left-Handed Electric Guitar	<p>Differences between Gibson and Epiphone Les Pauls:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Country of origin - Gibsons made in USA, Epiphones made outside U.S.</li><li>2. Finish - Gibson uses thin nitrocellulose lacquer - ultra thin, ultra light (process takes weeks). Allows wood to breathe, over time gets thinner. The best finish for tone.</li></ol>
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3. Epiphones have polyurethane finish, which is more practical, takes a couple of days to apply, is not as labor intensive, and is a more durable finish.
4. Materials - Gibson uses higher-quality materials such as mahogany from South America. Epiphone uses less-expensive materials, or combinations such as alder and mahogany for the body.
5. Tonality - Epiphone Les Pauls have darker tone—more mids and bass—while Gibson Les Pauls have lighter overall tone.

## Price Ranges

Given what we now know about the various Les Paul families and features, we can break them down in the several rough price categories, working our way up from basic, introductory guitars to more fully-featured guitars.

Examples:

??Inexpensive - Epiphone Les Paul Junior or Epiphone LP Special

??Mid-Priced - can range from [Epiphone Les Paul Custom](#) to Gibson Classic or Studio

??High End - Gibson LP Standard

??Collectible - VOS models, e.g., Les Paul Custom VOS, Les Paul Standard VOS

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