

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Doc Sweeney Pure Series Snare Drums

Three solid-shell snares designed to let the timber speak for itself.

The last time we checked in with Rancho Santa Fe, California-based boutique brand Doc Sweeney was in the May 2020 issue, when we reviewed the gorgeous 1920s-inspired Classic series 5.5x14 solid-shell maple and mahogany snares.

This month we got our hands on three more solid-shell options, also 5.5x14, but made from ash, oak, and elm. While the Classic series drums are made to replicate, and possibly improve upon, the highly coveted dark, dry tones of vintage drums, these three snares—categorized as the Pure series—are meant to express the utmost tone and performance from a single-species shell. Let's put them to the test.

Commonalities

Aside from the wood species being used, all three Pure series snares are identical. The shells are steam-bent from a single plank to 5.5x14 cylinders. The bearing edges are cut to 45 degrees and are shaped to a rounded apex. This profile allows for incredible sensitivity and response while also maintaining solid head-to-shell contact for impeccable tone.

To keep the drum as resonant and tonally pure as possible, Doc Sweeney forgoes gluing in reinforcement rings. Instead, these shells are shaped using an advanced milling technique that creates thicker integrated rings at the edge to support the head and keep the drum round, as well as a thinner shell wall to enhance sustain and expressivity.

These drums came with Remo Diplomat Skyntone batter heads, which are made from a thin 5-mil film laminated to a 3-mil polyspun fiber and are designed to have a warm tone and soft attack. The

bottom heads were standard Ambassador Hazy Snare Side models.

Hardware includes proprietary chrome-over-brass single-point round lugs and Slingerland-style triple-flange hoops with an inward-facing upper flange. The throw-off is Doc Sweeney's custom DS1, which is milled from aluminum and stainless steel and features an in-line shift design with three positions that allow you to lock the wires at tight, medium, or loose tensions. This throw-off operates smoothly and holds tension very well. It's also designed to incorporate the look of the round lugs, which give the drums a very slick, cohesive appearance.

Pure Ash

The Pure Ash was the most all-purpose-sounding of the three drums in the series. It had a full, open, warm voice with clean, balanced overtones, similar to what you get from maple. But it was a bit more controlled and punchy, which recalls the denser timbre of birch.

If you are searching for a jack-of-all-trades snare drum, I'd put the Pure Ash at the top of the list. You can crank it up for extra snap and pop, tune it in the middle register for full, dense backbeats, or detune it for old-school thump. I preferred to run this drum wide-open; the overtones were just too pleasing to deaden with tape or gels. But if the circumstance demands it, this drum takes to muffling very well. Plus, the lightly finished ash shell is just downright gorgeous.

Pure Oak

While not drastically different from the others, which is a testament to Doc Sweeney's consistency and quality control, the Pure Oak



Pure Ash



snare had the driest tone and most cracking attack of the bunch. As a result, it handled low tuning exceptionally well; the overtones died down before they had a chance to become overwhelming. And it performed flawlessly under close mics, especially when recording tracks that needed a snare that hit hard—but not aggressively—and didn't take up too much width in the mix. I've become a big fan of oak snares in recent years for their ability to punch yet blend in any situation, and this Pure series version is one of the best there is.

Pure Elm

If you're looking for a snare with a little more character, Doc Sweeney's Pure Elm is guaranteed to grab your ear. Again, it's not a specialty drum designed for just one or two applications. In fact, it

could easily be a go-to for everything from jazz to symphonic, pop, rock, or all-around studio use. But there's some extra movement in the overtones of this shell that helps the drum poke through the mix just a little bit. The closest sonic comparison I could come up with for this Elm shell is the dry but vibrant tone of seamless aluminum. I use aluminum snares about 75 percent of the time, both for live gigs and studio sessions, because they're incredibly versatile and malleable for different sounds and styles. With this Pure Elm drum by Doc Sweeney by my side, I've found a perfect wood-shell counterpart.

Check out demos of the full tuning ranges of these three snares at moderndrummer.com.

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