

TONECONCEPTS

The Distillery

By Joe Gore

Nels Cline dubbed ToneConcepts' powerful new overdrive/preamp the Distillery, but he could just as easily have called it the Laboratory, the Beauty Parlor, or the Operating Room. In fact, the Canadian pedal company could have named the device for any location where exquisitely precise repairs and modifications are performed.

According to ToneConcepts, the Distillery was created for gigging guitarists seeking a transparent boost that won't degrade their core sound, but with enough tone-sculpting power to compensate for bland backline amps. It excels at that task—and many others. Players with good ears will be able to summon new tones from their guitars using the pedal's uncommonly powerful EQ tools.

IC What You Did There!

Inside the Distillery are two separate circuits, each activated by a footswitch. Workmanship is solid, with a tidy circuit board positioned perpendicularly to the enclosure via board-mounted pots.

One side of the Distillery is a bright, musical-sounding booster with three controls: boost (output), guts (gain), and bleed (a passive treble-cut). The IC-based overdrive color is a bit

Klon-like, with pristine cleans at low gain settings and throaty drive at higher ones. It's a potentially bright circuit, but the bleed control is perfectly voiced for, say, smoothing the ragged edge of a Strat bridge pickup, or conversely, adding extra bite to a dark humbucker. With 20dB of clean boost, there's plenty of *oomph* to overdrive an amp, even at modest guts settings.

If that was all the Distillery did, the pedal would merit consideration as a simple but effective booster. But there's more.

Qs You Can Use

The fun starts when you activate the second circuit, a filter/EQ with adjustable contour (frequency) and edge (resonance). These controls let you sculpt those all-important mids, clarifying thick sounds or bulking up thin ones. (Maybe they should have called it The Gym, or perhaps The Liposuction Clinic.) If you've ever been frustrated by overdrives with conventional passive tone controls that can only chop highs, you'll probably be thrilled here. (Note that while you can use the booster without engaging the EQ section, you can't use the EQ without the boost.)

I love how the Distillery performs with a vintage-style Les Paul. Modest gain settings add mass without compromising note



attack. There's none of the compressed, nasal character you sometimes encounter from Screamer-based circuits. Compelling colors emerged throughout the range of the filter controls, especially the ones with an edgy, almost Strat-like bite. You can truly tweak a humbucker's character here.

With so many bright sounds on tap, you might suspect the Distillery would be a poor match for guitars with single-coil pickups. Fear not—the complementary voicing of the edge and bleed controls lets you dial in aggressively edgy Strat tones while rounding off painfully glassy highs. Here too you can add mass without compromising note attack. Transients crack like knuckles.


Filter At Your Own Risk

I was able to get cool tones from every guitar I plugged into the Distillery. But make no mistake: This pedal can be blisteringly bright. For that reason, I'd be more inclined to recommend it to experienced players accustomed

to wrangling EQ than to neophyte tone-seekers.

Despite its range, the Distillery doesn't really do "freaky." You won't get the extreme whistling and rumbling sounds available from some other stompboxes that pair overdrive and a resonant filter, such as the vintage Systech Harmonic Energizer and the modern boutique pedals it inspired. The Distillery is more about refining tones than redefining them. It's a scalpel, not a sledgehammer.

The Verdict

The Distillery is a powerful and sophisticated tone-sculpting tool. Chances are it will help you draw new shadings from your guitar, nudging tones in various directions as the musical setting demands. It's a great resource for recording guitarists who must often shape tones to fit into a mix, or for players hoping to differentiate their tones within a multi-guitar band. Best of all, it won't downgrade the sound of a great guitar/amp pairing. 



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RATINGS

ToneConcepts The Distillery

\$179 street
toneconcepts.com

Tones	★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★☆☆
Build/Design	★★★★
Value	★★★★

PROS A powerful tone-shaping tool. Excellent clean boost. Many cool tones.

CONS Powerful enough to get you into trouble if you don't know what you're doing. Doesn't do extreme/freaky filtering.

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