1972 Fender Stratocaster

Maple Neck Refret, Finish Restoration, Conservation Cleaning, COA, and Final Setup Addendum

Finished instrument after maple-neck refret/restoration, final stringing, setup, and intonation.

Instrument	1972 Fender Stratocaster, black finish, maple neck restoration/refret
Owner / Customer	Bruce Ward
Serial number	275970, as documented on the COA/vintage audit photographs
Neck date	22 NOV 72B, Fullerton, California Factory, as shown in the COA/vintage audit and heel photos
COA registration	F72-275970, documentation date June 22, 2026
Prepared by	JR's Custom Shop Guitars, Torrance, California
Project status	Completed. Refret/restoration, final stringing, full setup, relief adjustment, action measurements, nut-slot measurements, electronics checks, and intonation are documented.

Document Overview

Purpose. This report documents the work performed on the original maple neck and supporting hardware/electronics conservation for the 1972 Fender Stratocaster. It also records the COA/vintage audit material already completed for the instrument.

Important status note. The refret, neck finish work, hardware cleaning, shielding/electronics checks, reassembly, final stringing, setup, relief adjustment, action measurements, nut-slot height checks, and intonation have been completed.

Customer request. The guitar arrived with a rosewood neck attached. The customer wanted the original maple neck refretted and restored so the guitar could be played with its proper original neck. The customer had been turned down by several shops in the 1980s because the shops were concerned about removing frets from the aged 1970s maple neck without damaging the finish or wood.

Work philosophy. The work was approached as a playable vintage restoration: conserve original evidence where practical, document the original parts and condition, correct the fretboard and finish issues enough to support dependable playability, and avoid unnecessary replacement of original components.

Primary fretwire	Jescar medium/jumbo stainless fretwire, pre-radiused to 7.25 inches; job notes identify Jescar FW47104-S.
Neck condition target	Straight neck confirmed before installation; truss rod confirmed functional.
Main risks	Aged maple-board finish/poly chip-out, old fret extraction, finish humps at upper frets, corrosion/salt residue, original electronics preservation, neck pocket alignment/gap behavior.
Setup status	Final setup completed: strings installed, truss relief adjusted, action measured, nut-slot heights checked, and intonation adjusted.

Executive Summary

The guitar came in as a black 1972 Fender Stratocaster body with a rosewood neck installed. The customer requested that the original maple neck be restored and refretted so the instrument could return to playable use with its original neck. The project required careful vintage handling because multiple shops had previously avoided the work due to the risk of damaging the aged maple-board finish during fret removal.

The old frets were removed with localized heat and controlled extraction/punch support. The process kept damage low: no wood chip-out was documented, and finish/poly chipping was minimal. Poly buildup and board humps were then leveled and corrected before refretting.

The maple neck finish was color-matched using tinted poly. The board was sanded progressively through fine grits, coated, wet sanded, and polished. This was done as a playable restoration rather than a museum-only relic preservation job. The aim was to keep the original neck usable, stable, and visually appropriate to the guitar.

New stainless frets were installed, then the fret ends were cut and dressed. Level/crown/polish work was performed after installation. The neck was reassembled to the body, strung, and finalized for relief, nut height, action, intonation, bridge relationship, and electronics function.

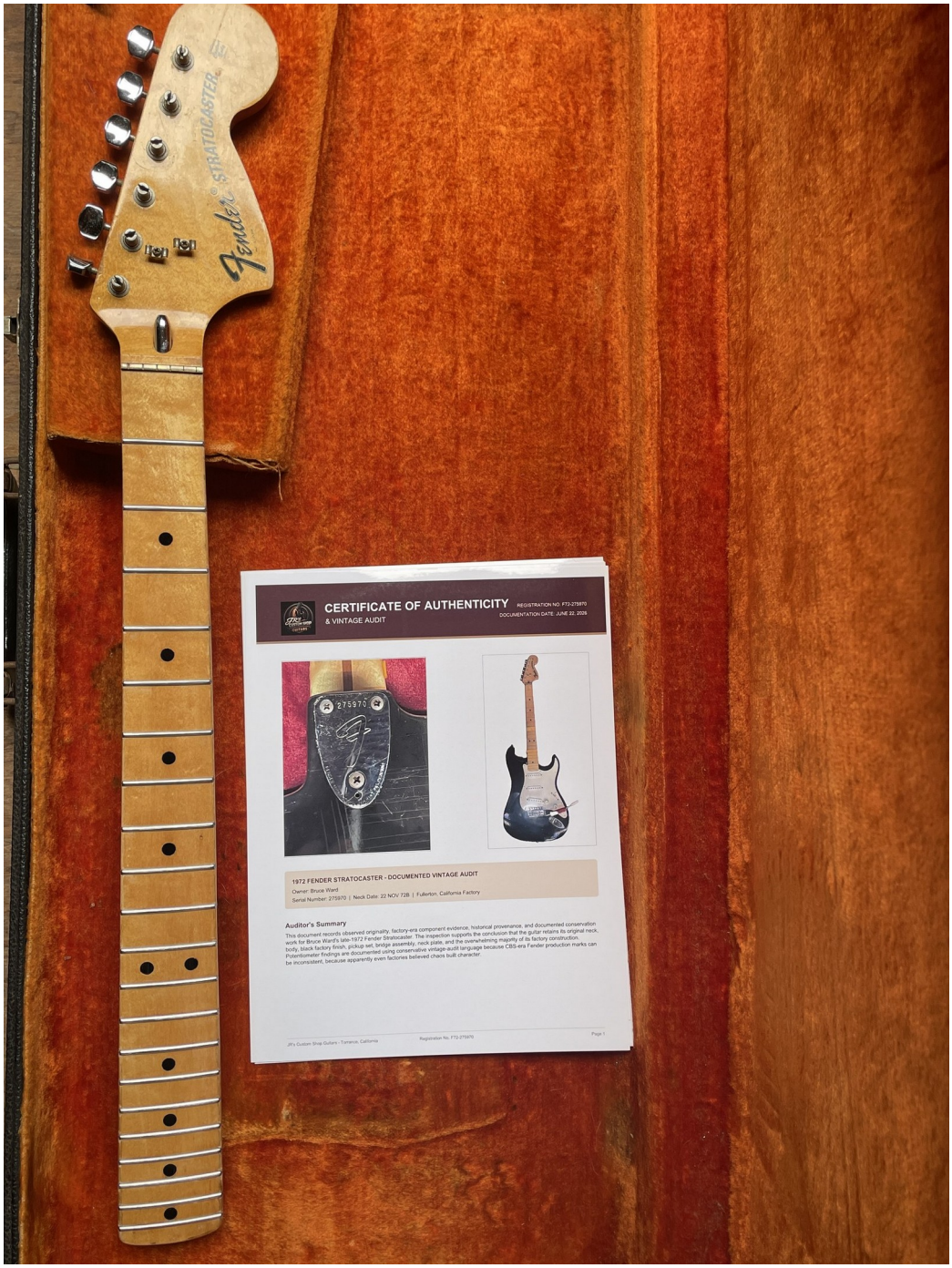
During reassembly/testing, the neck pocket fit required careful alignment experimentation. The guitar also presented an output-jack shielding short, which was corrected by insulating the jack areas with heat shrink. Original electronics were cleaned and retained rather than replaced.

The COA/vintage audit was prepared separately and is integrated into this documentation through photographs and reference details. The final photograph set shows the restored maple neck in the original 1970s Fender case with the completed COA documentation, followed by final stringing/setup completion measurements.

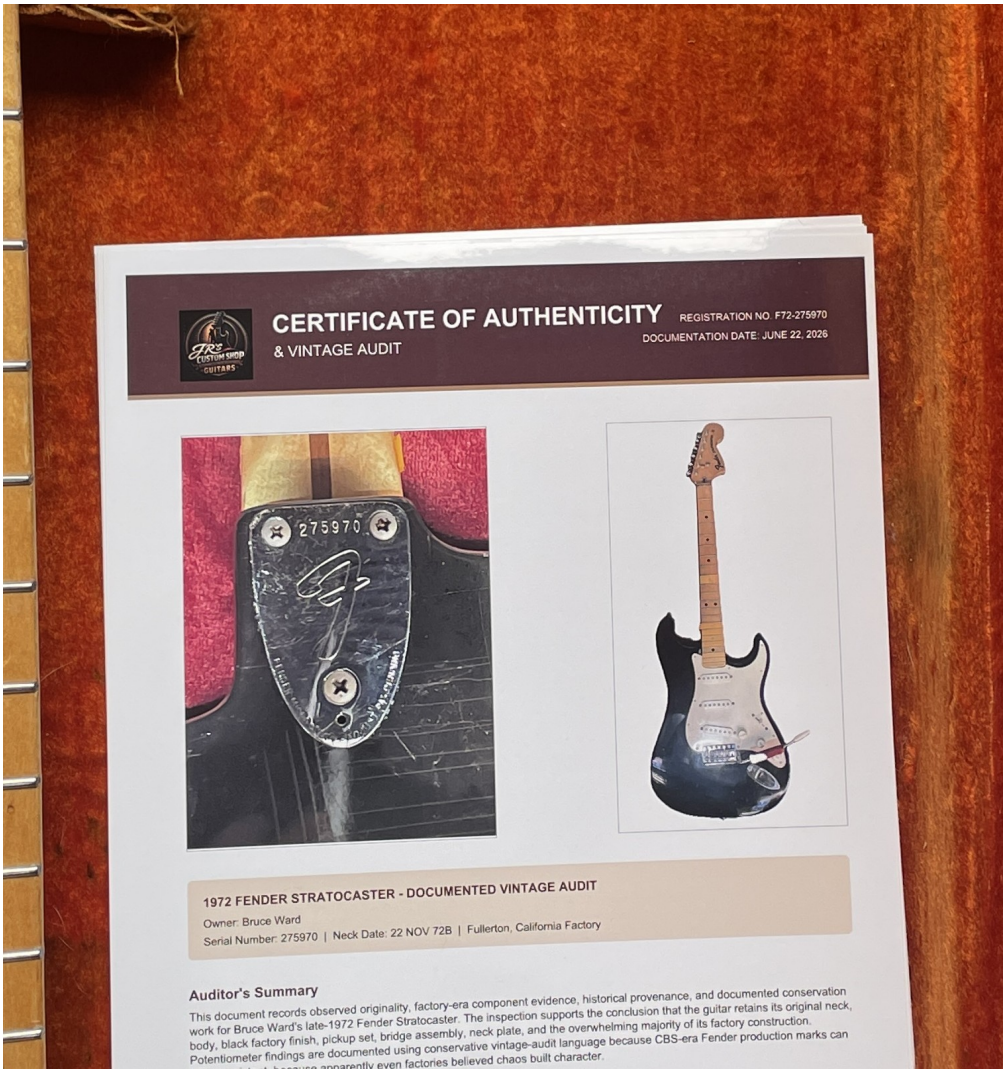
COA / Vintage Audit Addendum

The COA/vintage audit was already completed and is included here as a supporting documentation section. This report does not replace the COA; it adds the refret/restoration process documentation around it.

Registration number	F72-275970
Documentation date	June 22, 2026
Audit title	1972 Fender Stratocaster - Documented Vintage Audit
Owner	Bruce Ward
Serial number	275970
Neck date	22 NOV 72B
Factory	Fullerton, California Factory
COA conclusion summary	COA notes support originality/factory-era component evidence for the neck, body, black factory finish, pickup set, bridge assembly, neck plate, and most factory construction, while documenting replacement/conservation findings conservatively.



Finished maple neck in the original 1970s Fender case with the completed COA/vintage audit paperwork.



COA/vintage audit detail showing registration, owner, serial number, neck date, and audit summary.

Detailed Refret and Restoration Process

1. Intake, customer request, and pre-service documentation

The instrument was documented before service. Pre-service measurements were taken, the customer string preference was confirmed, and required fretwire/tools were ordered.

The guitar arrived with a rosewood neck attached. The original maple neck was supplied for restoration/refret so the instrument could be returned to playable use with its original neck.

The customer history mattered: shops had declined the work decades earlier because fret removal from an old maple Fender neck can tear finish, lift poly, or chip wood if rushed.

2. Vintage evidence and originality documentation

Neck heel stamps, neck plate/serial evidence, pickup markings, potentiometers, bridge parts, and body cavities were photographed as part of the COA/vintage audit record.

The goal was to preserve original components where possible. Original electronics were cleaned and retained unless a fault required intervention.

3. Electronics, shielding, and corrosion/salt cleanup

Old shielding was removed. It left brown residue and corrosion evidence consistent with long-term exposure and ocean-climate contamination.

Electronics cleaner was used on caps, pots, pickups, and related contact areas before re-shielding. Salt residue matters because it can conduct electricity and accelerate failures.

During later testing, shielding contacted the output jack tip and shorted the signal. Heat shrink was added to the affected jack areas, then the controls and pickup positions were retested successfully.

4. Hardware cleaning and conservation

Tuning keys were polished. Rusty hardware such as screws, ferrules, and springs was soaked and cleaned. The body was lightly polished to reveal/document defects without erasing vintage character.

Bridge hardware, saddles, and related parts were documented and cleaned rather than replaced.

5. Maple neck evaluation before fret removal

The neck was checked for straightness before new fret installation. The truss rod was confirmed functional.

The existing fretboard finish showed aged poly buildup and wear, especially around the upper frets. The old frets and finish needed controlled removal/preparation instead of aggressive pulling.

6. Controlled fret removal

Frets were removed using heat and a controlled punch/extraction method. The process was intentionally slow to prevent the 1970s finish from fracturing into the wood.

All old frets were removed with minimal poly chipping and no documented wood chip-out. This was the critical risk stage of the project.

7. Board correction and finish preparation

After the old frets were out, problem poly buildup and fretboard humps were sanded down. The work focused on playability because the guitar is intended to be played, not merely displayed as a relic.

The board and affected areas were progressively sanded through 320, 600, 1200, 2500, and 3000 grit, then cleaned before new poly was applied.

8. Tinted poly color matching and polish

Two 4 oz poly batches were mixed for color matching. One used yellow tint; another used yellow, black, and red tint. A portion of the darker mix was blended into the yellow mix, then adjusted with additional yellow until the match was appropriate.

Four to five coats were applied with sanding between coats. The surface was then wet sanded through 3000, 5000, and 10000 grit and polished with fine polish and a small random orbital polisher.

9. Stainless fret installation

New Jescar stainless frets were prepared, pre-radiused to 7.25 inches, trimmed, organized in order, and pressed into the prepared slots.

The installation was done with the neck properly supported. After seating, fret ends were cut and dressed.

10. Level, crown, polish, and reassembly checks

The new fretwork was leveled, crowned, and polished. The neck was then assembled to the body for preliminary testing of nut height, bridge relationship, neck angle/string gap, and electronics.

The original maple neck fit the body but presented a pocket/alignment gap and buzz condition that required loosening, realignment, testing with and without shim material, and final tightening in the best position.

The second control knob needed cleaning, but the original part was retained. Tuners were oiled. A slight coat of aging poly was added to the sides of the neck and left to cure/rest.

11. Final stringing, setup, and future checkup note

Final stringing and full setup have now been completed. The maple neck truss rod is working and was adjusted to the recorded vintage Stratocaster relief specification of 0.012 in / 0.348 mm. Final action, nut-slot height, and intonation measurements are recorded in Appendix B.

The owner should be advised to bring the guitar back during cooler/drier months for a checkup so fret seating, neck response, relief, and setup can be verified after the wood and new fretwork have acclimated.

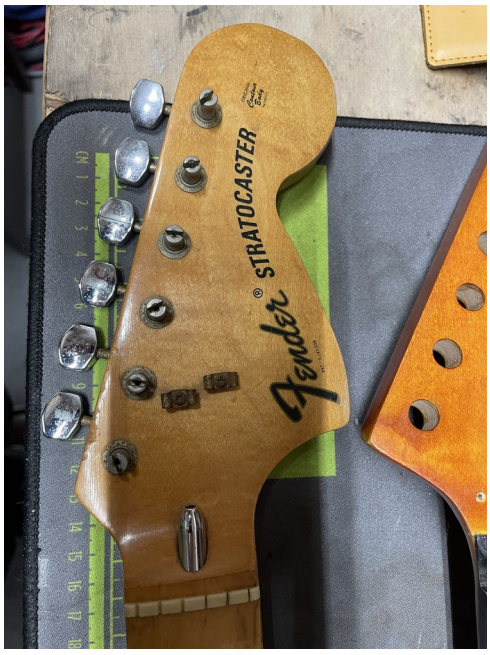
Selected Photo Documentation

The following photographs are organized in approximate process order. They are selected from the supplied shop folder and are intended to show before/during/after condition rather than every image captured.

Intake

Incoming configuration: black Stratocaster body received with a rosewood neck attached.

Rosewood neck present at intake. The customer requested restoration of the original maple neck instead.



Original maple neck before restoration, showing headstock, finish age, nut area, and hardware context.

Maple neck condition

Maple board before refret, showing old frets and aged finish/poly buildup along the playing surface.

Upper-board condition before fret removal and board correction.

Vintage evidence

Neck heel date stamp documenting the late-1972 maple neck marking.

Heel and neck hardware evidence documented before reassembly.

Pickup date stamps and original electronics evidence photographed during the vintage audit.

Electronics and cleaning

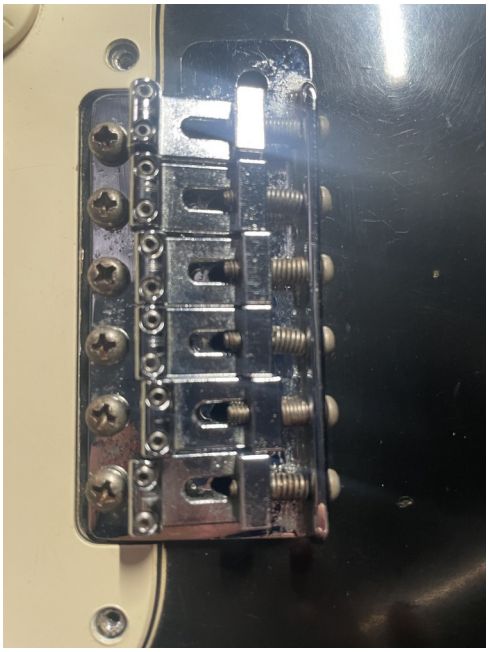
Potentiometers, wiring, and control cavity condition documented during electronics inspection.

Old shielding and adhesive/residue after removal; corrosion/salt contamination was documented and cleaned.

Shielding work after cleaning and re-shielding the cavities.

Hardware cleaning

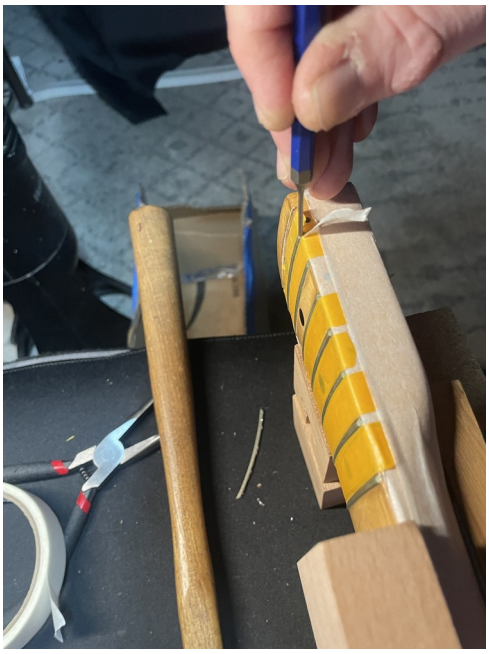
Bridge/spring deck components documented during cleaning and conservation.



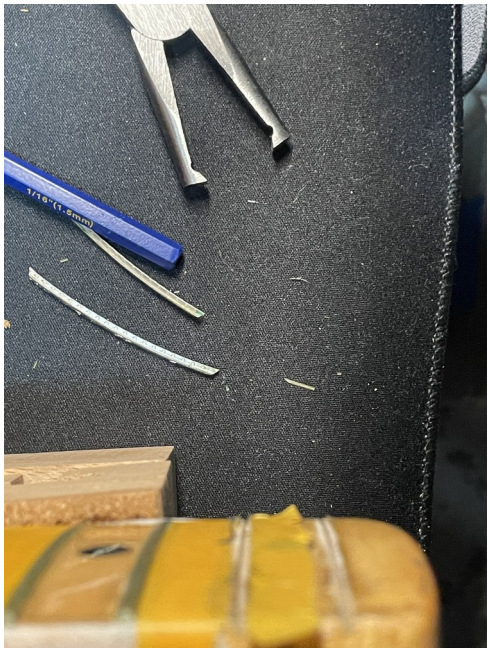
Bridge area after cleaning and reassembly work.

Fret removal

Controlled fret extraction began with localized heat and support to protect the aged finish.

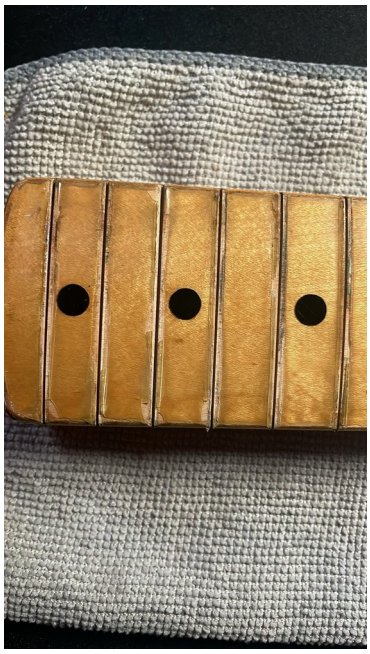


Fret removal in progress using heat and a controlled push/punch technique to avoid chip-out.



Removed fret section and protected fretboard edge; chip-out was kept minimal.

Board correction

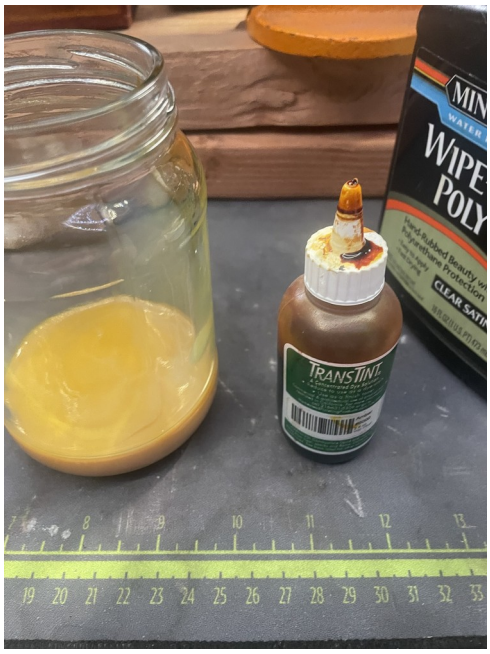


Fret slots and board surface after removal, before final finish/slot preparation.

Poly/finish leveling and board correction after fret removal.

Progressive sanding across the board to remove humps and prepare for a playable refret.

Finish restoration



Tinted poly color-matching process for the maple neck restoration.

Color-matched finish work on the maple neck after sanding and tint adjustment.

Color match checked under brighter light before final polish and assembly.

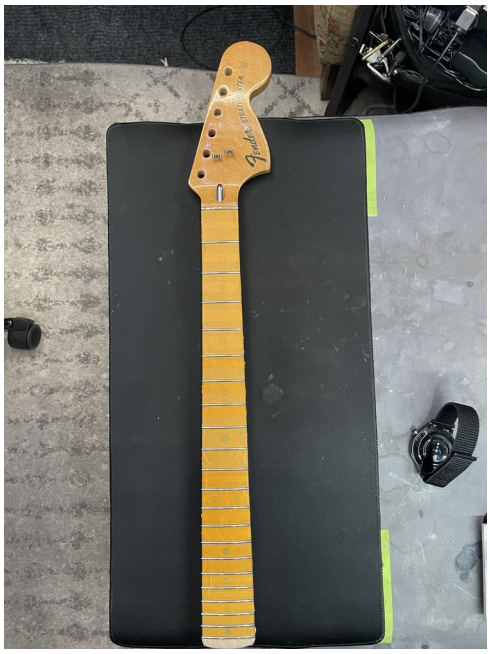
Refret installation

New stainless fret installation using a press and supported neck fixture.

New frets seated into the corrected maple board.

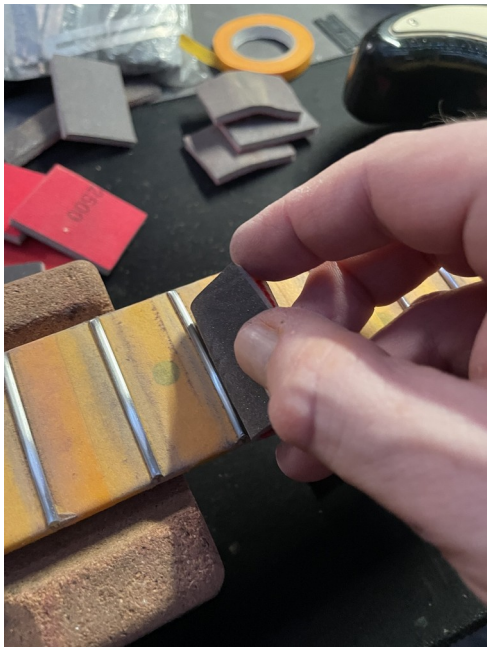
Fret installation complete across the board before final end work and leveling.

End dressing and leveling



Fret ends trimmed and dressed after pressing.

Refret level/crown/polish work in progress after installation.



Detail work during leveling and cleanup at the fretboard edge.

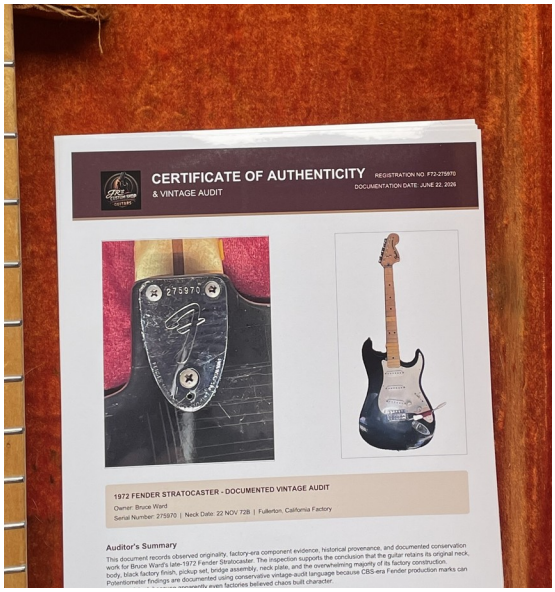
Final status

Finished maple neck after refret, color match, leveling, and polish.

Back of the restored neck/headstock after reassembly.

COA

Finished maple neck presented in the original 1970s Fender case with the completed COA/vintage audit document.



COA/vintage audit page detail: registration, owner, serial number, neck date, and audit summary.

Appendix A - Original Shop Log Summary

1. Took all pre-service measurements. Confirmed the customer string brand preference. Ordered Jescar medium/jumbo stainless frets and miscellaneous tools needed for the job.

2. Began work on fret removal after receiving the frets. The new frets looked good, were pre-radiused to 7.25 inches, trimmed, and placed into a fret holder in order 1-22. Old frets required heating plus controlled punch-out with an Irwin punch to avoid chipping or splintering. The process worked well. Old shielding was removed; it left brown residue and showed signs of salt buildup from outdoor/ocean climate exposure. Salt can conduct electricity and cause failures, so electronics cleaner was used inside and out on caps, pots, and pickups before re-shielding. The neck was confirmed straight before new fret installation; the truss rod was functional.

3. Polished all tuning keys. Rusty parts were soaked in WD-40, including screws, ferrules, springs, and related hardware. The body was lightly polished to remove/reveal defects for documentation in the COA.

4. All frets came out with minimal chipping of poly and no wood chipped. Heavy poly buildup at higher frets was sanded. Defects from Fender and some wear over time were filled. The neck was then ready to sand and receive frets.

5. Mixed two 4 oz bottles of poly. One bottle received two drops of yellow Transtint. The other received one yellow, one black, and two red drops. After comparison, about 1.2 oz of the darker mix was added into the yellow mix, then adjusted with more yellow. The fretboard was sanded to remove humps because the guitar is intended to be played rather than preserved only as a relic. After sanding the humps down, the board was worked through 320, 600, 1200, 2500, and 3000 grit, cleaned, and color-matched poly was applied. After 4-5 coats, with sanding between coats, it was wet sanded through 3000, 5000, and 10000 grit and polished with fine polish and a small random orbital polisher.

6. The guitar was assembled and tested for nut height, bridge relationship, string gaps, and neck fit. Although the neck was original to the body, there was a pocket gap that created a buzz. The neck was loosened, aligned, shimmed, tested, then tested again without the shim until the best position was found. The electronics were tested and a shielding short at the output jack tip was found. Heat shrink was added to the jack areas and the short stopped. All positions and knobs were tested. The second knob needed some cleaning, but originality was preserved and it was not replaced. Tuners were oiled, a slight coat of aging poly was added to the sides of the neck, and the guitar was left to sit. The owner should be warned that in colder months it should come back for setup and a fret acceptance/stability check.

Completion Notes

This document records the completed refret/restoration work, integrates the COA/vintage audit material into the project archive, and adds the final stringing/setup measurements after completion. Relief, action, nut-slot height, truss rod function, and intonation were confirmed during final setup.

Recommended follow-up: after seasonal temperature/humidity change or after several weeks of play, re-check relief, fret seating, fret ends, neck pocket alignment, nut slot behavior, bridge height, pickup function, and output jack insulation.

Appendix B - Final Stringing and Setup Measurements

Final completion note. The guitar is now finished and strung. The original maple neck truss rod is working and was adjusted to the documented relief target. Final intonation was adjusted after setup. Measurements below are recorded from the completed final setup.

Final setup item	Recorded measurement / status
Truss relief	0.012 in / 0.348 mm
Truss rod	Working; adjusted to relief specification on the restored maple neck.
Action - high E at 3rd fret	1.00 mm
Action - low E at 3rd fret	1.35 mm
Action - high E at 12th fret	1.50 mm
Action - low E at 12th fret	2.00 mm
Nut/string height - low E and A	0.020 in, measured from top of 1st fret to bottom of string
Nut/string height - D and G	0.018 in, measured from top of 1st fret to bottom of string
Nut/string height - B and high E	0.016 in, measured from top of 1st fret to bottom of string
Intonation	Adjusted after final stringing and setup.

Measurement method. Nut/string-height values were recorded with feeler gauges from the top of the 1st fret to the bottom of the string. Action values were recorded at the 3rd and 12th frets after the instrument was strung and adjusted.

Final completed instrument after stringing, setup, relief adjustment, and intonation.