

# ALVAREZ PD311AV

The Alvarez PD311AV is a spruce-top guitar in disguise. Why have Alvarez made this mid-priced contender look like it has a mahogany top? Sam Wise finds out.



**A**lvarez might be based in St Louis, but most of their guitars are made in China. They benefit, however, from a relationship with K Yairi guitars, which has resulted not only in their top-of-the-range Alvarez-Yairi guitars, which are built in Japan by Kazuo Yairi, but also in certain pieces of licensed technology.

## Build and Features

The PD311AV is one of Alvarez' Chinese-made guitars, but bears the Yairi licensed DCB, or 'Direct Coupled Bridge', which provides an extra reinforcing plate for the string anchors behind the soundboard. This sterling piece of technology is mounted on

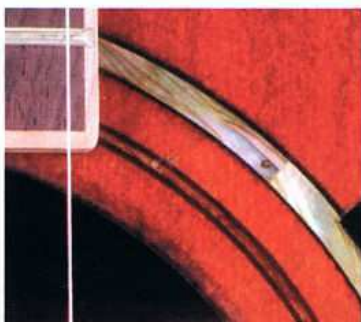
the guitar's most notable feature – a spruce top which has been treated to what Alvarez describe as a 'satin antique violin' finish. To my eyes, however, it might be trying to do an impression of a mahogany top. It's perhaps a little redder than real mahogany, but the dark accents are very reminiscent indeed. Looking closer, however, it looks like a decent piece of spruce regardless, and is decorated tastefully with a herringbone binding, simple rosette featuring an abalone inlaid ring, and an unusual but elegant pickguard. The back and sides are of rosewood, solid in the case of the back, but a veneer on laminate on the sides. This fairly unusual arrangement makes a lot of sense: the back is

next most important in terms of tone generation after the top, so if you want to improve tone without hiking price too much, it's a good move. Certainly the wood used is handsome, and the herringbone centre stripe at the back, and the maple binding, set it off beautifully.

The neck appears to be mahogany, though Alvarez don't specify, and the rosewood fingerboard is once again bound in maple. There are clear black

fret markers on the binding, but the fingerboard itself bears only a simple motif at the 12th fret. The neck is topped with a rosewood-faced headstock, bearing an Alvarez logo, and the most complex piece of inlay on the guitar, which is once again bound in maple. The overall look is very pleasing, and while the redness and almost sunburst appearance of the top works well, I couldn't help thinking how much better it might have looked with a real

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The spruce top is enhanced by an abalone soundhole inlay and elegant pickguard



## Alvarez PD311AV

www.acousticmagazine.com for reviews



### Technical specification

**Manufacturer:** Alvarez  
**Price:** £499  
**Model:** PD311AV  
**Body Size:** Dreadnought  
**Made In:** Far East  
**Body Size:** Dreadnought  
**Top:** Solid Spruce  
**Back & Sides:** Solid Rosewood  
**Neck:** Mahogany  
**Fingerboard:** Rosewood  
**Frets:** 21  
**Tuners:** Gold Die Cast  
**Nut Width:** 1.72"  
**Scale Length:** 24.9"  
**Onboard Electronics:** No  
**Strings Fitted (Gauge & Brand):**  
 D'Addario 10s  
**Left Handers?** No  
**Gig Bag/Case Included:** No

### Contact details

**Alvarez**  
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### What we think

**Pros:** Classic spruce and rosewood sound, looks that differentiate it from the crowd.

**Cons:** Looks may not be to everyone's taste, lacked a little sparkle at the top end.

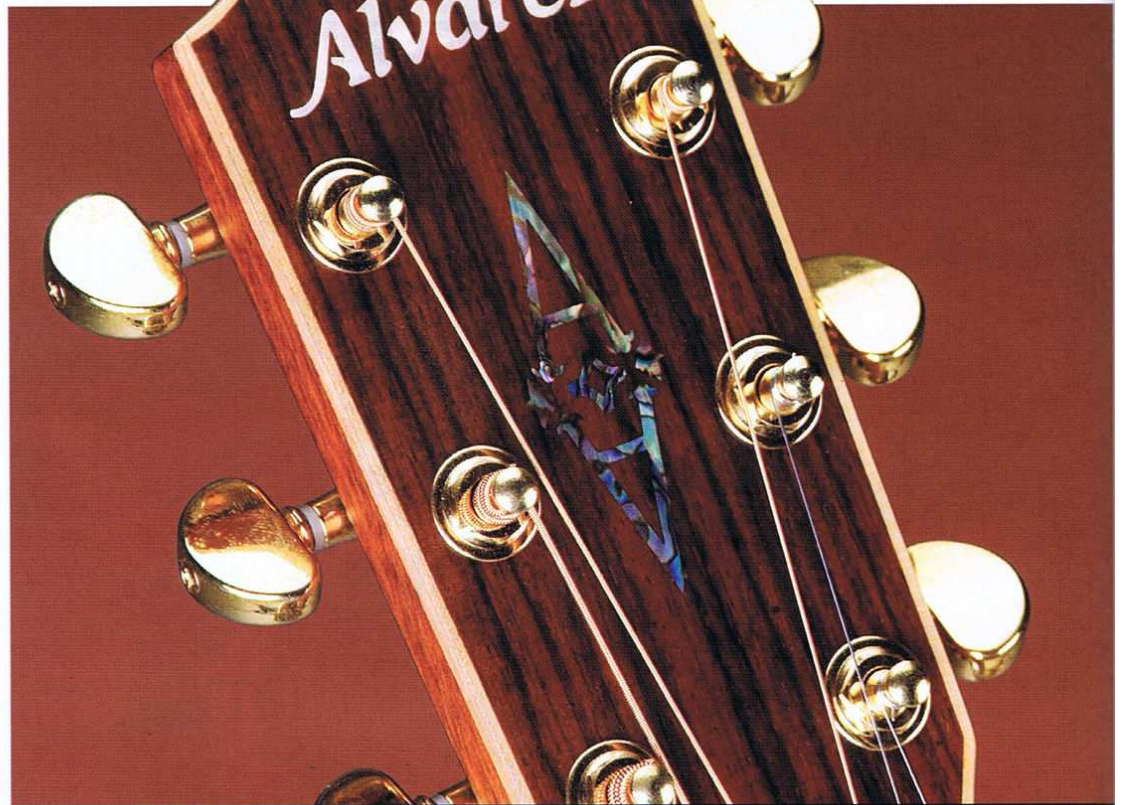
**Overall:** A good guitar which misses out on being great.

### Our Ratings Explained

**5 Stars:** Superb, Almost faultless.  
**4 Stars:** Excellent, Hard to beat.  
**3 Stars:** Good, covers all bases well.  
**2 or 1 Stars:** Below average, poor.

### Rating out of five

**BUILD QUALITY**  
**SOUND QUALITY**  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**



The Alvarez logo looks spectacular on the rosewood headstock

mahogany top.

Whatever you think of the styling, however, the Alvarez certainly looks like a high-end guitar. The combination of woods lends a sense of expense, and the only niggle I could find was a little bit of glue squeeze-out at the heel – impressive, given that the soundhole smells like a glue factory!

### Sounds And Playability

In feel terms, the Alvarez isn't really particularly distinguished; if you've played a dreadnought before, you'll have no surprises here, and that's no bad thing. The neck is a fairly slim modern C section, which is beginning to become a bit of a niggle with me: the only place I ever seem to find a different or interesting neck profile is on guitars specifically modelled on vintage instruments. None of this is really a criticism – dreadnoughts are a known quantity, and lots of people like slimmish necks, but one could get bored! The only real issue I had with the PD311AV was the action, which was unnecessarily high, making picking, in particular, hard work, and meaning that putting a capo on required a retune. Intonation, however, was as near perfect as to make no difference all over the neck, which is what you'd expect at this price point.

Spruce and rosewood is traditionally one of the brightest wood combinations, and as

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expected, the Alvarez tone is certainly crisp and direct. There's not really a sparkle to the high end on this guitar, which is a bit of a surprise; it's certainly bright, but for my tastes it's a little too direct and simple, without the involving depth of tone which the best-sounding guitars have. It's the same story through the mid range as well: it's powerful, bright and punchy, but not rich. To some extent I'm picking holes here: these are the characteristics of the spruce/rosewood combination, but the nicest examples I've played have just been a little more complex

in tone. The bass end certainly has projection and clarity, and ultimately these are what one wants in a rosewood-backed guitar.

### Conclusion

This is a solid, decent guitar, well worth the money, and worthy of your consideration. For me, the stain on the top helps it stand out from the crowd, but not in a way that totally convinces me. In a crowded guitar shop, however, just getting the attention can be enough.

**Sam Wise**

