

If you've ever been transfixed by a *GP* cover, thrilled by some amazing photos of your favorite artist, or seduced into reading an article by a kick-ass layout, then you probably have art director Rich Leeds to thank for your moments of delight. Rich has been this magazine's not-so-secret weapon for years, and now he has chosen to share his formidable artistry with the world as the owner of his own business, Big Wig Design. I'll miss him a bunch, and so will many of you.

For 16 years, Rich has visualized and energized the look and feel of this group's publications—first with *Keyboard*, and then with *Guitar Player*. He has worked with company icons such as Jim Crockett, Tom Wheeler, Dominic Milano, and Tom Darter, and, because of this, he has been *GP*'s conceptual bridge between its past, present, and future. And this

was *never* just a gig for him. A snippet from his farewell e-mail to the staff reveals his passion for these magazines: "In 1976, I tore an ad for the new Ibanez Artist out of *GP* and tacked it to my bulletin board. I worked all summer to buy that guitar. About 11 years later, I was on the staff and standing on a stage at the magazine's old Cupertino [CA] office playing guitar with Jerry Garcia. Unbelievable!"

During Rich's marvelous tenure here, he has won numerous design awards, nurtured a vast community of photographers and illustrators, trained some brilliant assistants (many of whom became art directors themselves), and secured the respect of all who have worked with him. His legacy at *GP* is one of innovation, passion, and commitment, and he also holds staff records for arguing, going ballistic, interrupting discussions, and embarrassing the

crap out of egotistical morons (and wrongheaded friends).

When I became editor in chief approximately four years ago, I challenged the staff to reinvent *GP* immediately. Rich didn't even flinch. He got together with our editors, and, thanks to the staff's sweat and brainpower, we hit the streets with a totally redesigned magazine *one issue* after the gauntlet was thrown. I've never forgotten that miracle, or what a blast it was to be pummeled by the vortex of energy that is Rich Leeds in a full-on creative onslaught. Since then, he has refreshed the design three times, and taught me (sometimes painfully) how to be a better editor.

Starting this issue, Alexandra Zeigler is the new art director of *GP*. She's a bundle of energy and genius, and she definitely has the vision and chops to redefine what a modern



guitar magazine looks like. I'm ferociously excited about the "Alexandra Era" and *GP*'s visual future, but I'm still going to miss Rich's explosions of laughter, his quests for confrontation, and his insights (even the ones I never asked for).

Rich, you leave *GP* as a company legend, and the magazine is far better for your being here. I can't thank you enough, so I'll just shut up and salute you. Good luck out there! —MICHAEL MOLENDAG