

# Friedman IR-X Review and IR Guide

Alisa Lafoks



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## Short Version

The Friedman IR-X is especially useful when you need to get a driven guitar tone recorded and sitting in the mix quickly. It is not magic; it is a predictable working signal chain: set the knobs roughly around noon, choose an IR that fits, and play.

You probably do not need it if what you enjoy about processors is deep editing: virtual amps, scenes, complex signal chains, many mic choices, and lots of parameters. And if you do not know why you specifically want tubes, you probably do not need it either. For that workflow, a Quad Cortex, Tone Master Pro, or plugins make more sense. The IR-X is about less menu work and more direct response under the fingers.

# What Is the Friedman IR-X

The Friedman IR-X is a dual-channel all-tube preamp with built-in cabinet simulation. Inside are two 12AX7 tubes; Friedman specifies 200 V plate voltage. This is not a decorative tube for marketing, and not the usual starved-plate approach found in cheaper tube pedals: in feel and behavior, the IR-X is closer to a normal amp preamp. The voicing and circuit approach are Friedman throughout, from the same world of amps Dave Friedman has been building for guitar players for more than 20 years.

## Two Channels, Two Characters

**Channel 1** — from clean to light edge-of-breakup. The 3-position BRIGHT switch shapes the top end: off for a warmer sound, on for the more familiar Friedman bite.

**Channel 2** — high-gain territory. From classic rock crunch to modern metal saturation. The TIGHT switch firms up the low end for tighter palm-muted parts.

**BOOST** — extra gain on top of either channel. For solos, or simply when the part needs more push.

## Architecture

Up to the SEND jack, the IR-X is a tube preamp with two channels, 3-band EQ, and the BRIGHT/TIGHT switches.

After the RETURN jack, it runs through 96 kHz power amp simulation, with PRESENCE and THUMP shaping the power-amp feel, and then through cabinet/microphone simulation.

Between SEND and RETURN, you can place effects. You can also use the IR-X as a preamp only: SEND into an amp return or an external power amp, then into a cabinet. The reverse also works: feed an external preamp into RETURN if you only want the IR-X power amp and cabinet section.

## Usage

The IR-X can stand in for an amp in several situations:

- **Studio** — balanced output straight into the audio interface. You can record two tracks at once: BALANCED OUT with IR, and SEND without the cabinet section, for processing through another IR in the DAW.
- **Live** — BALANCED OUT to front of house, SEND to an amp return or power amp on stage. Stable FOH sound and familiar cabinet monitoring.
- **Practice** — headphone output. Same preamp and cabinet section, without a loud cabinet.
- **Pedalboard** — fits on your board, replaces your amp.

## Cabinet Simulation

12 Friedman cabinet IRs. Each channel has 3 IR slots. You can load your own WAV files (44.1–96

kHz) over USB.

The IR section can be bypassed: you can use the IR-X as a tube preamp into an external power amp and real cabinet, or with external IR processors.

## Presets

128 MIDI-programmable presets. Each one stores channel, boost status, FX loop status, and IR selection per channel. PRESENCE and THUMP are set through Friedman Editor.

The IR-X responds well to the guitar volume knob: roll the guitar down and the overdrive backs off into a cleaner sound. That is one of the reasons Friedman works for me.

## How I Use It

My main setup is simple:

guitar → Tube Screamer when needed → IR-X → audio interface → DAW.

Most of the time I record the finished signal with an IR straight into the interface. If I want more room to change things later, I take the signal without the cabinet section and run it through a different IR in the DAW.<sup>[1]</sup>

Sometimes I use the IR-X only as a power amp sim and cab sim for other preamps: external preamp into RETURN, then BALANCED OUT to the interface or front of house. Sometimes I use it simply as a tube preamp pedal in another rig. In that role it feels like a compact, high-gain Marshall-ish preamp: not a universal processor, but a focused piece of hardware with a clear attack and gain character.

If you want to use a real guitar cabinet, you still need an amp return or a separate power amp after the IR-X.<sup>[2]</sup>

## My Impressions

I also have a Quad Cortex and a Fender Tone Master Pro. Both are good processors; I have no real complaint about their sound. But under the fingers they do not feel the same. With the Tone Master Pro, the difference from the IR-X is still noticeable: it sounds good, but it plays a little more mechanically. With the Quad Cortex, I barely feel the difference anymore, especially with a well-built patch. Maybe I am fooling myself a bit; I cannot rule that out. But I still enjoy playing through the IR-X more.

When I listen to a solo guitar recording on its own, honestly, I do not hear the difference. I have put tracks next to each other: IR-X, Quad Cortex, plugins. Without being told, it is almost impossible to know which is which. And I think that is a good thing, not a problem. Modern processors model a lot: harmonics, power-supply sag, even interaction between gain stages. In blind comparisons, the difference is not always obvious even to experienced players. I also cannot reliably tell a recorded IR-X from its captured version when I listen to the guitar alone. In a mix, though, it feels different. I admit this could be placebo.

When the guitar has to sit in a mix, that is where it gets interesting. There is less low-end mud, it does not get buried, and it does not fight the vocal as much. It is especially noticeable on double-tracked rhythm parts: they sit in their lane and do not smear across the mix. With processors, I more often had to shape things with EQ and cut resonances. With the IR-X, the result starts closer to where I want it.

Why? I do not think it is tube magic. The IR-X is simply well designed: it gives me a signal with the right spectrum, organized harmonics, and less extra low/high information that later becomes a mix problem. Maybe a Quad Cortex with the right settings can do the same. But the IR-X gets there quickly, without menu diving.

Solo guitar: probably placebo. Playing feel: not really. Mix placement: looks more like good engineering than tube magic.

## Who Might Not Like It

For what it is meant to do, the IR-X works well, so I do not have many classic complaints about it. But it is not a universal box for everyone.

If you like spending time building tones from a thousand settings, with scenes, virtual heads, cabinets, microphones, compressors, and EQs, the IR-X may feel too direct. The workflow is different: put the knobs in the middle, turn it on, and the sound is already in the right area.

If you want one device to replace the whole pedalboard, all effects, all amps, and every studio routing option, a processor is the better direction. The IR-X is a tube preamp with an IR section, not a full modeler for everything.

## IR Library

The IR-X comes with 12 Friedman cabinet IRs. You can load your own, but the stock IRs work very well for me; I tried many third-party options and came back to the built-ins.

Here is my cheat sheet for what I would use each IR for. This is not an official Friedman classification; it is my practical read based on feel, descriptions, and typical cabinet/speaker behavior.

If you do not want to read the whole table, I would start here:

- **6402 57 121 (MAIN)** — first stop for classic Friedman drive in a recording.
- **V30 (MAIN)** — dense modern rock and a quick live option.
- **GREEN** — direct rock tone that is easy to fit into a band mix.
- **DS112 57 1973** — cleans, light edge-of-breakup, and a more open blues character.
- **BLACK 57 160** — heavier rock, dense mids, and a warm color.
- **EV12L 57121** — more neutral and wider when you do not want the usual Celestion color.

Name	Description	Profile
6402 57 121 (MAIN)	Dave's well-known bare-wood cabinet. It came from a 70s rock guitarist and was already in its stripped-down look. Resonant and lively, loaded with four rare 1990s 6402 Greenbacks. This cab has been around Dave's amp voicing work from early on. Captured with SM57 and R-121 for a balance of cut and body.	STUDIO OD DIST CLASSIC
V30 (MAIN)	The Friedman 4x12 — closed back, Baltic birch, tongue-and-groove construction. Tight bottom end, big midrange, balanced top. The Celestion Vintage 30 sound has become one of the common reference points for modern guitar. In this cab it has low-end thump and enough cut without getting too sharp. Captured with a single SM57 through an API preamp for a direct, punchy sound.	LIVE OD DIST AGGR MODERN
1984B V30 GB (MAIN)	A rare UK 4x12 from the 80s rock era. This 1984B "Bass" cabinet has British Greenbacks on top and V30s on the bottom. The speaker blend and mic balance give it a large sound: big low end and a cutting top.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST BRIDGE
1960 GREEN 5757121	A classic 1980s 1960B cabinet loaded with 20-watt British Greenbacks. It has a recognizable voice that works from 80s rock into more modern rock tones. Captured with two SM57s on two speakers, plus an R-121 for body. Run through API preamps with a little EQ to bring out presence.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST BRIDGE
DS112 57 1973	Friedman Dirty Shirley 1x12 open-back with a G12-50GL. Detailed top end with a more open bass and mid response. A good choice for clean tones or a bluesier feel. Captured with SM57 and Soyuz 1973 through API preamps.	STUDIO CLEAN EDGE OD CLASSIC
BLACK 57 160	Dave's vintage 4x12 with checkerboard grille cloth. Celestion G12H-30 "Black Back" 55 Hz 30 W speakers. Dense and meaty — good for heavier rock, but warm enough to work with Strat-style tones too. Mic'd with SM57 and M160 ribbon.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST CLASSIC
GREEN	Friedman 4x12 with a 16-ohm Celestion G12M-25 Greenback. Classic rock tonality that fits into a band mix easily. Captured with a single SM57 and API preamp for a clean, punchy sound.	LIVE CLEAN OD DIST CLASSIC
6402 57	Dave Friedman's favorite bare-wood 4x12. A primary workshop cabinet used to voice his amplifiers from early on. Four 6402 Greenback speakers. Captured with a single SM57 for a direct, punchy sound.	LIVE OD DIST CLASSIC

Name	Description	Profile
65W 57121	Captured from a classic 1960B cab. The vintage G12-65, with its large dust cap, has a fat, warm sound with a firm low end. Captured with an SM57 and R-121 combination.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST CLASSIC
CREAM65 57121	Captured from a clean 1980s UK 1960A 4x12 fitted with a newer Celestion Creamback 65 W. Phase-aligned SM57 and R-121 on a single speaker. Balanced tone with a slight vintage lean.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST BRIDGE
EV12L 57121	The vintage EV12L has a character that is almost the opposite of many modern speakers, but it handles balanced cleans and dense rock/metal tones well. SM57 and R-121 capture the smoother response of this vintage 12-inch speaker in a very large closed-back 2x12.	STUDIO CLEAN DIST AGGR NEUTRAL
GREEN+V30 MIX 5757121	One of Friedman's preferred combinations: two Greenbacks and two V30s in the same 4x12. A blend of those speakers, with an SM57 on each and an R-121 added to the V30 for extra body.	STUDIO CLEAN OD DIST BRIDGE

## Profile tags legend

### Use case

- LIVE — simpler, faster, more predictable for live use; usually more direct and punchy
- STUDIO — more "produced" and mix-ready; often multi-mic or more complex texture

### Gain range

- CLEAN — best for clean tones
- EDGE — edge of breakup, light crunch at the boundary of clean and overdrive
- OD — overdrive, medium-density rock distortion
- DIST — full distortion
- AGGR — more aggressive, dense, high-gain

### Voice character

- CLASSIC — more vintage, familiar rock character
- BRIDGE — halfway between classic and modern
- MODERN — more modern, dense, focused character
- NEUTRAL — less colored, less "typically vintage"

## Notes

- The profile tags are not an official rating system; they are a practical interpretation.
- Friedman's current IR-X specification says 12 free Friedman IRs. This table stays within that set and does not include additional OwnHammer/editor-library options.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the Friedman IR-X?

The Friedman IR-X is a dual-channel tube guitar preamp with built-in power amp simulation, cabinet IRs, a balanced output, an effects loop, and MIDI presets. It can be used instead of a traditional amp for recording, live work, or a pedalboard rig.

### How is the Friedman IR-X different from a guitar processor?

A guitar processor usually models the whole chain: amp, cabinet, microphones, effects, and routing. The IR-X is different: the gain and main playing response come from a real analog tube preamp, while the digital section handles power amp simulation, cabinet IRs, and microphone/cabinet tone. It is not a universal modeler; it is a tube preamp paired with a digital cabinet section for direct recording or front-of-house use.

### Is the Friedman IR-X a tube preamp or a digital simulator?

Both, but in different parts of the signal path. Up to RETURN, it is an analog tube preamp with two channels. After RETURN, it uses digital power amp simulation and a cabinet IR section. That is why it can work as a tube preamp, a direct recording rig, or a power amp sim plus cab sim for an external preamp.

### Can I plug the Friedman IR-X straight into an audio interface?

Yes. Use the BALANCED OUT with cabinet simulation. A common setup is guitar or pedals into the IR-X, then BALANCED OUT into the audio interface, then record in the DAW.

### Can I use the Friedman IR-X without an amp?

Yes. The IR-X is designed to work without a traditional amp head and speaker cabinet: into an interface, front of house, active monitor, or headphones. For a passive guitar cabinet, you still need a power amp or an amp effects-loop return.

## **Can I connect the Friedman IR-X directly to a guitar cabinet?**

<p>No, not directly to a passive cabinet. SEND and BALANCED OUT are not power outputs. If you want to use a real cabinet, the chain should be IR-X into an amp return or external power amp, then into the cabinet.</p>

## **Can I use the Friedman IR-X only as an IR loader?**

<p>Yes. You can feed an external preamp into RETURN and use the IR-X as a power amp sim plus cab sim. That is useful if you like another preamp but want to use the IR-X cabinet section and balanced output.</p>

## **Can I use the Friedman IR-X as a tube pedal?**

<p>Yes, with the right expectation. In that role it behaves more like a compact, high-gain Marshall-ish tube preamp than a neutral overdrive pedal. It can be placed in another rig if you want that specific Friedman-style preamp voice.</p>

## **Which Friedman IR-X IRs should I start with for driven guitar recording?**

<p>For a quick start, I would try 6402 57 121 (MAIN), V30 (MAIN), GREEN, or BLACK 57 160. 6402 gives a classic Friedman character, V30 holds a dense modern rock sound, GREEN fits easily into a rock mix, and BLACK 57 160 works for denser heavy-rock parts.</p>

## **Can I load my own IRs into the Friedman IR-X?**

<p>Yes. You can load your own WAV impulse responses over USB using Friedman Editor. The built-in IRs are already useful, so I would try those first before replacing them with third-party files.</p>

## **How many built-in IRs does the Friedman IR-X have?**

<p>Friedman's current IR-X specification lists 12 free Friedman cabinet IRs. In this article I treat them as a practical cheat sheet: which ones suit clean tones, drive, heavy rhythm guitars, recording, and live use.</p>

## **Do I need Friedman Editor?**

<p>Yes, for some tasks: loading and organizing IRs, managing presets, and settings such as PRESENCE and THUMP. But the basic sound does not require deep editing: set the hardware controls, choose an IR, and play.</p>

## What is an IR in guitar tone?

IR means impulse response. In this context, it is a capture of a cabinet, speaker, microphone, and mic position. For a guitar preamp, an IR is critical: without cabinet simulation, a distorted direct preamp signal usually sounds harsh and unfinished.

## What do power amp sim and cab sim mean?

Power amp sim imitates part of the behavior of a power amp: presence, low-end push, and the feel of the output stage. Cab sim imitates the cabinet, speaker, and microphone using an IR. Together, they turn the preamp signal into something you can record directly or send to front of house.

## What are SEND and RETURN on the Friedman IR-X?

SEND is the output after the tube preamp and before the cabinet section. RETURN is the input before the power amp simulation and IR section. You can place effects between them, take the preamp signal without a cabinet, or feed an external preamp into the IR-X.

## What do PRESENCE and THUMP do?

PRESENCE affects upper-mid/treble projection and how far forward the guitar feels. THUMP adds low-frequency punch and weight, especially for palm-muted riffs. Both are part of the power amp simulation behavior.

## What do edge of breakup, clean, OD, and DIST mean?

Clean means no obvious overdrive. Edge of breakup is the border between clean and light crunch, where the sound starts to break up depending on pick attack. OD means medium-density overdrive. DIST means full distortion for rock and heavier guitar parts.

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[1] That is not a raw guitar DI. It is the signal after the tube preamp. For traditional reamping, it is still better to record a separate clean DI track.

[2] The IR-X SEND is not a power output for a passive cabinet. A passive guitar cabinet has to be connected after a power amp: for example, through an amp's effects loop return or a standalone power amp.