



year book

late 2019 edition

signals

hi-fi for grown-ups

Musings

Our business spluttered into life in October 1993. The precise date is a little uncertain because it was merely the beginning of a two year period agreed with my wife to 'see if it works out'. Juggling childcare for our three year old, freeing my wife to work full time, meant that it was not the only thing on my mind in any case.

Twenty five years on, I'm typing this partly as a diversion from writing something far more important, namely my father of the bride speech at said offspring's wedding.

She survived, the experience. We all did. I guess it worked out all right!

This significant anniversary has set me thinking and, despite all the technological advances, it's surprising just how little has changed.

Back in '93, audiophile, or 'audiofool' cables were just breaking onto the market. Then, as now, their worth was being discussed and mocked. Back then, this took place in the letters pages in the various magazines. It was a slower, gentler world.

Valve amplifiers were going through a renaissance (I dabbled but didn't inhale). High end CD players were morphing into two or more box DAC /transport combos (Naim excepted).

And the turntable was king.



For loudspeakers, the physical similarities between then and now are just as notable.

There has been progress, though. Most electronic components and loudspeakers are more capable than their forebears were at the same point in the marketplace. Some dramatically so, for example with DAC design.

The Lyra Etna lurking here is a clue that something else has happened too. Evolution and creativity have kept the analogue world every bit as relevant and vibrant as the digital one. Perhaps more surprisingly, at its best, analogue seems to be maintaining its edge too.

The digital vs analogue debate is now more nuanced than back in 1993. The quality of the recording and / or the mastering are often more significant factors than the method of replay.

Nevertheless, recordings, digital or analogue, can offer something more magical via a turntable based system than a digital one.

This explains the existence of so many turntables at St Cecilia's House. We're drowning in the bloody things! Still, it's part of what keeps us busy and for that we are thankful. By the way, that Etna is truly wonderful!

Thanks, as ever, go to our customers for buying from us. Without you, there would be no us. Thanks too, go to Andy Heavens for being an ever more important part of our little operation.

Alastair

News

follow but, for a while, and as we have always intended, we will simply use St Cecilia's House for more frequent, smaller events. So far, this is working well.

Turn-out was the best yet and the show seemed to go down well on the various forums. Thanks go to the sizeable team of suppliers who put in so much effort.

We held our last Audio Show East at the beginning of November '18 in Trinity Park Ipswich. Others will



We had some prize winners in the raffle, five in total, and three are pictured here. Adam Cronin won the Quadraspire QPlus interfaces, Terry Turner got the True Signal interconnect, Malcolm Lomer PMC's prize, the freshly remastered Beatles White Album signed by the mastering engineer and complete with his mastering notes.

Roy Mellor won the record voucher donated by Theme One and Paul Lloyd the Emotiva USB lead from Karma AV. Andy was kind enough to make the presentations. Turns out he wears different jumpers every day. Who knew?

Under 'other' news, we have altered our portfolio of brands quite significantly. As well as the innumerable turntables, we have loudspeakers and electronics from ATC. We've taken on Quad who offer electronics, speakers and headphones.

We have new DACs and amplifiers from Chord Electronics, new speakers from Kudos and Dynaudio including the skyscraper Confidence 60s, some even larger fact Fenestria towers from PMC and new networked products from Primare and even Pro-Ject.

Naim's new streamers are here too, the full set. In fact pretty much everything in the Naim range is here.

Anything we've failed to squeeze into these pages, including headphones and headphone amps, should be on our web site. Please register on there to receive news via email. You have to be in charge of this these days.

Forthcoming events are on the site too.



K U D O S

The long awaited Kudos **Titan 505** finally arrived in late 2018. These were demonstrated to great effect in active configuration with Linn electronics at our ASE 2018 event and, with the 505 (and stands) now on demonstration, we can say that we are very pleased with them.

The entire Titan range is in stock for demonstration and we have now equipped ourselves with Naim SNAXOs, power supplies and multiple power amplifiers. It's worth the effort though. Active results from Kudos are proving to be genuinely stellar.

With Linn, it's a comparatively simple matter of using their digital crossover: Memorably, the 505s arrived at the same time as the Chord Étude power amp. All needed running in and, using the Dave DAC straight into Étude with the Titan 505s made for a startlingly good, simple and fairly compact (passive) system. With a stand-alone active crossover now available from Exposure, even the Chords can be active.

The more modest Kudos X3 and X2 floor-standers have been finding new friends. Despite the existence of the new super high value loudspeakers that have joined our ranks, spending that bit more on a hand crafted UK built product, still holds appeal and makes sense too.



Our supersized arrival of 2018 for has been the PMC **fact fenestria** loudspeakers. We have been looking for the 'next level' speakers to partner the Naim Statement pre-power combo in our void-like central room. With the **fenestrias**, we are very happy that we've found something genuinely worthy.

There is a lot of novel technology at play here but the upshot is that they simply get out of the way and let you hear through to the music. These communicate the whole event with vigour and spacial cues intact. Voices and instruments hang in space and the 3D environment extends to behind you. In time, the ideas within them will, we are told, cascade down the range.

Clearly, a large room is a prerequisite but, by virtue of their modular construction, moving these around for home demonstrations is actually viable. So too is accommodating the shipping cartons. This is an utter revelation when you're used to large loudspeakers from other manufacturers.

Beyond these whoppers, we also have the newly revised smaller **facts** and far more compact and affordable (but still high achieving) **twenty5** series on demonstration.

PMC's lovely **Cor** amplifier continues to impress and is proving very compatible with a wide range of loudspeaker brands.





Late 2017, we started stocking Dynaudio products. Mid 2019 and we almost have the set. This has turned out to be one of our better decisions.

The model of the moment when we started was the Special 40 stand-mount and we were in a state of rapture. These, plus the low cost but European made Emit 10 and 20 stand-mounts, have proved incredibly popular.

At ASE 2018, we had the honour of the UK preview of the new Confidence series. The ones we had, Confidence 50, are the second largest in the range. For a variety of reasons, it was all a little sub-optimal. For a start, the room was a little less well damped than would have been ideal, the speakers were 'pre-production' samples, not quite the final item. For all that, it was far from disastrous.

It certainly encapsulated all that is wrong with trying to

present products in a tight time-frame. Everything was to the wire. Too pressured.

A few months later, we had the new, affordable Evoke series. These are really hitting the spot, offering high end performance from compact, room friendly packages.

With two stand-mounts, two floor-standers and a centre speaker these are likely to be the mainstays of the Dynaudio range. The newly designed tweeters are tangibly better than the ones in the Special 40s but, still, these limited edition speakers hold a special appeal. Incidentally, we are now down to just grey being available and the end of the limited run is very much in sight.

Further up the range, we've had some success with the Contour range, particularly the 20 stand-mount.

Finally, the fully fledged Confidence series is with us.

For our big room, we have the rather striking Confidence 60s (pictured right) and the Confidence 20 stand-mount. Both are extremely fine examples of the loudspeaker makers art.

By the way, unless you have a gallery overlooking the listening room, the view on the right is not one you are likely to see. These are very tall indeed.



Wiltshire based ATC was formed in 1974 by Billy Woodman to manufacture custom drive units for the professional sound industry. They quickly made their mark with speaker drivers capable of handling more power and producing less distortion at a higher sound pressure level than any other unit on the market.

For years, their slightly cruel approach to letting you hear the flaws in any given recording was almost at a level of parody. "My system's so revealing I can hardly play anything on it".

Things have moved on. Source components these days are generally more capable of accepting analysis and, anyway, ATC now have rather better tweeters! Ones that they now make themselves, we should point out.

The current range is very hard to ignore, with an affordable 'Entry' Series representing remarkable value for money.

The SCM40 passive speaker is a bargain at £3750 and the active one does an awful lot for £6800. Their active speakers have proved to be very compatible with Naim and Linn electronics as well as ATC's own.



The SDA 2-2 pre-amp / CD / DAC is a gem and drives the active speakers (or a power amplifier) brilliantly.

Infected as we are by the prices of other high end kit, even huge devices like the SCM 100 or 150 A actually look surprisingly inexpensive.

Their heavy build and thug-like looks hint at their more brutal forebears but actually these are refined and very musical transducers. ATC speakers, both active and passive, are capable of producing deep, clean, extended bass in even quite small rooms. We've known the large SCM100As to work well in some impossibly small rooms.



As many will be aware, Focal are Naim Audio's sister brand under the ownership of Vervent Audio Group. For the last few years, existing products, such as the high end Utopia have been updated to a character that dovetails more completely with the Naim electronics.

The rest of the current range has been voiced with Naim in mind from the outset.

We have a particular fondness for the Sopra series and also have some of the Aria range on demonstration too. All have matching centre channel speakers, by the way.

At the Audio Show East event that I keep drizzling on about, Naim demonstrated the differences between ND5 XS 2 and NDX 2 streamers through a Supernait 2 amplifier. They used the new Kanta N°3, largest of the range, in what was a very large room. The results were excellent. These come in a range of colours and finishes, generating quite a few permutations.

Late 2019 has seen arrival of the new Chora range. It replaces Chorus and crunches hard on the toes of Aria. It's also stunning. These were an instant addition to stock!

Super clean styling is by Naim's casework designer, Simon Matthews and the Chora 816 floor-stander is something special. At time of writing, we've yet to try the slightly larger 826 pictured here.



KiiThree is an unusually proportioned, 40cm deep, 40 cm high and 20 cm wide stand (or shelf) mount system. Fully digital, fully active, it can handle both digital and analogue inputs and powers each of the six drivers with a separate 250 Watt class D power amplifier.

With all the cross-overs and phase alignment, there is quite a lot of DSP going on. They certainly utilise the multiple drivers in an unusual way. With mid-range and treble facing forwards, the additional four bass drivers face sideways and rearwards. The idea is to propagate a sound wave towards the listener whilst minimising room effects. It works too.

Stick your head in the corner behind any conventional loudspeaker and you will almost certainly hear an exaggerated level of bass output. Do the same thing with the Kiis and you will hear almost zero bass content.

These can be configured to drive just about any environment from just about any position. As ever, it's best to position them to give the best unaided result, but some level of adjustment can be applied to make the results seriously engaging.

If these references to DSP (Digital Sound Processing) make you feel that purism is lost, bear in mind that any music streamer or DAC will be doing this as a matter of course. All we can offer you is a demonstration. You just might be surprised. . .





Here, we have a budget loudspeaker brand with the purist values of a high end specialist. They are co-designed between the UK and Germany and built in the far east to a very high standard.

The new 'i' series, arrived a few months ago and is a proper step forward from the previous generation. These are cracking partners for Naim Uniti, Rega, Primare, Quad, just about anything of quality. The range includes centre speaker and sub-woofers.

We have almost all of the models in stock, including the rather striking and high end Concept 300 pictured on the left with its remarkable and radical tensegrity stand. In this case, the speaker is isolated via in-built suspension from the light and rigid support. In typical Q Acoustics style, the stand is part of the deal with the £3000 speakers, not an expensive add-on. Sure enough, the looks are 'marmite' but they work undeniably well.

Across the board, performance, finish and construction quality belie the low asking prices. All the Concept range, which starts from just a few hundred pounds, have very inert multi layer cabinets with a gel core that converts vibrational energy into heat. They are unusually high tech. And very good.

Russell K.

Dunstable based Russell K have been making loudspeakers that make us smile for about five years now, although Russell Kauffman, the man behind them, has over 40 years experience in the industry.

There are two stand-mounts and two floor-standers in the range and all share the same principle of having zero internal damping.

All Russell K models reward careful set-up and can justify electronics that cost considerably more than they do.

One of our favourites, the Red 150 floor-stander was demonstrated at Audio Show East in its new SE form. They sounded stunningly good but we did not hear them against the originals for comparison.

It is available as a stand-alone model or as an upgrade for existing Red 150 owners.

On site, we have Red 50 and Red 100 stand-mounts and Red 120 and 150 floor-standers.

The slightly delayed 150 SE should be with us before the end of 2019.

Good amplifier matches are Naim, Chord Etude and PMC Cor. True

Signal cables have impressed with them too.

Falcon Loudspeakers

Founded in 1972 by Malcolm Jones, the first Chief Design Engineer at KEF, Falcon have a legacy of quality, and innovation together with a reputation for peerless attention to detail.

Falcon has been associated with the BBC LS3/5a for many years, and their Classic LS3/5a is the only authentic LS3/5a to meet BBC's original 1976 Specification.

To sum up, these are fairly expensive, unapologetically 'retro' and hold the distinction of being the smallest loudspeakers we've ever had vetoed by a wife on looks alone (size is usually everything!).

Despite this crushing judgement, there is real love out there for them. These overpriced undersized tiddlers are selling in numbers that we could never have anticipated.

Falcon manufacture the drivers in-house in short runs and the quality is clearly top notch. They manage to be easy to please yet sound disproportionately full range, dynamic, coherent and very musical.

When it comes to tech, there is evidently more than one way to skin a rabbit. These raise an interesting question about what actually constitutes progress.



QUAD

It all started for us in the hot summer of 2018. A local customer was looking for a CD player to replace a dead Arcam unit and compliment their existing older Quad amplification.

The Rega players were not to their taste, and they waited for new Arcam to come out only to find it too similar to the Rega. We borrowed the Quad Artera from another friendly dealer and it hit the spot perfectly.

Quad were nice enough to deal with and we found ourselves opening an account with them. We now have Artera Play + CD / preamp, the matching power amplifier and the new all analogue Artera Preamp.

There is also the fully integrated Solus system, essentially a Play+ with internal power amps, offering CD, DAC and amplifier functionality in one box.

Build quality is lovely and these all have the solid, heavy 'hewn' build that reassures. Sound quality is recognisably Quad but with sufficient spirit to keep music engaging.

Now, the new Vena II amplifier with phono stage and digital input has arrived. It's available as a sub-£1000 package with the excellent and dinky S1 loudspeakers. We've even got some of the other Quad loudspeakers too.



Have we mentioned that, if you're looking for speakers, we're the place to come?

The lack of in-built streaming functionality in these products has been a little contentious. A built-in DTS Play-Fi option is due but our understanding is that it will not be available to retrofit on older units.

With all the DACs having a USB input already, simply connecting them to an Innuos or Melco music server will bring both high quality locally stored music and access to online streaming services. With the next Melco update, this will include internet radio.



MELCO

This has become something of a watershed brand for us. At first sight, these are simply high quality network drives that have their roots in predominately Linn users in their native Japan wanting better sounding music storage than an off the shelf NAS drive.

When we first came across them, we were already using something that was demonstrably better than a NAS and were surprised that (a) the cleaning functions of the internal data switch in the Melco was improving the sonic character of all data pulled through it and (b) that the more expensive N1ZH and N1Zs drives sounded so much better.

Having become believers, we have sold quite a few of these and have acquired a fair amount of knowledge along the way. Recent enrolment into their Master Dealer programme was therefore pretty much automatic.

An interesting feature of this type of device is that, if you connect it via USB to a suitable DAC, it can also become a network player in its own right.

Control can be via their own 'App' or ones from a

variety other vendors. Full functionality, including access to online services such as Qobuz can be expected.

Audio quality is potentially very high indeed, only significantly influenced by the choice of DAC and cabling.

Given that something of this calibre is of relevance to any stand-alone streamer, it actually makes for a surprisingly cost effective high end streaming solution.

Ripping CDs into the Melco can be accomplished by plugging any USB 3 laptop style CD drive into one of the USB ports. One of 2018's more surprising discoveries was that Melco's new posh, heavy and clearly overpriced D100 CD drive actually delivers 'rips' that are discernibly better than those from a 'cooking' drive. Indeed, the experimentation showed that doing this with an inexpensive drive via the office Mac via DB Poweramp software produced the least appealing sound of all.

The 'it's all dots and ones' conversation still has some way to go!



Naim Audio have had a busy year. Finally bringing the innovative new Uniti series to market towards the end of 2017, all efforts were then put into the launch of the 'new platform' streamers.

First of all, we had the ultra high end ND555, then the NDX-2 pictured above and finally, the 'entry level' ND5XS-2.

The level of uptake on the ND555 has exceeded expectation by a significant margin. So much so that issues with getting a sufficiently high yield on the anodised cases has led to a significant delay in supply.

The level of performance uplift of the near as dammit £20k with power supply ND555 over the £5k NDX-2 seems to be in line with the price differential. This is a statement that I cannot imagine making 25 years ago.

Certainly, the bulk of ND555 buyers have been existing NDS owners with a couple who have had the CD 555 players..

On our Naim Statement system the ND555 is giving results of a commensurate level.

IE it's really rather marvellous!

Further down the ladder, the Uniti series has become a dominant force in quality two channel audio. Even if you ignore the convenience, value and compact size, these are fine sounding systems.

Flexible whole house
multi-room
audio

comes
without any
quality trade-offs.

2019 has seen the arrival of Nait XS 3 and Supernait 3. These are both integrated amplifiers and are the first Naim amplifiers in almost 20 years to have (moving magnet) phono stages within them. Beyond the added feature, they are a significant improvement on XS 2 and S/N 2.

We carry the entire Naim range, right up to Statement level and even have 3 x NAP 500s for active systems on demonstration. We usually to have the Uniti series in stock for immediate supply.

On top of that, we have a substantial range of loudspeakers.

If you have not yet visited our new facility, please do, we are very proud of what we have to offer and are able to demonstrate systems in normal domestic environments.





Chord Electronics Ltd.

Chord have become synonymous with ultra clever digital, especially DAC, technology. So, why the picture of their latest analogue power amplifier?

For a start it's utterly brilliant. Far more powerful than the diminutive size would imply, Étude is built to the same 'Chordette' form factor as the Dave DAC, Blu II scaler cum CD player and 'Prime' analogue preamplifier.

As with the rest of the range, it's also available in black as well as silver. All Chord's products seem to be produced and therefore photographed first in silver. The concept here is that these collections form matched systems.

Pictured below left is the TT, or is it Hugo range of Hugo TT DAC, Hugo M Scaler and Toby power amplifier. It's great, bizarre, weird and just a bit baffling. But mixing them up certainly adds interesting mismatched shapes to otherwise straightforward systems. I suspect that some explanation is required, though: All Chord's latest non-portable DACs have the capacity to handle data via twin coaxial cables at up to 768 khz 24 bit.



The Blu II CD transport and Scaler brought the ability to scale CD resolution to 16 times the original data rate. Quite why this makes so much difference is a mystery to even Rob Watts, the designer, but it certainly works. It goes beyond detail retrieval, adding spacial cues, timbre and musicality.

With so few people wanting the CD transport in the fairly pricey Blu II, the more modestly priced M Scaler has been awaited with some excitement. It may have launched in February but finalising it took a while and it only entered production in early November. Now, at last it's reasonably freely available.

For us, the interesting and surprising discovery was how much scaling brings to even the relatively lowly Qutest DAC.

We now have all these products on demonstration so you can compare and contrast.



rega

Rega Products seem to be becoming an ever increasing part of our business. The move to St Cecilia's House, from home to retail legitimacy, has increased the amount of relatively affordable systems being sold. And people are still in love with turntables.

The Brio, Elex-R and Elicit amplifiers are all proving popular. The Fono Mini, MM, MC and Aria phono stages too. In a world where CD players are almost history, the Apollo-R and Saturn-R CD player and DAC-CD player continue to sell respectably. In fact, only their top loading arrangement seems to hold them back.

We have the Osiris amplifier and Aura Reference phono stage. The spectacularly heavily built and energetic sounding Isis CD player is available on request.

The best bit is the turntables, though, and pictured here is the stunning, skeletal Planar 8, which is available with either no cartridge or one of three bundle deals:

The Exakt Moving Magnet or one of Rega's two MC cartridges, Ania or Apheta 2.

It's as lovely sounding as it's beautiful looking.

Late 2019 sees arrival on the Planar 10 gracing the front cover, the Apheta 3 MC cartridge and the long-awaited Aethos integrated amplifier.



LINN

Linn who, along with Rega and Naim, are one of the trio to have started in 1973, have also been busy.

On the turntable front, the Majik LP12 has received an upgrade, specifically, a new arm.

Gone is the Project carbon fibre affair and in its place comes the Linn branded Majik tone-arm made for them by Jelco. This has improved performance significantly and, needless to say, we have this turntable on demonstration too.

There is the new Selekt range of modular and upgradable network streamers and all in one systems. Selekt comes as simply a streamer / preamplifier or as full system in a box.



There are two 'states of tune' for the DAC section, standard and Katalyst, and there is also the option to specify it with full A/V decoding functionality and up to five power amplifiers.

Uniquely, the modular structure means that all of this can be done at a later date. It has an open format that can be upgraded at will. Just like the LP12, in fact. Selekt

sounds great and is an operational tour de force. We have several versions on demonstration.

We also have Majik, Akurate and some Klimax models and are equipped to demonstrate Kudos loudspeakers in active mode with Linn.

The Innuos logo, featuring the word "innuos" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the letters "n" and "u" is a thin, white, curved line that arches over them, resembling a stylized "i" or a musical note.

ZEN MkIII Music Servers

Powered by innuOS

Innuos music ripper / server / players are now in their third generation. These are the most affordable best-featured devices of this type that we stock and the sub £900 Zen Mini has become a staple for Naim Uniti Atom buyers who want to keep costs in check.

Innuos are to be applauded for their software design too. These are the most straightforward, least demanding music servers that we supply.

The range extends from Zen Mini, through Zen to Zenith. At each level, there are various sizes of storage and it culminates in SSD storage in the Zenith. Actually, there is a Statement two box server above Zenith, but we've yet to try that.

All can run Roon software directly and this has been a very popular feature for those who prefer to organise their music in this way.

For us, the most popular role for the Innuos servers has been as a digital store for a Chord DAC. In this situation, with a USB connection, the DAC and server combine into a single device that amalgamates music storage and control with the functionality of a dedicated music streamer.

This sounds more complex than it actually is, so a hands-on demonstration is ideal.



P R I M A R E

Primare have been in the background with us for several years. We had a soft spot for the amplifiers, CD players and even DVD/BluRay players in the past but the control software for their first generation streamers was a little hit and miss.

This time around, things are a lot more sorted. Manufacture was in the far east a few years ago but it has now returned to Sweden. Build quality is good and support via UK distributor Karma has always been excellent.

Here we have the Prisma i15 and i35 products. These are both fully integrated amplifiers with network players. There is a CD / network player available too.

Unusually, the i15 looks like a shrunk i35 rather than just a slimmer one. It makes for a very compact unit and it caused quite a stir at our recent ASE 2018 event driving a pair of Falcon Acoustics' lovely LS 3/5A loudspeakers.

The i35 predictably does more than just go louder. It has the rather more sophisticated UFPD2 all Analogue class D amplification. Yup over my head too. It goes head to head with the Naim Uniti Nova.

It's refined, neutral, unfatiguing yet spirited and can drive proper loudspeakers to serious levels. Despite its more compromised power amplification, the i15 remains a very civilised device, well suited to an advanced starter or second system.



t h e s m a l l s t u f f

We probably don't make enough of the ranges we have but we do stock headphones from Focal, Grado and Sennheiser. The intention is to have some Stax products in stock too.

We already have headphone amplifiers from Naim, Rega, Lehmann, Trilogy and Sennheiser.

IsoAcoustics Gaia isolators work! These replace the speaker spikes and sit straight onto a hard floor or, on carpet, with their optional spike bases. Masses of happy people! Priced per pack of 4

Gaia 1 £599 Gaia 2 £299 Gaia 3 £199 Spike bases £49



If you're a weight obsessive you need this! The **Rega Atlas** tracking force gauge is a very high quality device, unlike the vast majority out there.

Rega Atlas £175



Speed obsessive too? If you have the **Neo TTPSU** (also available), you can adjust speed to perfection. Or just set it fast like Regas of old! Rega Strobe works at 100Hz for added accuracy.

Rega Strobe £63



A Vibration Measuring Machine (book) by Bill Philpot, Paul Messenger, Roy Gandy. Essential reading for anyone with an interest in music reproduction.

A Vibration Measuring Machine £39.50



h o t w i r e d

Despite an extreme enthusiasm for cables in the early days of Signals, we have for some time now shied away from making too much of them.

It's not that they are irrelevant but there are no absolutes. What's great in one context can be a toxic in another. An interesting example of this is that, despite doing it with the HiLine, Naim don't make a 4-5 pin Super Lumina cable for use with the Superline phono stage. Why? "Because it sounds rubbish there". Go figure.

Cables that have stood out for us over the past few years are:

For Naim the standard NAC-A 5 speaker cable takes some beating.

At a significant price and with higher budget electronics, Super Lumina has done it for us too and it's in a lot of high end Naim systems, that we've sold. Indeed, it's our default for the serious stuff.

Recent arrival, True Signal, has hit the spot too with Naim systems and also ones involving Mark Levinson, Chord and Linn electronics. So far, this does seem to be a surprisingly universal match.

The £300 Silver RCA interconnect is a stunner that seems suited to just about everything from Rega to Quad and Naim.

We have just about all the permutations on hand so that buyers can try them out.

For day to day USB and Ethernet cabling, we've become very fond of QED. This takes us back to our roots, since it was the cable brand that kick started the audiophile cable industry in the UK.

In fact the QED loudspeaker and interconnect cables are really impressive at sensible prices.

Audioquest and TS RJ45 cables have gone down well.

For mains, we've found the Naim Power Line to be remarkably universal.

Beyond this, there is a lot to be said for the Linn cable with Linn (and Arcam) and Rega with Rega. These are both wonderful value.

Somehow, we now also have reels of Audioquest loudspeaker cables.

Talk to us. At the very least, we could use the therapy.



Equipment support is crucial part of the audio system and the impact this has cannot be overestimated. It's telling that, when testing samples out, we've found that a single Naim Uniti Nova can reveal virtually all we need to know.

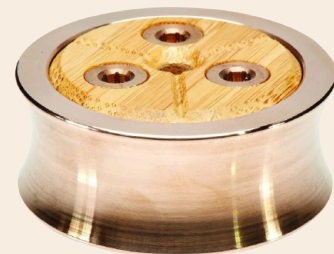
We have Naim's own Fraim and Fraim Lite, the entire Quadraspire range, Isobue and, now, Lateral, so there are plenty alternatives to play with.

Quadraspire have taken the concept into new territory by making interfaces that replicate the sound signature of their various racks. The Reference version is on the right and these are available in threes and fours.

Our remarkably diligent customers are forever experimenting and we can say that these interfaces not only 'rescue' poor sounding support furniture but continue to improve some of the better ones.

Putting these between a Naim Fraim shelf and an NDX II the other day brought unexpectedly dramatic results. Just like a serious power supply or high end cable. Work of the devil ...

Quadraspire



Naim were one of the first to grasp the concept of system synergy and the interdependence of components. No surprise, therefore, that their cables, including the PowerLine mains lead, should dovetail magnificently. It is supplied as standard with their high end products (PowerLine Lite comes with everything else).

It is a surprise, though, to find that this high end power cable has proved to be so universally useful with other brands too. Melco, Linn, Chord and many others sound noticeably better when used with PowerLines.

Some of our more adventurous customers, who talk of exotic mains leads in the manner of fine wines have been very impressed too. In this elevated world these actually seem comparatively inexpensive.

As with many other Naim designs, these cables are more about high quality materials and mechanical decoupling than anything else and the layered design of the MusicWorks blocks (top right) are an extremely good match.



MusicWorks



We've had the MusicWorks mains blocks for some time. Their top end block, the third generation 'Ultra' G3, was a revelation. We've enthused about it but, at £999, it's not something we would expect to sell in significant numbers.

And then one of our customers wrote of their experience on the Naim forum. Suddenly a £1000 mains block is perfectly normal! The range starts at £485, by the way.

Now, here's a thing. For another £300 the Ultra block can now be supplied pre-built or upgraded with a base layer made of a Peek / Acrylic composite. Peek is what the feet are made from but that never seemed particularly interesting.

Adding this new material, called Acouplex, does stupidly positive things to the sound quality. Peek has become rather intriguing! We now have them all in stock . . .


It's an audio cliché, but Lateral Audio Stands stemmed from a desire to make something better than was already available. Impressively, Lateral's owner, Kevin Hancock, has achieved his aim.

In terms of audio quality, we think these stands outclass many similarly priced and more expensive ones from established makers. The design is subtly unusual but very logical, with the shelves supported with lateral fixings through sturdy oak uprights. There is a naturalness and dynamic freedom about these stands that is instantly appealing.

Fundamentally, these are low-mass designs. As a further upgrade, isolation shelves can be added. Kevin is based in Derbyshire and he uses locally sourced solid oak, plywood and aluminium. These are hand finished in a light wax.

| LATERAL |
audio stands





Naim's second generation Mu-so and Mu-so Qb compact music systems are now with us.

Compared to the original Mu-so, significant progress has been made in both audio quality, which wasn't exactly shabby in the first place, and functionality. These now almost completely replicate the features provided by the Uniti range.

The new Mu-sos go deeper, tighter and cleaner in the bass and are far more open and dynamic. This makes them a more engaging listen.

They manage to project the sound more free of the box too. With an HDMI input, a Mu-so2 can make for a very effective high end sound-bar replacement, controllable via the TV handset, and one with more bass weight and clarity than you would expect.

Best of all, play music from either your own local network, Spotify, Tidal or internet radio and you are very likely to be hooked.

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