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1993 - 2023

signals
hi-fi for grown-ups

year book 2025/6

signals



Who we are:

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Hours of business : Monday to Friday 09:30 - 18:00

Saturday 09:30 - 17:30

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the Signals Year Book. This is our pitch to introduce ourselves to new customers and stay in touch with existing ones.
So... who are we?

We are a small specialist domestic audio equipment dealer located on the High Road in Trimley St Mary in an anonymous building that was previously a 1990's built Catholic Church.

We've been around since 1993, moving to our current location in 2017. By December 2024 we finally got our big blue roadside sign. See left.

Using the word 'small' back there, possibly underplays what we have to offer. Most visitors are surprised by the substantial amount of kit that we have on demonstration. Our listening facilities are pretty damned good too but, best of all are the guys that work here. Everyone is committed to getting the very most for our customers.

Within reason, we try to cover all realistic levels of expenditure, with brands such as BlueSound, Rega and WiiM giving us some surprisingly affordable entry level products.

Alastair (that's me) started the business and still mainly writes the sales spiel. Co director Andy has worked with me for well over twenty years. He has good ears and talents both in electrical engineering and setting up turntables such as the Linn LP12, Vertere, Nottingham Analogue and the many from Rega. Mick has been with us for around five years and specialises in networks as well as looking after the networked and computerised accounts.

Most recent arrival and youngest of the team, Kevin, has some serious knowledge in all areas of audio. Having worked for Celestion for several years, he is particularly fascinated by loudspeakers. Before joining us in 2023, he already had his own you tube channel, called Ditton Works. He has published numerous video reviews and has generated some very creative promotional videos for us. He is also becoming well versed in the vinyl dark arts, taking some of the pressure away from Andy..

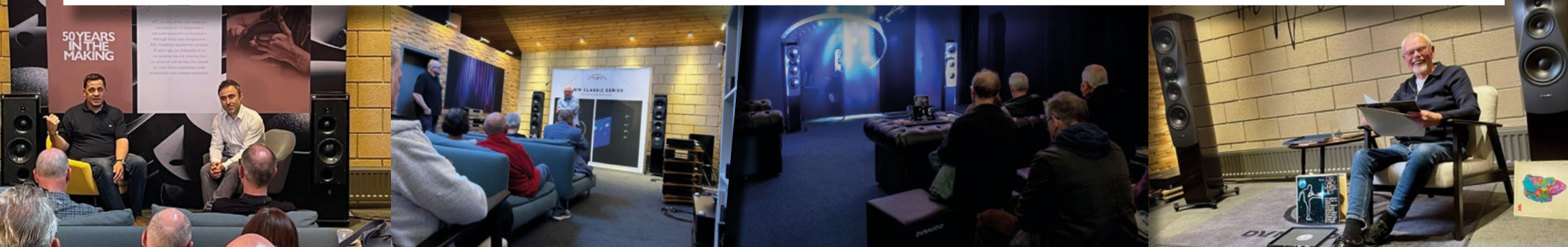
Beyond producing sporadic 'yearbooks' such as this, there are fairly regular emails sent out. To receive them you need to register via the link close to the bottom of the first page of our web site. Even after you've entered your details you still need to elect to receive emails. Feel free to join the list, cancellation is a breeze!

Our previous yearbook was produced to coincide with our as-full-size-as-we-can-muster Audioshow East event at Trinity Park in April 2023. Despite minimal advertising and marketing by yours truly, the 2023 show was extremely well attended. It received an excellent review in [Soundstage Magazine](#), there was even a video published by a guy called Leo at "[My hi end](#)". It made an impressive case for visiting Ipswich. Quite an achievement!

We had quite a lot of these still on the shelf, so I didn't feel under too much pressure to get a fresh full sized publication done. Its now late September 2025 and I started drawing this up in March. The dwindling stock of 2023 yearbooks means that I needed to pull my finger out!



Over the last couple of years we've held numerous events, open days, product launches and even the odd Jazz day. High point for us, so far was an evening in March 2025, courtesy of Dynaudio, with broadcasting legend 'Whispering' Bob Harris. Please sign up to receive news via our web site to be kept up to date.



The Team

Pictured left is the Signals team in 'Usual Suspects' pose. From left to right, it's Mick, Andy, Kevin and Alastair (me).

The intention was to look fed-up and shifty in the manner of the film poster and I feel we may have succeeded.

Whether it's the right 'look' for a trustworthy team of helpful individuals is a moot point.



The Annual Report

Given the state of the economy, our year from April 2024 to March 2025 came to a far more agreeable conclusion than expected, with business remarkably close to (our very good) 2023/4 levels both in terms of turnover and profit. Sorry to mention the 'P word' but without it, we're history. The nature of our business is continuing to evolve, though, with a higher proportion of sales at the more affordable end of the market.

Despite this, stand-out products have included high end Accuphase, Dynaudio and Naim items. Linn upgrades too. At a more accessible level, the Bluesound network players have benefited from an updated and broadened range and Rega really are 'cooking on gas'. In tough times we need great music to stir the soul and if we can help it deliver goose-bumps too, all the better!

Thanks, as ever, go to our customers. It would be lonely without you.

so... what does signals hi-fi actually do?

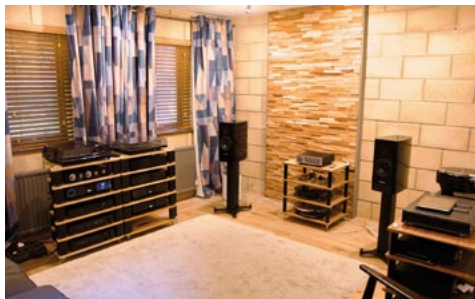
We supply and install domestic audio equipment. Prices range from the genuinely modest to the pretty damned profligate.

At all levels we strive to offer real value for money although we'd be the first to concede that finding value for money in a quarter of a million pound pre-power amplifier combo will take some doing!

With far too many years of audio experience under our collective belts, we have an understanding of what equipment combinations work most effectively together in conveying the drama and engagement that makes music replay so rewarding.

Best of all, we can work with you to find something that matches and hopefully exceeds your expectations and comes within budget.

A huge benefit in dealing with a local specialist such as ourselves is this help in making the right choice and the knowledge that we are there to support you in the future.



Our re-purposed 1990's church offers a collection of listening spaces. All are furnished. The central space has been handy for public events and as a demonstration area for people who live in barn conversions. The other more

normally dimensioned rooms replicate the sizes of many domestic sitting rooms.

Assembling a musically engaging and tidily integrated audio system can take some thought. If the required source is simply a CD player or turntable, it's very simple. Most of the integrated amplifiers that we sell have in-built phono stages and most are equipped with remote controls too.



For those who want to integrate with a multi-channel AV receiver or amplifier, quite a few have an AV pass-through option. Handled this way, the AV amp, when selected, takes control of volume for everything.

When it comes to adding access to streamed, networked music, it can make sense to opt for a system that allows all control via a single IOS or Android 'App'. Some surprisingly inexpensive kit from WiiM and Bluesound offer this. With music and input selection all on the same screen along with volume control, it can make for a satisfying user experience.

The integrated all-in-one systems from Linn and Naim offer serious audio quality along with ease of use.



We've long been advocates of the Naim Uniti products be they Atom, Star or Nova. And the recent resurgence of interest in direct CD replay has brought the unique features of the Uniti Star (above) to the fore.

The Star can play CDs directly or copy their content in either uncompressed WAV or barely compressed

FLAC onto a USB connected hard drive.

It's a server too so this music can be accessed around the house over an Ethernet network by other Naim devices. The multi-room aspects of the Uniti series extend downwards to the Mu-so 2 networked speaker and upwards to the higher end systems too. It's a high quality single box device with a huge and weighty sound. It's the box beneath the TV screen below.

As with the Uniti series, an HDMI link to the TV can bring some impressive system integration along with a massive uplift in sound quality.

Linn's devices from Majik to Klimax DSM almost all have a similar approach to HDMI connectivity.



naim's new classic

The last couple of years have seen a huge amount of change in Naim's product line-up. Progression from the older models to new has seen a fairly brutal cull in the range. For now at least, the next step up the ladder from Uniti is the New Classic 200 and then 300 series of components.

Back in days of yore, the Naim upgrade ladder progression was a slightly convoluted business. It worked best if you moved forward on the preamp ahead of the power amp and you had a whole raft of power supply possibilities. There was NA PSC, Flatcap, Hi-Cap DR, Supercap DR, XPS DR, 555PS DR to name a few. Now, all the components can function on their own terms and the only upgrade PSUs are NPX 300 for the amplification and network player plus NPX TT for their sole stand-alone phono stage.

Far too simple! Even the cabling requirements to link the audio components look disconcertingly normal. As has always been the case, all required cabling to get the system functioning comes with the various components. Only loudspeaker cables need to be added. As ever, the standard of these freebies is surprisingly high and very much part of the Naim sound.

As ever, the benefits of the power supply upgrades are easy to hear and appreciate. What's slightly new is that the 'entry level' NSC 222 network player/preamp is perfectly compatible with either the (newly designed) NAP 250 stereo power amplifier or the NAP 350 mono blocs. In truth the highly regarded NAC-N 272 streamer / pre from the old range was similarly upwardly

compatible. Not perhaps coincidentally, Technical Director Steve Sells designed both.

Where things get clever is in system integration. Having realised that the wired data link between boxes for system integration in previous versions led to a subtle blunting of performance, this time these links are done optically. The issue was related to adding noise to the ground plane. I couldn't really explain it but I could just about hear it.

The NSC 222 therefore links to the power amplifiers via an optical link. If the NPX 300 is in use, it automatically picks up on changes being made, so if you power the system down or adjust logo brightness via either handset or control 'app' these changes apply to all components.

Beyond the App, remote control of Uniti and new Classic is via a radio link using Zigbee protocol. No need for line of sight to adjust things.

With the 300 series, there is a stand-alone NAC 332 pre-amplifier, NSS 333 network player and the aforementioned NAP 350 power amps. The system integration between preamp and network player uses Zigbee, so any changes to listening level and input selection appears on the NSS 333's screen.

A decade or so ago the Statement S1 pre-amplifier was launched. Amongst several unusual features was the use of a ladder resistor volume control. This normally has the downside of having the volume change in obvious steps. A clever system that smooths these out was developed for Statement and it's also implemented in



the NSC222 and NAC332.

Overall performance is very much our cup of tea. We feel that real progress has been made over the outgoing amplification. The NSS333 network player is a proper step up from the NDX2 too.

Several customers have upgraded from 282 and 252 pre-amps

to the new 332. We've even had one migration from 500 series, admittedly for the smaller size. That they don't feel short changed says a lot. We have the whole range on demonstration. I've even opted for the full 300 system for use at home. 500 series is still better but this new series has an appeal all of its own.

“it was the inconvenience and expense that first attracted me to vinyl”

We certainly do turntables too. And quite a lot of them. Who would have thought that mid way through the 2020's this is would still be a such a hugely popular medium? New buyers are appearing all the time and existing ones keep finding upgrades to keep them engaged. We might be guilty of helping a little with that last point!

The above quote, stolen from an internet meme, is not especially true, though. There are decently capable turntables available that don't break the bank or, more importantly, destroy your expensive records.

Looming centre page is the new DG-X turntable from British manufacturer Vertere. It comes at the low end of a very high end range of products. And red is simply an option. We have the higher end sibling decks on demonstration too. There is a sonic quality to their products that allows music to flow from them in an unusually unforced yet unhindered way. We think they are rather special, which is why we've invested significantly.

Essex based Rega provide us with our entry level offering. They cover a wide range of price points, starting, with the entry level P1. Everything is made in the UK and they have become a mainstay of the UK hi-fi industry (quite possibly the largest in terms of turnover too).

We have Rega's entire range on demonstration right up to the excellent £13,000 Naia reference. All their turntables justify their place in the world but the Planar 3 strikes us as offering a particularly good value / performance balance.

New arrival Planar 3 RS, pictured below, comes above the standard P3 and adds some restrained anodised alloy 'bling' whilst offering a package deal with the excellent Nd5 cartridge and Neo TTPSU power supply upgrade.

It's proving to be a popular choice.

One thing to bear in mind, if your looking for a really low priced option is that customers often upgrade. To facilitate this, we take trade-ins and this leads to some excellent buys, all of which will be checked, serviced and warranted.

It's always worth having a conversation



with us or even just keep an eye on the 'pre-owned and ex dem' section of the web site.

What, all this verbiage and we haven't even mentioned Linn? Fear not, the brand that generates the greatest amount of upgrade business for us is very much in evidence. There are usually four or five LP 12s on site covering a significant amount of their range. Linn were a relative latecomer to our portfolio when we were already doing good business with Nottingham Analogue and Rega.

Rather than to focus exclusively on Linn, we've chosen to offer a significant amount of demonstrable choice. We also rather enjoy not being your standard Naim - Linn - Rega kind of shop! After all, there are a lot of right answers out there.

One of these right answers has been to mix brands, and Vertere tone-arms are a known good match for both Linn and Nottingham turntables. Similarly, the uni-pivot Roksan arms or yore, which, after all, come from the same original designer, are also compatible.

Nottingham Analogue is a fascinating brand that, superficially at least, puts the 'cottage' into cottage industry. Sadly, company founder, Tom Fletcher, passed away in 2011.

We made contact with them almost 25 years ago after a new customer brought a Nottingham Spacedeck in for a cartridge change. We were shocked by how much better this sounded than the far more expensive offerings that we had by a couple of brands that we probably shouldn't mention. After ringing them up, I was told that I needed to be 'interviewed' by Tom. It was a memorable and

amusing experience.

As we've grown, our attention has tended to drift towards the better known brands that people actually ask for, but something in the air seems to have changed and we now have people seeking products that are tangibly 'different'. Nottingham Analogue couple this artisan quality with actually being rather good too. Add in the improvements to finish and build over the years and the fact that, as of April 2025, we're still using their 2016 price list. They are phenomenal value for money too!

These four brands, supported properly with demonstration stock, take up a lot of shelf space!



All this talk has been about turntables as an entity but the reality is that they are actually a collection of parts, many of which are negotiable.

Just about the only fixed turntable we do is the Rega Planar 1, it comes with the Rega Carbon* cartridge. Because they've opted to make the deck plug and play, its weight is already dialled in and you simply wind the balance weight all the way forward. Changing cartridges is therefore a little less straightforward. Indeed, it's a good argument for opting for the better sounding Planar 2, which can also come with Carbon but has an arm designed to allow the user to fit a wider range of alternative cartridges.

One of Rega's most recent developments has been a the new Nd series of neodymium magnetic cartridges, and the Nd3 is a very worthwhile option on the Planar 2 that you can specify from new or change to later. We are more than happy to demonstrate the steps.

*Late 2025 arrival is the Carbon Pro Stylus upgrade. Swapping is a matter of moments.



full circle: the new wave of super moving magnets

For the last 50 years or so, two different cartridge technologies have predominated: Moving Magnet (MM) and Moving Coil (MC). There have been others too but these are the main ones.

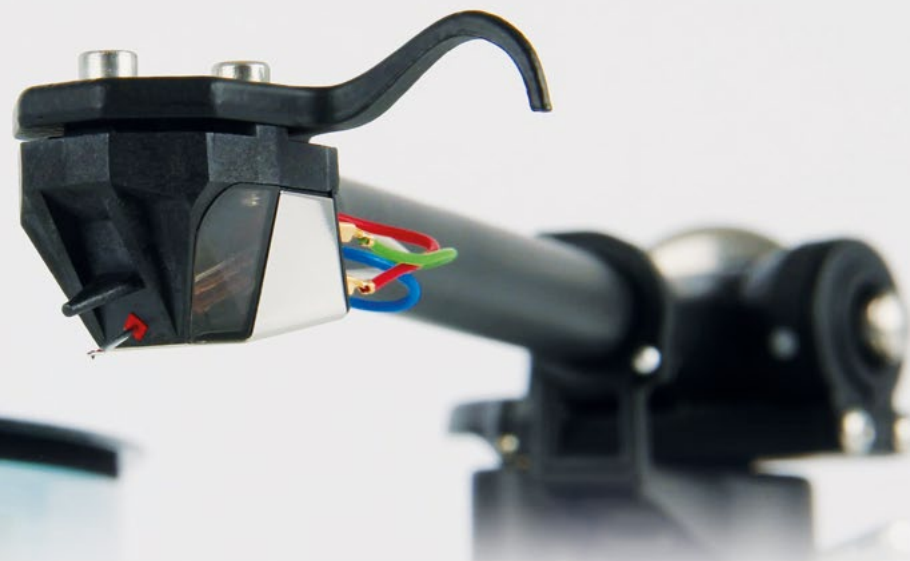
The Zenith of 1970's replay was a low mass, probably SME, arm loaded with an ultra high compliance MM, (Shure?) cartridge, played at very low tracking forces.

Gradually, MC cartridges made their appearance and they brought different requirements the most obvious of which is far lower output, roughly a factor of 10 below MM levels, necessitating a more sophisticated phono stage. With valve amplification, this often means the same stage but with fairly expensive step-up transformers. Regardless of amplification design, a good MC stage will cost more than an MM one.

Quite a lot of modern integrated amplifiers have creditable MM stages but few have decent MC ones so a really good MM cartridge, such as the Dark Sabre above and Nd7 in the headline can make a lot of sense.

MCs generally have higher mass and lower compliance, meaning that the cantilever is more resistant to movement. This transfers more energy into the tone-arm, bringing about the need for more rigid structure, often with higher mass too.

Rega have managed to straddle these requirements with arms that can work equally well with MM



and MC cartridges, possibly one of the reasons why they are often fitted as OEM to other manufacturers decks.

In concert with this, companies such as Lyra and Dynavector are making MC's that are less arm sensitive in any case.

Given a level playing field, the general sense is that low end MC's have some benefits over their MM counterparts (more openness, greater clarity) but could be more prone to poor tracking and a certain lack of sonic weight or substance. On top of this, most MM cartridges allow for an easy replacement of the stylus by simply plugging a new one in. Mind you, the stylus is often 90% of the cost of the cartridge in any case.

Rega Carbon excepted, Rega and Vertere's MM offerings have the stylus assembly fixed, so that you need to have an exchange cartridge instead of a stylus assembly.

And the 'new wave' of the title? Their latest MM products not only have the appearance of their MC siblings but blur the old sonic dividing line too.



Dynavector are one of the few manufacturers to make some high output MCs that work into conventional MM stages. Having said all of this, a high end low output MC such as the ones we have from Dynavector, Linn, Lyra and Vertere offer the ultimate performance.





... we cover the high end

Pictured left is a row of Linn LP12 turntables. The closest one is in Klimax specification with the Ekstatik MC cartridge and Bedrok plinth.

When the LP12 Klimax price is quoted as being 'from' £25000, you know it's getting serious. Cynics may well see the LP12 as the gift that keeps giving (to Linn and dealers) but its eternal 'Triggers Broom' upgradability has proved to be very successful and is definitely part of the appeal.

You can start with a fairly modest Majik LP12 and evolve it as far as you want to go. Our favourite offering is to take a Majik with the better MC cartridge, add a Hercules Power Supply, which elevates the sound quality and gives electronic speed control. It's a fine sounding combination that holds it's head high against the similarly priced competition and still has oodles of development ahead of it.

By this level, there is no absolute best or right answer. It's more a matter of how you want to hear your music and how the character dovetails with the rest of your system. The old school appearance with wooden plinth and a proper dust and finger excluding lid fits very well with current aesthetics. The fluted plinth is an option that you can add to give it the classic appearance.

The corresponding Vertere decks, DG-X at Magik level, MG-1 at around Selekt price level and Klimax-challenging (trouncing?) SG-1 have impressed and charmed us greatly. They are all upgradeable too but in different ways. The MG-1 is on the cover of this, erm, *magazine*.

Nottingham and Rega were mentioned on the previous pages. Since Tom Fletcher's death, Nottingham have made few revisions. Nevertheless, the performance of their turntables and arms are still exceedingly competitive. Once upon a time, Nottingham did offer a branded low end MM cartridge, the 'Tracer', but this was in the distant past.

It was a classic case of a turntable designer aiming to show that the turntable and arm were the most important parts. It made Tom's point but it was telling that the man himself used a fairly exotic MC cartridge. We've always liked how most Lyra and some Dynavector cartridges sound on the NA decks.

Rega have been the most productive in developing their range and their Naia turntable with matching arm can be specified with their high end Aphelion 2 MC cartridge at an enhanced package price. All these options are on our shelves for demonstration.

When it comes to upgrade-ability, Linn have to take the crown. Far more of our Linn sales are of enhancements to existing products than completely new ones.

Hard on the heels of Bedrok, the super dense super compressed plywood plinth, 2025 sees the arrival of Keel SE and (very impressive) Radikal 3. Beyond a welcome change of aesthetic to the power supply case-work, both bring yet another uplift in performance. We are well equipped to offer comparative demonstrations. Honestly, it's almost like Leicester :)

... & some serious phono stages to boot

Now armed with your expensive turntable, which will quite probably have a low output MC cartridge, you will need something to amplify these delicate signals. Strike that. Regardless of the cartridge technology, the amplification stage is a critical part of the process.

Vertere do two stages, the compact Phono 1 Mk II at around £1500 and the Calon at about £15000. The cheaper one is exceptional and an award winner to boot. The expensive one, shown below, is a stunner, although ours is black. Both are on demonstration at Signals Towers.



All the Rega amplifiers below Aethos level have good quality MM phono stages built in but thereafter you need a stand-alone phono stage. There are two 'serious' ones in the range : los and Aura. The much loved Aria ceased production in May 2025. los (MC only) is due fairly soon at the time of writing.



Accuphase's 5 year product replacement cycle keeps us on our toes. Their high end C47 stage rolled up slightly earlier than anticipated in mid 2025. The C37 was an absolute cracker and the new model should be better still. You know the drill, image below. Rest assured, if you need to hear one we can make it so.



Matching Naim's New Classic series, the snappily titled NVC TT is a Moving Magnet and Moving Coil stage that offers an upgrade over the in-built MM only stage in the NSC 222 streamer / pre. It's a stylistically matching phono stage for the NAC 332 preamplifier. Not evident from the picture below is that it marks a return to the half width casework of old.

It can draw its power from either the 222 or 332 preamplifiers but also from the visually identical NPX TT power supply elevates performance just as you would expect.

These were first launched with the ill fated Naim Solstice turntable package and the the fact that NVC did not trounce, or even quite match, the old Superline stage particularly if the latter was paired with a Supercap DR added to the downbeat 'vibe' at launch.

Viewed with a little bit of detachment, it is a very good phono stage and adding the NPX TT is very worthwhile. We have both on demonstration.



Beyond having both MM + MC inputs in their DSM preamp/network players Linn also make a stand-alone stage called Uphorik.

They also offer Urika (below) which is built in to the LP12 Trampolin base board. Urika comes in two forms: Analogue and Digital. Both require a Radikal Power supply to function and the digital version is dependant Exakt input in the system. Mind you we did once 'con' ours into outputting to a Chord Dave DAC with impressive, if expensive, results.

The latest Majik DSM is suitably equipped, as are the Selekt DSM and Klimax DSM player/pre's.



H

ow to describe Vertere? astonishingly, Google's AI synopsis does a pretty good job:

"Vertere Acoustics is a high-end British audio company founded in 2006 by Touraj Moghaddam, a respected audio industry figure and Roksan co-founder, specializing in turntables, tonearms, and audio cables. The company's history is marked by a focus on designing high-end cables to improve audio systems, followed by the development of innovative turntables and tonearms, starting with the RG-1 record player and the Reference Tonearm, driven by a philosophy of identifying and improving the weakest links in an audio chain."

The history goes back to 1985 when, fresh out of London University, Touraj co-founded Roksan. This was about 12 years after the arrival of Linn, Naim and Rega and when the Linn - Naim reality distortion field was in full flow. With his Xerxes turntable in production Touraj felt he knew a better way and it's fair to say that there is still a significant following of the products that he made back then.

His final Roksan turntable was the TMS 3 (Touraj Moghaddam Signature) and it is still held in very high regard.

The current Vertere - Latin for turn or rotate, if you didn't know - shows echos of his original design principles. But things have moved on. A recent comparison was made between their mid-range MG-1 turntable and TMS 3 with same arm and cartridge on each and the MG-1 was the more accomplished player by a sufficient margin for our customer to make the switch.

For a few years after leaving Roksan and setting up Vertere, the focus was more on cables, both mains and signal, the cartridges, tone-arms, with turntables and electronics following on.

Relationships have been forged with the recording industry and with many of the artists who are involved. Vertere turntables are routinely used by significant figures such as Miles Showell at Abbey Road studios to judge the final output.

In fact Vertere make a fair amount of the hardware that goes into cutting the records and, of course they also use his cables to connect it all up.

Describing the various areas where Touraj exerts his influence makes him sound insufferable but Touraj is a really great guy to deal with. Generous with his time and helpful to a fault.

After all these years, his enthusiasm remains infectious. We've had a couple of open days with him and Mike Burn at St Cecilia's House and he brings along recorded rarities including acetates and one pressing of the Beatles "A Day in the Life" cut in reverse so that the dynamic crescendo is handled by the outside grooves at higher speed and with less strain on cartridge alignment.

The Vertere cables follow the house sound of aiming for neutrality and clarity but offer impressive refinement and resolution. Rather than be another random badged up made-in-China offering, they are manufactured in Germany to Vertere's precise specifications. In fact Vertere are suppliers to Naim for their (slightly different) and tweaked Super Lumina cables.

As was the case with Roksan in the past, and with Nottingham Analogue, the Tonearms are all unipivot designs. There is compatibility with both the Nottingham and Linn turntables too.

The phono stages are stunning and we have both on demonstration. When we bought our SG-1 turntable with an RRP between £40k and 50k we thought we were stepping into the 'loonie league'.

And as for Linn? 'Hold my beer' :)

the unbearable lightness of being



As an engineering company, Linn are in the unusual position of being able to manufacture and finish their own casework in house. As with most serious audio manufacturers the material of choice is aluminium and, to paraphrase the Hollies song, it ain't heavy. Add in their preference for switch mode power supplies and you have physically lightweight fairly high end components in a world where mass is equated with quality.

Thankfully, Linn can also machine casework out of solid billet aluminium. For years, this has been the structure for their top end Klimax components. When it comes to the Radikal power supply for the LP12, the internals are identical for Klimax and Akurate. Hate to say it, but the one with the heavier, more rigid casework sounds better.

That line of boxes on the right is, from the left, Klimax DSM player / preamp £35k of reassuring tactile heaviness, the Selekt in the heavier machined alloy Edition Hub casework followed by the Majik DSM in a folded alloy case.

Each in their way have been surprises. For years, the Linn sonic signature has been refined and measured but not terribly exciting. The latest Klimax DSM was first to break the mould. All the new electronics that we've heard, power amps included, have been very engaging indeed and the new Majik DSM 'baby system' is an absolute joy.

Whereas Naim have a collection on Uniti all in one units followed by a single streamer / preamp (NSC 222), their next level is with a separate pre-amplifier (NAC 332) and streamer (NSS 333). With Linn, the all in one units comprise Majik followed by two versions of Selekt casework, Classic (light-weight) and Edition.

Within these structures there are various DAC options up to their high end Katalyst and state of the art Organik. The last one was entirely designed in-house. Uniquely, you can specify the existence or absence of in-built power amplification, 5.1 channel AV processing or up to three stereo channels of power amplification to allow active mode with compatible loudspeakers.

In active configuration, a power amplifier is driving each speaker driver directly and the crossover is handled at line level via their clever Exakt digital system.

All of Kudos' current, and some of their past models, such as Super 10A and Super 20A qualify, as do older Linn models and their current, and excellent 119 and 150 loudspeakers.

Changing the specification of the Selekt can be done at dealer level, so there is a degree of long-term progression available that is very reminiscent of the LP12 turntable.

The Klimax is a high end streamer with pre-amplifier, Utopik Power Supply and Organik DAC. The new Klimax power amplifiers now match the current aesthetic and are deeply impressive.





The subject of streamed or streaming audio comes up fairly often in conversations with new customers. There are a lot of misconceptions and this is not helped by the fact that streaming means different things to different people.

Most are familiar with streaming ‘apps’ that can run on phones and tablets. The assumption is that you simply need to connect your phone to the audio system to access this music feed. Bluetooth is offered on a lot of amplifiers for this very reason. It might help to understand something of the background here.

Music streaming initially spun out of the multi-room installation environment with the need to share a music library over various locations. In the early days, music needed to be compressed to fit into the expensive and limited amount of storage available (think iPod). Over time, the need for compression has diminished and, in the hands of teams at Linn, Naim and others, streaming has evolved into a technically better way to play copied CDs in uncompressed form with considerable operational benefits.

Whilst Naim developed their own ripper / servers, Uniti Serve, followed by Uniti Core, Linn left this void to be filled by third party vendors. Japanese maker, Melco*, spotted this opening and developed some high quality music servers which, for a long time, came in Linn dimensioned three quarter width alloy casework.

Within a few years of this, a company based in Portugal called Liv Zen utilised some existing software called Vortexbox to manufacture low cost but effective ripper / storage devices. The whole premise at this time was to offer music stored on a network and accessed via music player utilising Universal Plug and Play technology (UPnP).

Melco’s evolution was along this path, manufacturing what has become predominately high end music servers. Naim players from a decade or so ago were very sensitive to the way the data was served and, certainly to our ears, the Melco’s justified their extra cost very easily.

In the meantime, on-line music services have improved beyond recognition. Qobuz in particular seem to have grasped the changing world. Indeed, a huge issue is that services such as Qobuz simply aren’t bad enough! Besides this, innumerable listeners are quite uncritical and use highly compressed Spotify services, so standards can be quite low.

With a Melco music server, music downloads purchased from the Qobuz site can be set to automatically populate your music server. Interestingly, the sound quality of files downloaded this way is noticeably cleaner and more vibrant than the same data downloaded via a computer and dragged across the network to the store,

Roll forward to 2025 and with, say a Naim ND555, the Melco N1 still beats the alternatives in our view. The Naim Uniti Core, especially when equipped with the right SSD drive evolved via various software upgrades into a formidable device at an agreeable price that runs it closer than seems reasonable. Sadly, the Core has now been withdrawn by Naim due to a combination of low demand and restricted parts availability. Very few remain.

In parallel to all of this, a huge amount has been going on at LIV Zen. For a start, they have quietly grown into a far more sophisticated operation called Innuos. A couple of years ago we were trying to reconcile why we prefer the sound of Melco units when feeding (mainly Naim) network players and yet find an Innuos to sound preferable while running directly through a good quality DAC such as those from Chord Electronics. We’ve therefore been suggesting the Innuos products more for ‘DAC’ duties than UPnP network storage.

Responding to the decline in demand for music storage that has led to the demise of the Naim Core, it’s fair to say that Innuos have been thinking quite deeply. Still based in Portugal, they now have a sizeable team of software engineers and their ‘Sense’ control ‘app’ is, we think, a game changer. Rather than serve files to a network player, the Innuos devices actually are the player with music data storage being optional and pretty much incidental.

The new Stream 1 + 3 player / servers are modular designs with a choice of how much, if any, SSD storage you have, the ability level of the DAC or whether you simply want a digital output. Even for this last option there is some choice over the quality and type of digital feed.

If you do have in-built storage, you can elect to download directly from Qobuz, just like the arrangement with Melco, and the control of this via the Sense App is very intuitive. Their control App allows you to route the audio to other devices in the home in a very similar way to Roon and, as with Roon, it’s brand - agnostic meaning that you can share the same music across different product ranges. As an added bonus, Sense is free to download and is arguably sonically more transparent too. There are no ongoing costs.

Innuos may have seven software engineers (quite a lot in this niche world) but they’ve been working hell for leather on the new products and the opportunity to hear the new stream players only well into 2025. Coincidentally, Dynaudio have launched the Confidence 20 active speakers and these have the option of AES/EBU digital connections. This is an option with the Stream devices.

*As of August 2025, Melco is being renamed as DELA

MELCO have been a big part of our lives for several years, now. As the first proper high end music store brand and with oblique links to Naim audio in the first place, we've acquired a reasonably deep understanding of how using their devices can elevate audio quality in a streamer based music system.

One of the advantages of dealing with the various steps or ripping, storing and serving music in separate boxes is that we've become aware of the significance of the ripping process itself. MELCO have always kept this separate from the music store and allowed for use of fairly low cost USB drives. Their own D100 CD drive coupled with a DELA storer / server produces the finest CD copies that we've heard.

It was a surprise to be told that they were needing to adopt a new name to avoid a conflict with another, larger, Japanese company. With audio roots going back to the mid sixties in Japan, this seemed baffling. Having said this, when I was looking to download a nice clean MELCO logo from the internet I was surprised to see so many other companies using the very same name. It's only slightly better for DELA, mind you.

Anyway, same products, new name, although they do seem to be taking advantage of the re-brand to launch some new products, and they're not necessarily storage devices either. As mentioned on the opposing page, online services are becoming big business and not everyone wants to buy and store music.

The UK distributor for DELA is ADMM and another product range owned by them is called ADOT. This was the brainchild of their MD Alan Ainslie. It utilises SFP (Small Form Pluggable) connectors to introduce an optical Ethernet feed into your network. The premise is to eliminate the transfer of electrical noise. By simply making an electrical break just before the network player there is a tangible improvement in audio quality.


But there seems to be rather more to the SFP option than just this. Various other products such as the high end DELA N1 server/store, all of the DELA network switches and even the Linn Klimax DSM streamer are equipped with SFP ports. I found myself borrowing an oldish SFP equipped MELCO S100 switch from work the other day and introducing it between the elderly MELCO N1Zs solid state store that I use and the Naim NSS 333 network player. It was already inboard of an ADOT optical bridge and I felt that the S100 wired with conventional Ethernet leads brought a gentle upgrade.

Then connecting a MELCO C1 SFP cable directly between the S100 and the network brought about one of those Jaw hits floor moments. I've heard what this does with the top end kit at work but somehow on home turf it seemed a whole lot more surprising. There are various ADOT packages available with different power supply options. In certain situations it can work out as a very economical way to cover longish runs with a quality boost as an incidental payoff. Mick and Andy know far more about ADOT than I do. Feel free to give them a call or an email.



MELCO
becomes
DELA™





As with Linn and Naim, Southend based Rega turned 50 back in 2023. They produce turntables, cartridges, loudspeakers CD players and amplification. Their level of expansion in recent years has been both impressive and reassuring. Building products that people want at prices they are willing to pay has proved to be a novel and effective strategy. Who knew? :) All the turntables receive gentle ongoing revisions with new versions appearing periodically. As mentioned elsewhere, their moving magnet cartridges have had a very significant update with the new Nd series.

Also, as mentioned earlier, the sales 'star' for us has been the Planar 3 RS but from Planar 1 to Planar 10, business has been robust. The high end Naia is a significant step up from the high on identical looking Planar 10 but it also enters a world of very interesting competition, much of which we have here on demonstration.

Rega's amplification has seen a very significant series of upgrades over the last three or so years and this culminated in the new Brio MK7 amplifier. Now equipped with an in-built DAC, the new Brio is very impressive indeed. When you consider that pretty much all the alternatives take advantage of lower cost Far Eastern manufacturing, Roy Gandy's team deserve praise for being so competitive.

In many ways, with excellent, musical, British built amplification at a very low price, Rega have taken over a section of the market now ceded by Naim. The current

casework even has something of a Naim Olive series 'vibe'.

By even making CD players these days, Rega have put themselves in an unusual situation. That the ones they do make are actually rather good is something of a bonus. For now, the entry point remains the £2k ish Saturn now in MK5 guise but we still have hopes for a new, more affordable, half width Apollo to match the revised Brio. I wonder if they'll take Audiolab's lead and simply make them transports, utilising the DAC in the amplifiers. As matters stand, the Saturn operates as both CD player and DAC.

Moving up the Rega ladder, the Reference series brings the excellent Aethos integrated amplifier which has neither DAC input or in-built phono stage.

Despite my waffling on about the new age of high end Moving Magnet cartridges, the lovely Aria MK3 MC + MM phono stage is no more. The IOS will replace it and it, as with the higher end Aura is Moving Coil only. Do they not listen to their own mood music?

The long-promised new Mercury and Solis pre and power combo is almost here. For some time now, pre-production examples have been doing the rounds at shows and dealer visits. We had a quick listen to a set over a year ago and I've genuinely forgotten what we made of it. We did decide to place an order, so it must have been OK!

I think we thought it was like a bigger Aethos, which it certainly resembles. Their new aesthetic is very agreeable.

The re-entry into the loudspeaker market involves two very radical offerings, the Kyte table top or stand-mount has an ultra low mass Phenolic Resin cabinet and the Aya floor-stander comes with a higher mass glass reinforced cement (not quite the same as concrete) enclosure.

Both both taking subtly different routes to the same end, namely low coloration. Pricing on the Kyte is now quite aggressive, helping keep the sub £1000 Planar 1/ iO/ Kyte system package viable.

Any Colour You Like!

Cleckheaton, Yorkshire, 1967, James Sugden has designed and manufactured the first commercial solid state class A power amplifier. This was not a thing of beauty and it was called the Si402.

By 1968 he was manufacturing an integrated amplifier for local loudspeaker manufacturer, Richard Allen. Aesthetics were a little untidy, but it was beginning to look like the Sugden designs we've known over the years. By 1969 the the J E Sugden A21 was in production, selling 500 units in it's first year. It was joined by the C51 control unit and A51 power amplifier.

In 1981, audio enthusiast and engineer Tony Miller acquired the business and relocated to nearby Heckmondwike where it has remained ever since. Tony and his son, Patrick, ran the business for many years and when Tony died in 2021, Patrick took over control.

Sadly, Patrick passed away in September 2023. We had dealings with both father and son over the years. I guess Tony's character could be described as 'laconic'. Patrick was easier to get along with and I was very sad to hear of his passing, particularly at such a young age.

The company remains under Miller family ownership and, impressively, they still manufacture everything, even the casework, in-house. The person who builds your amplifier signs something that resembles a luggage label and this follows it through the various stages of test and finishing.

In this finishing stage, they have added the option of having the fascia in a wide range of colours. Black and Titanium are standard options with colours costing a little more.

When we last dealt with Sugden, they were experimenting with offering custom colours. Anodised aluminium can be an inexact science, so they have settled on offering tried and tested ones that are known to 'take' properly.

The core strength with these amplifiers has always been sound quality. There is a warmth and purity that comes with Class A operation. I remember a musician customer who said the A21A was only amplifier that conveyed timbre accurately enough for him to differentiate between cellos.

Weaknesses tend to be a lack of absolute power, which is generally more theoretical than actual. Over time, these have acquired a little more bass grip but they still tend toward being soft and mellifluous. The upside is that this sounds uncannily accurate and realistic rather than gut wrenchingly impressive.

Class A operation is inherently wasteful with any unused energy being given off in heat. More positively, they warm up very quickly.

One of our customers who has migrated from cool running class A/B to Class A Accuphase amplification actually did the maths on energy costs. He reported at the energy used on leaving his old amplifier running all the time was greater than his consumption using the Class A amp from a half hour warm-up.

All current Sugdens have remote control of volume, nothing more. We think that the current A21A sounds better than the units we had a decade or more ago. They certainly feel better built. We have this, the A21SE pictured right and the fairly chunky IA4. Give your ears a treat and book a demonstration!



Accuphase

The soft golden glow around St Cecilia's House continues to spread. Our Accuphase collection is evolving.

We have on demonstration three of the four available CD players, C-2300 and C-3900 preamplifiers, A-48S and A-80 class A power amps, E-700 class A integrated amp and E-3000 + E-4000 class A/B integrated amps.

Our preference is definitely for the class A offerings over the class A/B ones although the serious power output from some of the A/B designs have been very useful. The fairly modest quoted power on the Class A amplification is very misleading. These seem to have very big watts!

An assumption that we've run into is that there is something inherently positive about amplifiers being integrated, bringing shorter signal paths etc.

It's a tribute to how pure, musical and composed these amps sound that this should be considered but, really, there is no material gain, just the cost saving of a single chassis, the space saving and reduced cabling requirements.

Thinking about it, perhaps they have a point after all!

The entry level pre-amp (C-2300) paired with the lowest priced class A power amplifier (A-48S) fronted by any of their CD players makes for an incredibly accomplished system.

Only the DP-450 is a straightforward CD player. The DP-570 and 770 are combined CD and SACD players and the DP-770 is very special indeed.

DP-570 is due for replacement at the end of 2025 and this brings us nicely to the agony and ecstasy of being an Accuphase dealership. Firstly, there is their (roughly) 5 year replacement cycle. This feels very alien in the world of high end audio where change tends to be more gradual.

Secondly, the words 'freely' and 'available' don't get a lot of use

The integrated amps and lower end pre's can accept option boards. These comprise the excellent AD-60 MM/MC phono stage which allows you to switch settings via the front panel of the amplifier and DAC-60 which provides a digital input.

The C-2900 pre-amplifier takes a unique, rather high end, plug-in phono stage module and at C-3900 level you need to use a stand-alone one such as the excellent C-57. Not cheap but very good.

For stands, we've tended to pair them up with the excellent Lateral Concert stands that you can almost see above. These really suit the electronics and have been judged to be a visual success by customers.

Finding loudspeakers that suit has not been difficult. We've had breathtaking results with Dynaudio Confidence series, the Heritage Special and Contour Legacy. The new contour 20 Black Editions are terrific with them too.

In truth, the same can be said for ATC, Kudos, Russell K, Harbeth and Falcon.

Similarly, the cable compatibility is wide ranging. We like the results with Audiomica but many use Naim NAC-A 5 and Super-lumina, Tellurium Q of various levels and Vertere,

They are all responsive to MusicWorks mains distribution utilising either their own cabling or Naim Powerlines.

DYNAUDIO



We've been stocking Dynaudio loudspeakers since soon after we moved Signals into our new home in Saint Cecilia's House in 2017. Initially, we had the (then quite new) Special 40 stand-mounts. When we first heard them, we had the impression that they cost twice as much as they do and still we were impressed. Their synergy with Naim electronics was a major draw and their improbable level of bass 'heft' allied with surprising dynamics, clarity and overall musicality really had us hooked. They might be compact, but they can create a large and convincing musical performance.

A customer request to hear the Contour 20 stand-mount led to us meeting an affordable, fairly compact (but not exactly small) stand-mount speaker that also punched above its weight and price point. Very much next level to the Special 40 but also a rather different character.

Following this, we were introduced to the Emit series of the day. This was a re-hash of some older drivers in vinyl wrapped enclosures. They were pretty good, very competitive against the opposition, but

they earned no coconut either! The current Emit's are far, far better.

Soon after this, the Evoke series arrived and we realised that this series of four loudspeakers would be able to cover all bases for about 70 percent of our customers. The closest from the Evoke series to Special 40 is the Evoke 20 and they trade points. Overall, the Evoke wins on refinement and the S40 offers more fun and 'punch' with a little more mid-range resolution.

For this reason both are retained for demonstration.

We also have the new Focus range which is visually almost identical to the Evoke series. These are actively driven with in-built amplification and streaming cards. They have analogue and digital inputs too. Compatible with the current 'connect' music service apps from Spotify, Tidal and Qobuz, they are frightfully modern :).

Basically, they are "lifestyle" products but with design and performance integrity.

The Contour series was revised, gaining an

'i' suffix and all have found happy buyers over the years, with the stand-mount 20i being the most popular, followed by 30i. Contour 60i is enormous!

There is an issue, though. And this comes in the shape of the Confidence series.

Confidence starts with the 20. It's a stand-mount but one for which the stand is an integral part of the design. The downward facing bass port sits above a diffuser that forms the top of the stand pillar. Visually, a stand-mount, functionally, it's floor-standing. The performance is very much that of an accomplished floor-stander too.

Amid all the radical tech, the Confidence range utilise the Esotar 3 tweeter and this brings some advantages of its own to what are some extremely well judged products. Across the entire Confidence series, the cabinet shaping, low mass composite baffle, bass port management cross-over and driver specification conspire to make a range that is better than it needed to be.

I was astonished to find out that the higher end Evidence series remains in production on a by - request basis. Dynaudio themselves acknowledge that the Confidence massively outclasses its older more expensive sibling. We tried some Evidence examples when we were seeking out a reference large passive loudspeaker for our hall-like main listening area.

The killer feature on Confidence is shared with most of the other current range too and this is that they are unusually easy to drive. We've powered our large Confidence 60's with all manner of fairly modest electronics to surprising effect.

Recent developments have revolved around Confidence too. The Contour 20 Black edition involves quite a lot of Confidence 20 tech, including Esotar 3, shoe-horned into a slightly altered Contour 20i cabinet. It's very good indeed. At a little over half the price of the Confidence 20, it's arguably better value but there remains a gulf between them.

The new Confidence 20A (for active) is a very interesting proposition worthy of a whole fresh article. We've had them on site for a listen and intend to get to know them better.

We have a significant cross-section of the Dynaudio range in stock, Ready when you are!



Our history with ATC goes back over thirty years. Based in Gloucestershire, ATC was formed in 1974 by Billy Woodman. He had learned his craft working at Goodmans Loudspeakers and his principles, philosophies, and absolute commitment to achieving engineering excellence are the foundation on which ATC is built. At the heart of this was outstanding transducer design and engineering that focused on achieving the best sound reproduction possible.

Recent years have seen noticeable developments in performance and, arguably, value. Some of their products may look physically quite brutal but the ATC house sound is high on subtlety and transparency.

They build all the loudspeaker drivers in-house as well as most of the electronics. There is a satellite facility in Bristol for some of this work. Their site in Aston Down has expanded hugely in the high on thirty ears we've known them and there is a ten year plan for further substantial developments.

A year or so ago they acquired an Evesham based cabinet maker who was already making cabinets for their higher end models and they've just relocated them to nearby Stroud. Having seen the issues experienced by other UK manufacturers who have sub-contracted cabinetry, this has been a very wise move.

All their models are available in either passive or active configuration. The latter is when the splitting of the audio band is done before power amplifiers and each driver is connected directly to the power amplifiers. Predominately, they do this within the loudspeaker cabinet and each loudspeaker has a mains connection and an interconnect cable running to the pre-amplifier.

Despite the high quality of the amplification that they fit, this usually costs less than equipping their passive speakers with a power amplifier of equivalent quality. As an example, we've had customer opt for sub £8000 SCM 40 Actives instead of powering the passive versions with Naim NAP300 or NAP 500 power amps.

The nomenclature on ATC speakers relates to cubic capacity in litres. On top of this, there are essentially four distinct ranges:

The Entry series comprises SCM 7, 11, 19 and 40. They come in a restricted range of finishes in cabinets that are built overseas. When you consider the engineering content, they are remarkable value for money. Only the SCM 40 is available in active form.

Next comes the Classic series of SCM 20, 50, 100 and 150. All of these are available in tower format too at which point they are joined by the 200 and 300 behemoths. As before, active and passive are options. Pro series is Classic but painted.

Then we get to the SE series which are available in active form only with rather more fancy detailing on the cabinets. This has led customers to suppose that you are paying a lot of money for 'bling'. I guess, arguably, you are, but you also get far higher quality electronics and very different cabinet construction. The gently curved sides are layered and damped too. The upshot is that there is a quantum leap in sound quality above an already exceptional loudspeaker.

A local customer was impressed with the active 50 SE floor-standers (pictured left) when he heard them at an ATC event that we held. Not for the first time, he was shaken at how much more expensive they were compared to the straightforward active version of his existing passive SCM 50 towers.

A home demonstration won him over and, once he had acclimatised to the purity and comparative lack of coloration. He has reported being on cloud nine.

We've have sold SCM100 SEs in the past. We were blown away with them then too.

For some time I've felt that ATC don't really explain the benefits of the SE models clearly enough.

Now that I've written this, I wonder how many Classic series buyers I'm putting off. Please make no mistake, these are all stellar products. It's just that some are more stellar than others.

We've been enthusiastic advocates of Kudos loudspeakers ever since their inception.

The range was fairly recently condensed to just the Titan series, 505 (stand-mount) 606, 707 and 808 floor-standers.

All have the capacity to be used either as passive loudspeakers (a standard pair of speaker wires to the amplifier, crossover components inside the speaker cabinet) or actively, where the frequency split between the drivers is done at line level and power amplifiers connect to the respective drivers directly.

Active operation became the holy grail with Naim and Linn users from the 1980s onwards and each of the brands employed different strategies to do this.

With Naim, there was a SNAXO crossover which required either a HiCap or Supercap power supply, and you connected this to the two or three stereo power amplifiers.

I presume you spotted the past tense back there. With the advent of the New Classic series, the SNAXO and all the power supply options passed into history.

Linn's approach is very different. In recent years, Linn systems have become wholly digital at heart and this, coupled with their Exakt DSP software has been used to apply the crossover requirements

in the digital domain.

With one of the negative aspects of active being the high box count of electronics involved, it's impressive that the Linn Selekt can offer really high performance and musicality from a single compact component.

For higher end Klimax level systems, more power amplifier boxes are drawn into action but the fundamental principles remain the same.

Kudos had always been keen to find a way to work with other makes of electronics and, after a long gestation period, their Sigao Drive crossover became available in 2024.

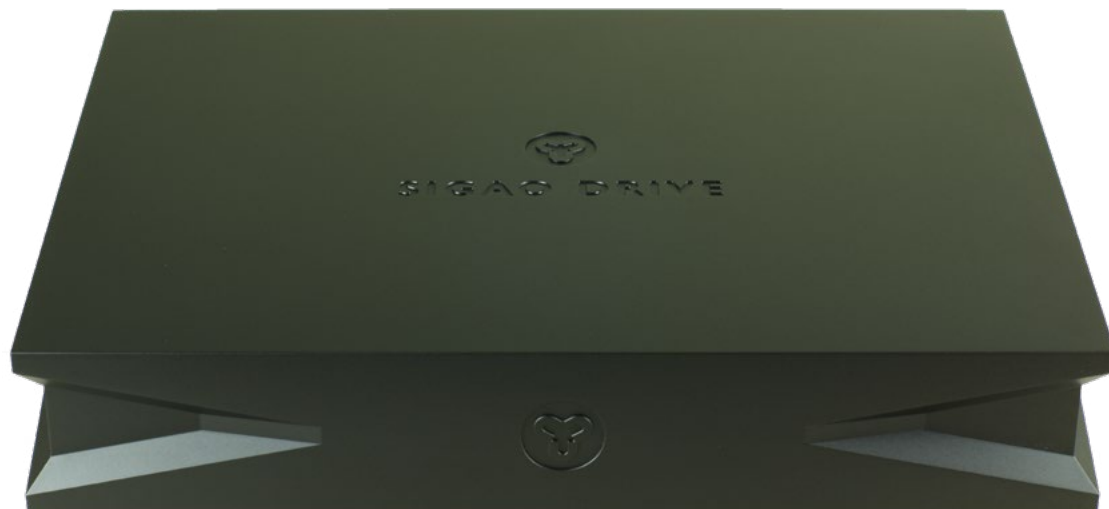
Designed by Roy George of Naim Audio fame, this is an unusual example of something that seems blindingly obvious, yet is difficult to make work, actually coming to fruition.

Sigao is a passive device that sits between pre and power amplifiers. To overcome the issue of compatibility, you can set the loading to suit the amplification that you have by way of plug in adapters.

Already, we've been able to use this with a customers Accuphase system to impressive effect and it can be made compatible with Naim (new or old), older pre Exakt Linn systems and just about any other system you care to mention.



K U D O S





Diminutive digital audio brand Bluesound have been building a steady following over the past few years. The Node streamer has carved a significant niche for itself as an audio bargain that can add networked audio to existing hifi systems.

The Node and Node Nano are sources for existing systems. Power-Node and Povernode Edge are entire audio systems in improbably small boxes. Using HDMI ARC, both Power-Nodes and Node can integrate TV sound in a pain free way. To cover additional zones, there are matching 'wireless' loudspeakers too.

The incredibly small and inexpensive Node Nano (below) is an outright bargain.

Audio quality is better than it seems reasonable to expect but these



do not suddenly render high end systems obsolete. It's only really features that separate it from the larger Node.

Running them through the internal DAC in, say, a Rega amplifier makes perfect sense although we do know of one being used with a £10k Chord Dave DAC.

The recent arrival on the scene of WiiM seems to have stimulated Bluesound's R+D dept. The latest version of Node leapt in performance keeping it

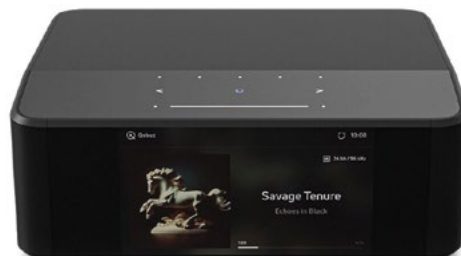
ahead of the game and two way Bluetooth communication is due via a forthcoming software update.

The control interface is excellent and there is access to most music streaming services. Zones can be joined up or separated through the intuitive and fully-featured control 'app'.

Latest arrival is the Node Icon and it's pictured here. Beyond having a colour display and the most features, it's their best sounding streamer.

The full range is in stock and on Demonstration.

Beyond these music players, there are a couple of other novel devices.



Vault 2i is a CD ripper / storer / server at a very competitive price. The Hub is perhaps even more interesting in that it makes other analogue devices in the home, such as a turntable or CD player available to any other devices in the home that use the Blue OS.

Arch competitor WiiM was mentioned earlier and we have a few of their products too. In our judgement, the WiiM kit wins on overall cleverness but the BlueSound on sound quality.



As manufacturers of some of the finest DACs available, Chord have a place in a lot of audio systems.

The Dave DAC mentioned on the Bluesound section is more normally partnered with fairly high end streamers or streaming transports as AURALIC like to call them. Quite a few have been used directly with Melco music store / servers.

Besides Dave, we have the Hugo M-Scaler, Hugo TT2 and Qutest.

Over the last few years, Chord have been developing their new Ultima series of amplifiers. The first to use the new tech was the Étude that offers 150 watts per channel and comes in a remarkably small package. This remains one of our favourites but, ironically, it's small size can count against it on the acceptability front.

Throughout the range there is an uncanny ability to play loud but to never actually shout. They never seem to sound under pressure and, my goodness we've applied some!

Tonally, all are neutral and refined, bass controlled and extended. Resolution is never questioned. You can hear straight through them.

The most recent arrivals are the Ultima 3 Pre-amplifier and the Ultima Integrated. They look identical to one another and that's one of them pictured above.

Finding the support bars that Chord supply on their full size boxes rather bulky, we were pleased to see that they're optional and ordered our demonstration units without them.

Chord are big players in the portable listening world and their Mojo 2 and Hugo 2 DACs. Add 2 go to the Hugo and you have a pocket sized music streamer.

Add Poly to Mojo2 and you have a smaller version of the same. Do I understand all this? You've got to be joking!

Andy and Mick, on the other hand, have a very realistic grasp of things and can explain.

signals and cables... it's complicated!

A very long time ago, I remember being impressed by a well known American brand of loudspeaker and interconnect cables. It was a simple, clear-cut range of basic, better, best and they gave excellent results with the equipment I was selling. I came to believe in the idea that first you get the cable infrastructure right. Thereafter it all falls into place.

Over time, the range expanded hugely, some prices became downright scary and as the equipment we were selling changed, the penny dropped that we had been selecting hardware that suited the cables, not vice versa.

All cable manufacturers believe in some level of absolutism, they are making the very best that they can. Hi-Fi reviewers often fall in line with this, making pronouncements based on what they've heard with their known equipment.

As with most vaguely serious dealers, we have masses of cables on site and try to find the best matches for the various makes of electronics. It's not uncommon for the right cheaper cable to sound better than the wrong expensive one.

When assembling a system, a good place to start is with the cables recommended by the electronics manufacturer. Those that do this, Linn, Naim, Rega for example, will have voiced their kit with these cables in place.

People often ask for the best cables for specific loudspeakers but, in our experience, the sacred relationship is with the electronics. Certainly, known 'bright' sounding speakers could benefit from a softer sounding cable but the fundamental relationship is set before you reach the speakers.

There is another relationship too, that of interconnect and speaker cable. Oh, and balanced XLR connections sometimes sound better than single ended RCA ones. But not always.

I remember mixing Nordost and Van Den Hul cables in a system years ago. The results were horribly harsh yet, when it was all Nordost or all VDH, composure returned. And the rogue cable in this instance was a digital interconnect.

The brands that have a regular place in our armoury are:

AudioQuest: For some reason, we've tended to focus more on their digital Ethernet, USB and Optical cables but we have some of their loudspeaker cables on the reel. We can usually borrow some of their more exotic offerings if a customer wants to audition it.

Audiomica: has been primarily suited to Accuphase in our hands. There is quite a wide range and it's best to maintain the same range of cable throughout.

There have been some breathtaking results mixing their high end digital cables with the Chord Dave and M Scaler. Deep pockets required if you head in that direction!

Linn Products make an excellent low priced loudspeaker cable in the form of K20. This has fitted the bill for people looking to upgrade things without going mad.

Having said this, it's best suited to their own kit. The next up in their range, K200, is well priced and capable of eye (ear?) opening results with Linn electronics, Accuphase, PMC and others. The matching Linn silver interconnects are good value too.

Naim's NAC-A 5 speaker cable is the closest thing to currency on the used

market. Since all the required interconnects come with the Naim source components and power amplifiers, using a loudspeaker cable that sings from the same hymn sheet makes sense.

Naim Powerline mains cables have become default choices with the MusicWorks Mains blocks.

Kudos Audio have managed to wheedle themselves into this world and their KS-1 speaker cable is a popular choice with Naim electronics, particularly if darker, more fulsome loudspeakers are in use.

KS-1 is excellent with Chord Electronics too and, in these situations, Tellurium interconnects have balanced well. Strangely, Accuphase seems less happy with KS-1 in use.

Tellurium Q cables have given some stunning results. We carry a respectable cross section of the range in both loudspeaker cables and interconnects. Quite a few Accuphase users have liked them. Ultra Black II and Black Diamond interconnects have been popular.

Vertere can take you close to financial oblivion if you get carried away but their more down to earth products offer excellent value for money.

The range of interconnects, loudspeaker cables, mains leads, even Mains blocks is stupendous but we seem to have acquired a fair amount of them.

When setting up for a demonstration, Kevin used a heady collection of the Verum interconnects, HB (for Hand Built) mains leads and Redline speaker cables. The total cable cost was well ahead of the A21 amplifier that sat at the system's heart but it sounded utterly remarkable. Redline though-out still sounded great, though.





QUAD's re-imagining of the 1960's 33 / 303 pre / power combination launched in late 2024. It's extremely competitive with the alternatives, such as the Rega ElicitMk5 with the added bonus that the stereo power amps can be switched to mono bloc mode (one per channel), giving noticeably improved grip and dynamics.

Initial demand for these took owners IAG by surprise and extra supplies needed to be shipped in by air at the end of 2024. The lack of a matching source component, be it radio, streamer or CD has frustrated some customers, particularly those who recall the FM3 tuner of the period.

The 33 preamp has an excellent in-built MM + MC phono stage, so re-living the audio system of your childhood can still be achieved.

Sister brand Audiolab also make a pre/power combination at the same price level. Any cynics out there who assume that they simply stuff the different boxes with the same or similar electronics will be crushed to find out that this is not the case.

Different design teams are involved and this is instantly evident when you compare them.



QUAD's new integrated amplifier was a 2025 arrival. It's called QUAD 3 and is a fully featured three quarter width design which clearly takes its aesthetic inspiration from the old valve 22 series.

QUAD 3 comes fully equipped to full 2025 standards with both digital and analogue inputs a very respectable MM phono stage, 65 watts per channel of power,

Up-sampling can be applied to the audio from both SPDIF and USB audio sources. The digital audio is up-sampled to either 352.8kHz or 384kHz. It's got an MQA Full Decoder (PC USB, Coax/Optical) Bluetooth 5.1, (aptX/aptX HD) Streaming.

Baffled yet?

Thankfully, it also sounds very good too. It has preamp outputs, so you could also employ one or two of the colour matched 303 power amplifiers to boost things up.

With the D-A electronics already in place, a matching CD transport is due, hopefully, just before 2026.

We have various devices that require a CD source but already have the digital electronics in place. Up until now, Audiolab's 9000 CDT has been the winner. Perhaps their sibling will provide serious competition!



Six years on from first stocking Lateral audio stands, we really seem to have found our 'groove' with them. They work well with all brands of electronics but are particularly well suited to Accuphase, having the capacity to accommodate their large, heavy boxes.

The concert stand includes an isolation shelf on the top level and this can be replicated on any shelf that you like and it has a significant impact on whatever device is placed on it. When we were comparing the new Linn Majik DSM to a base specification Selekt, we noticed that whichever one was on the Concert shelf was the one that sounded somehow better.

There is a, lower end, modular stand called Cadenz. It's a thoroughly excellent stand for the money. But the Concert stands, even without the isolation platforms, are bewilderingly better.

A new arrival that we have in stock too is Aria. Again, it's modular and this time the shelves have metal reinforcement let into the undersides. This adds mass as well as rigidity.

Both Aria and Cadenz are available in oak or walnut natural veneers or black stained oak. Now to get them to reinstate that 'a' onto Cadenz.



Our very own Kevin Fulcher is a pretty meticulous chap. When not demonstrating to customers, he's beavering away in the smaller 'back' dem room making system comparisons.

Anything that improves what a speaker can do is of great interest to him and IsoAcoustic Gaia Isolation feet have really hit the spot.

Whether you have a solid concrete or suspended wooden floor, they manage to clean up, in a thoroughly positive way, the presentation, of just about any speaker we have tried them with.

Our usual arrangement is to allow the customer to try them out and, because they almost never come back, the set we lend is usually new.

IsoAcoustics make a wide range of isolation devices and turntable supports. Their Aperta interfaces that go between support shelf and the loudspeaker.

Versions are available that suit centre speakers and Sub-woofers. Some can also introduce an element of tilt, if needed.

We have their ZaZen turntable support platform in stock too. With the growing trend to assemble systems on sideboards, these forms of isolation are becoming very useful.

Our headphone range has distilled to predominately Meze, Focal and the occasional Grado. QUAD made some rather fine planar headphones, but production has now ceased.

We were first introduced to Meze by a local customer who had bought some of their Empyrean open backed models. Chord Electronics, we discovered, were keen on using them to demonstrate their wares, so we took the plunge and bought some.

Meze are based in Romania and have co-developed products with Rinaro in Ukraine. At the time, the range amounted to little more than the entry level 99 series closed back and the large Empyreans and it was the 99 Classics that surprised us most.



and comes with shorter cables for portable use.

The 99 Classics have walnut wood ear cups and come with a longer cable. The tonal balance is slightly different too and our preference is for the wooden ones that coincidentally cost a little more.



Despite being closed back, they sound remarkably open.

Above the 99 Classics come the open backed 105 in AER and Silva specification. Silva uses a walnut trimmed alloy chassis, the AER one is made from rigid ABS and is lighter. Team member, Mick has just voted for Silva by buying a pair! Empyrean (lower left), now in Mk II guise, is an open design.

Lyric, pictured right, is closed and has unusual ability. Poet (bottom of page) is an open one and slightly cheaper than Lyric II.

Empyrean was once the top model but Elite has taken that place. It's another open design too.

These may be pricey but they are still a fair amount cheaper than the Focal Utopia's.

Isodynamic Hybrid Array features in Poet, Lyric II, Empyrean II and Elite models.

Warm memories of Wharfedale Isodynamics from the 1970's come flooding back!



Focal's Bathys wireless, Bluetooth, noise cancelling headphones launched a couple of years ago and were a revelation. Compromise is inevitable but minimising its impact is the real skill and Focal are to be congratulated in making such an impressive sounding product.

These use the same Naim / Focal control app as all their other streaming devices and it allows you to adjust the 'phone's behaviour such that you can integrate your listening experience with the wider world or choose to be completely isolated from it.

Either way, the sound quality is good enough to belie the fact that amplification and digital conversion is taking place inside the 'phones and that the, usually quite compromised, medium of bluetooth is being used to transfer the data.

At 30 hours, battery life is extended and these can charge via standard USB or USB C connections. Bluetooth range is impressive, they are revealing enough to show that audio from a laptop will be better than an iPhone but charitable enough to allow comfortable, fatigue-free listening to, say, Qobuz via the iPhone.

As of 2025, these are joined by the even better sounding, and more expensive, **Bathys MG**.

We also have various wired Focal 'phones right up to the latest Utopia model.



Celebrating the fantastic summer of 2025. Drone shot taken late afternoon Saturday 10th May when the Vertere event was almost over.

signals
hi-fi for grown-ups

