

STEREO • MULTICHANNEL AUDIO • MUSIC

the absolute sound

**PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR
AWARDS
2010**

Speakers from
MartinLogan, Morel,
Gallo, Coincident,
Electrocompaniet,
& Canton

Electronics from
Pass Labs, Rogue
Audio, & Esoteric

Digital from
dCS &
Channel D Software

Analog from
Townshend

Cables from
AudioQuest

YG Acoustics Carmel Speaker

Small Footprint, Giant Sound

**Audio Research 40th
Anniversary Preamp**

A New Standard

JANUARY 2011
\$6.99 US / \$6.99 CAN / £4.50 UK



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DISPLAY UNTIL JANUARY 15TH 2011

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In our ongoing series highlighting the country's best audio retailers, we visit this Delaware institution.

the absolute sound

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2010
PRODUCT
OF THE YEAR
AWARDS

Welcome to *The Absolute Sound's* 2010 Product of the Year Awards. Here we honor the very best components we've reviewed in the previous year. In many categories we've chosen more than one winner: one that represents the greatest value for the dollar, and another that represents the best we've reviewed without regard to price. We've also selected a Budget Component of the Year to recognize the single component that we believe offers the biggest bang for the buck. Finally, our Overall Product of the Year honors the one product that stands above all others as the single most impressive achievement of the past 12 months.

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2010
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Loudspeaker Cable and Interconnect of the Year

Kimber 12TC Speaker Cable **\$31/per foot plus terminations**

It's not easy surpassing a legend like the Kimber Kable 8TC—one of the most cost-effective, sonically assured, and commercially successful wires in audio history. But Kimber has come up with a suitable encore in the 12TC. Not only does it retain the 8TC's characteristic balance of detail, liveliness, tonal neutrality, and dynamic contrasts, but the 12TC also expands dynamics and breathes a bit more in all dimensions, auguring well for this legend-in-the-making. Reviewed by Paul Seydor, Issue 206

Soulution 750

\$25,000 (\$32,500 with 750PSU power supply)

If JV weren't wedded to tube phono stages, this genuine masterpiece from Soulution would be his first pick in a solid-state unit. The Soulution 750 might well be the best product this ultra-perfectionist, ultra-high-end Swiss company has yet made—and it has made some very very fine gear. Incredibly low in noise and high in bandwidth for a phono stage, the 750 is a virtually colorless, extremely transparent, exceptionally high-resolution phono preamp, with neutral timbres, complex textures, superb soundstaging, life-sized imaging, and more than a touch of tube-like bloom and dimensionality. No, it doesn't have multiple EQ curves and unless you already own a Soulution 720/721 linestage, you will have to buy the dedicated \$7500 750PSU power supply. All in all, it's a lot of money. But if you've got a lot of money and you're a vinyl junkie with a taste for the best in transistors, the 750 should be your first stop. Reviewed by JV, Issue 207

Phonostage of the Year



soulution

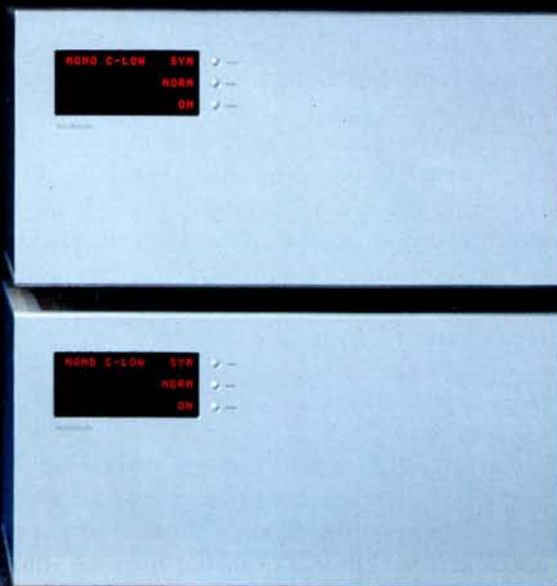
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Phono Cartridge of the Year



Sumiko Palo Santos \$3500

The Palo Santos Celebration is Sumiko's elegant, flagship moving coil (0.5mV). Well-balanced and neutral in the midrange, its signature (such as it is) subtly veers to the fuller-blooded and warmer end of the spectrum, with just a hint of upper-treble shading. To fully appreciate its presence and poise, pure unamplified acoustic music is a must. The Palo Santos only leaves a trifle of performance on the table, flagging ever so slightly in bottom-end resolving power and that last jot of orchestral air and bloom. Still, this beauty draws you into its naturalistic web and conveys complexities of timbre and space that are arresting and authentic. Reviewed by NG, Issue 206



Mystère CA21 \$2195

Reviewer Dick Olsher's first impression of the CA21, even right out of the box, was that it was no ordinary preamp. Its relaxed, totally edgeless presentation was devoid of gratuitous tube brightness or upper-midrange grain. Yet, unlike so many vintage preamps it did not gloss over detail with a broad brush. Harmonic textures were rich and luxuriant, with a textural density approaching the real thing. It was also a wonder when it came to image palpability, producing a flesh-and-bone, reach-out-and-touch-someone gestalt that is very rare even in the upper reaches of high-end audio. Time and again the CA21 facilitated some of the best sound DO ever experienced, making it an easy choice for Tubed Preamp of the Year. Reviewed by Dick Olsher, Issue 208



Tubed Preamp of the Year

HANDCRAFTING CABLES SINCE 1979



What do we do here at Kimber Kable?

The same thing we've been doing for over 30 years. We've been making some of the finest audio and video cables by hand in Ogden Utah. We make cables for the neophyte who wants to hear their music more naturally, the college student who finally has a Hi-fi system of their own, the guy who delights in finding the best bang for the buck, and the discerning buyer who wants the very best. We have all traveled through these categories at some point and Kimber Kable makes something for everyone.

It seems that there is a push in the manufacturing world to produce goods faster and cheaper at the cost of overall quality. We are bucking the trend and choosing to stay true to the science and methods that have sustained

us for all these years. We are constantly seeking improvement without losing sight of our roots. Our forward thinking and innovation keep us relevant without requiring complete reinvention.

The techniques we use to make everything from our entry level Tonik interconnect to the Kimber Select range of cables are similar. The materials and methods get more complex as you go up the line, but the basic motions remain the same. We've never found an automated method to serve as a viable replacement for the hands of a skilled craftsman. We're proud to know that our name represents the same thing to every customer: performance, quality, reliability, and integrity.



Venetian #29-210



801-621-5530 • www.kimber.com



Quad 99 Series

\$1100

Solid-State Preamplifier of the Year

For a preamplifier that's scarcely much larger than a mini component, the 99 is an extraordinarily versatile front end. It includes a dandy built-in mm/mc phono stage and some very sophisticated (and useful) tonal-correction and filtering controls (that can be defeated). Sonically it is notable for its musical naturalness and authority. Compared to much more expensive units, it may lack that last iota of see-through transparency, but it remains for reviewer Paul Seydor a continuing reference in its price category and several notches above as well. For its sound and its value, TAS's 2010 Affordable Preamp of the Year. Reviewed by Paul Seydor, Issue 203



Krell S-150M

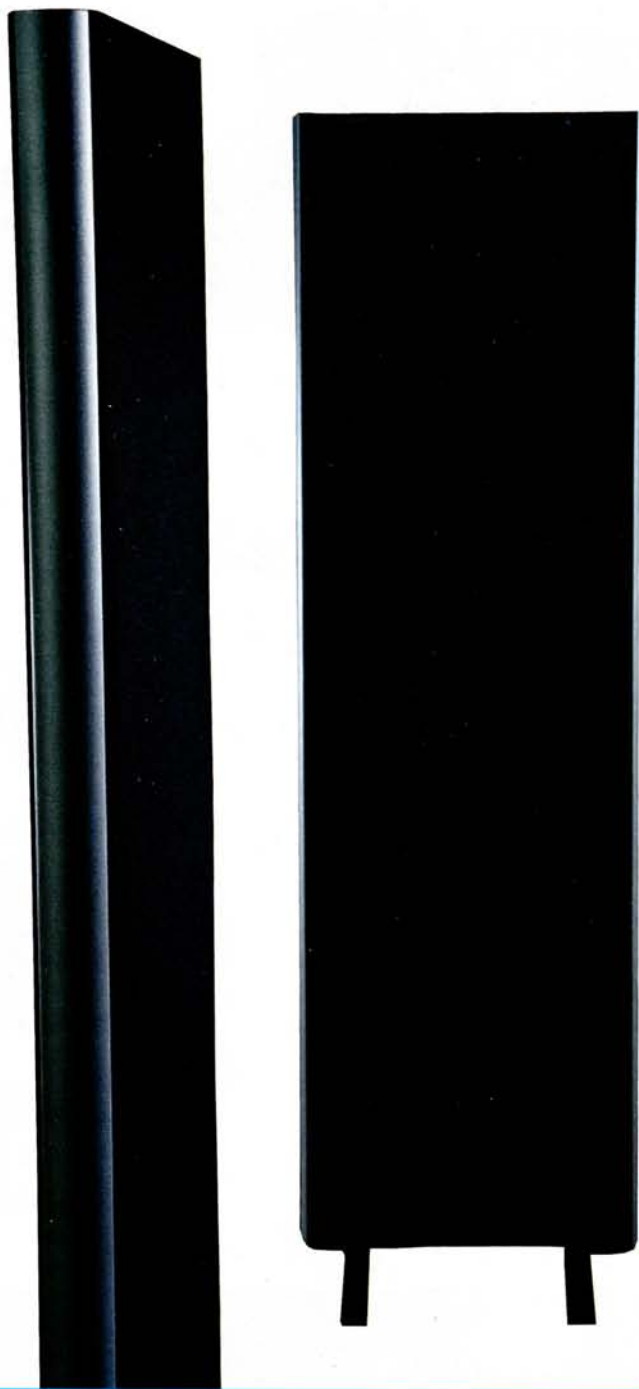
\$2500 each

Krell's compact, narrow-profile, cool-running 150W monoblocks are essentially scaled-down versions of its Evolution Series amps, with much of the Evos' classic and expensive sonic virtues. These include tight musical bass and a superb treble openness that places the 150M on a par with Krell's best. Further, it displays a dynamic liveliness and dexterity that verges on the uncanny. In the midrange, where the rubber meets the road, it is as grainless as any amp in our experience. Perhaps faltering just a bit in three-dimensionality and harmonic juiciness, for most applications it gives up little to the Big Boys. And though it may not be as efficient as the new guard of Class D amplification, it still only requires a meager 30 watts at idle. The Krell for those of us who don't live in the gym (only 17 pounds each) or have an off-shore bank account. Reviewed by Steve Stone, Issue 205

Solid State Power
Amplifier of the Year



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Affordable Loudspeaker of the Year

Magnepan 1.7

\$1995

Prior to the advent of this new, all-quasi-ribbon Maggie, JV thought its predecessor, the MG 1.6, was *the* single best buy in high-end loudspeakers. For him, the 1.7 now takes that coveted title, improving on the 1.6 in just about every area save for the low bass (which, like that of the 1.6, isn't really that low). From about 45Hz up, however, you will be hard put to find a more realistic transducer than the 1.7 for anything short of Magico money. Stunning coherence, transparency, detail, timbre, soundstaging, imaging—you name it. The 1.7s will also fare better at low listening levels than any previous Maggie. Not just TAS's Affordable Loudspeaker of the Year, the 1.7 is the affordable loudspeaker of the decade. Reviewed by JV, Issue 205

FRUGALITY IS COOL

We hear it all the time, "How do you do it for \$1,995 pair?"

"American-made" and "value" have made a comeback. The new Magneplanar 1.7 is not only "Made in America", it is made with virtually all American-made parts. Reviewers have called the 1.7 "The best value in high-end audio."

What is our secret? Clever engineering and frugality. In the past, frugality had fallen out of fashion. Today, it is back and now we are "cool."

It is tough to compete in a global market. In China, many workers ride their bikes to work. Well, the president of Magnepan rides his bike six miles to work—even in the Minnesota winters! Our marketing manager is no different and continues to drive a car that has 425,000 miles because it still has value and refuses to die.

Our cost-conscious philosophy allows us to compete anywhere in the world, including China. But, more importantly, you get the best sound for your dollar!

Magnepan: frugal, and proud of it.

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2010
PRODUCT
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Upper-End
Loudspeaker
of the Year

YG Acoustics Carmel

\$18,000

For listeners with small to mid-sized listening spaces, YG's demure new two-way, aluminum-boxed floorstander, the Carmel, is an extraordinary loudspeaker—one that marries the virtues of mid-sized, near-full-range floorstanders with those of classic, two-way stand-mount monitors. The speaker's true worth lies in its ability to let the music—*all* of the music—through to communicate with you, unfettered, unadulterated, evocative, and alive. Although the Carmels are undeniably revealing, they are not "*ruthlessly* revealing." Their fundamental spirit is to be honest in presentation, without being punitive to the listener. Sensationally high in resolution, with remarkably powerful bass and dynamics, the Carmel is perhaps the best small floorstanding speaker reviewer Chris Martens has heard, and a slam dunk for our Upper-End Loudspeaker of the Year award. Reviewed by CM in this issue

