



• OVERALL PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Magico Q5

\$59,950

The Magico Q5s are the highest-fidelity dynamic loudspeakers JV has yet reviewed. They aren't "beautiful-sounding" (unless, of course, the source is beautiful); they aren't "liquid in the treble" (ditto); they don't have "kick-ass slam" in the midbass (ditto); they aren't "highly analytical" (ditto); they just aren't. What you're getting here are true paragons of "high fidelity" in the only sense of those words that *makes* sense in a high-end system—a pair of speakers that has little-to-no sound of its own, and that will, as a consequence, reveals the sound of your recordings (and the performances and engineering that went into creating that sound) with an honesty that is, thus far, unmatched by any other transducer in JV's experience. What you're also getting, with first-rate sources, is a level of realism, from top to bottom, that no other dynamic speaker brings this fully or consistently to the table. When we say something sounds "real" on a hi-fi system, we generally mean "sort of real"—i.e., as real as hi-fi's get when they aren't reproducing transients like doorbells or ringtones. With the Magicos (and, once again, the right sources), "sort of real" comes so much closer to "really real" it will shock you. You would simply have to hear these things reproducing Joan Baez's soprano or Siegfried Stöckigt's Steinway or the LSO's string section or Tina Weymouth's Fender bass to appreciate how much nearer a high-fidelity speaker like this one can bring you to the absolute sound. Indeed, with comparably high-fidelity electronics driving them, and the most natural recordings, you cannot currently come closer, in JV's opinion, to the lifelike reproduction of recorded music no matter how much you spend—and you can spend a whole lot more than the \$60k these speakers cost for a whole lot less, making them not just Product of the Year Award-worthy but, in the six-figure world of ultra-high-end loudspeakers, very good deals. *JV (214)*



• MID-PRICED LOUDSPEAKER OF THE YEAR

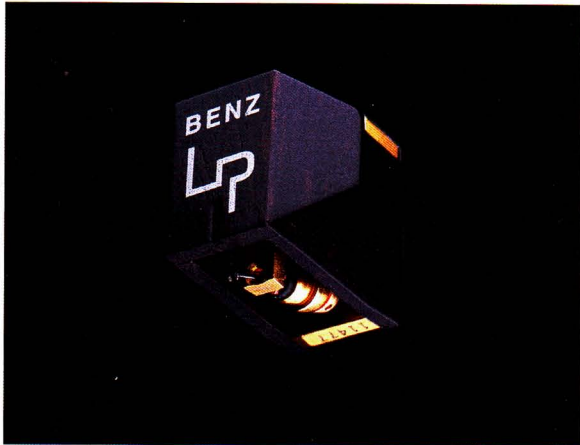
Magnepan MG 3.7

\$5500

Although Magnepan's loudspeakers have always been tremendous buys, the latest planar dipole from this venerable Minnesota firm, the MG 3.7, isn't just a good deal for the dollar; it may well be the best deal for *any* amount of dollars you can currently find in a high-end component. Simply superb transducers, the 3.7s offer you more than a taste of what the highest of high-end loudspeakers are capable of. Minus a dozen or so Hertz in the bottom end, they give you very nearly the whole enchilada—from timbre to texture to transients to imaging and soundstaging—and they give it to you with a realism that will raise goose-bumps on a regular basis. Many things have been improved here, but the blend of ribbon tweeter and quasi-ribbon planar-magnetic panels, the reduction in grain, and the subsequent increases in coherence and resolution stand out. High among the most lifelike loudspeakers on the market, the 3.7s would be award-winners in any year. *HP and JV (212, 213, 214)*



• PHONO CARTRIDGE OF THE YEAR



Benz LP S-MR

\$5000

The bane of most moving-coil cartridges has always been the brilliance range, where a resonant peak typically causes them to sound a bit grainy, aggressive, and brighter-than-life. Thanks to a patented cantilever-damping system, the Benz LP S-MR does not suffer from this problem, making it one of the very few mc's with truly natural-sounding treble. When you add lower noise top-to-bottom, superb transient speed, and world-class low-level resolution (thanks to the Benz's micro-ridge stylus) to the package, you get what is, in JV's (and HP's) view, one of the most neutral, lifelike, and least-mechanical-sounding "statement-quality" moving coils on today's market—and at \$5k, perhaps, *the* best buy. *JV (214)*

• MUSIC SERVER OF THE YEAR



Musical Fidelity M1 DAC

\$699

The M1 DAC looks to be an exercise in simplicity, but its performance will strike fear into the hearts of pricey USB DACs everywhere. It supports every sample rate from 32kHz to 192kHz and does so with a complete set of inputs, including USB, S/PDIF, and more. Sonically it is also a wonder, with a superior soundstage, palpable imaging, and fast transient attacks. It may lack an adjustable level control, but as reviewer Steven Stone said, "unless you plan to conduct tightly controlled A/B tests, you'll be hard-pressed to hear the [M1's] shortcomings. It's musical and arresting and involving in the way a good audio component should be." *Steven Stone (213)*