

TONEAudio AWARDS 2012

This past year has been an intriguing one, with excellent products throughout the price spectrum. The select components featured here are those most deserving of another look. Beyond our overall Product of the Year, which is a very expensive pair of speakers, the only other speaker we give an award to is in the Budget Speaker category. We felt it would be somewhat redundant to make a mega speaker our Overall Product of the Year and then give a Product of the Year award to another speaker.

Our awards are divided into Product of the Year Awards, for gear that redefines a category regardless of price, and Publisher's Choice Awards, which are my "teacher's pet" picks. And we're already starting to think about 2013!

2012 Product of the Year OVERALL

Sonus faber Aida

\$120,000/pair

www.sonusfaber.com

www.sumikoaudio.net

Spending \$120,000 on a pair of speakers should provide a transcendent experience, and provided you have the room and system to back them up, the Aidas do just that. If we gave an award for visual design, Sonus faber would always be at the top of our list. But a beautiful package isn't enough to be at the top—these speakers also deliver sonically, and should be at the top of everyone's "best of" lists.



AWARDS

Product of the Year

2012

PREAMPLIFIER

Robert Koda Takumi K-10

\$31,000
www.robert-koda.com

The K-10 is at the upper end of the price spectrum for a linestage, especially one with only four inputs and no remote. Yet it is built with the bespoke attention paid to a six figure Swiss timepiece or Rolls Royce. Every component painstakingly hand matched and assembled in a vault-like enclosure, sonically and mechanically.

Best of all, the K-10 delivers the goods, producing music in an uncolored nature that will puzzle even the most seasoned audiophile as to circuit design and type of active devices employed. It is pure music.



AWARDS

Product of the Year

2012

AMPLIFIER

Pass Labs XA200.5 monoblocks

\$44,000/pair
www.passlabs.com

Pass Labs is a company that quietly goes about the business of building fantastic amplifiers. Most of its customers love the company's products, thus they rarely turn up on the secondary market. Designer Nelson Pass has more basic technology patents than any other amp designer on the planet and he believes in great sound *and* ultra reliability—which is a good thing, because you don't want to pick up the tab to ship these monsters back to Pass. (They weigh 159 pound each.)

Our publisher's reference now for the better part of the year, these Class-A monoblocks run warm, and present an almost vacuum-tube-like sound with the heft and control that is exclusively the domain of solid state.



AWARDS

Product of the Year

A N A L O G
Turntable



AMG V12 Turntable

\$16,500 (with arm and wood base)

www.amg-turntables.com

www.musicalsurroundings.com

The AMG V12 combines the best of all worlds, offering museum-grade good looks, meticulous build quality and world-class sound. Setting up and adjusting the V12 requires a careful hand, but the reward is worth the journey. Fully capable of supporting the world's finest phono cartridges, this is a turntable that could be in your family for decades.

AWARDS

Product of the Year

A N A L O G
Phonostage



Simaudio Moon 810LP

\$12,000

www.simaudio.com

Applying everything that Simaudio has learned from producing its recent round of reference components, the 810LP is nothing less than a full-scale assault on analog playback. The company's scale of manufacturing gives it the ability to produce a \$12,000 phonostage at a level of performance that would cost three times as much from a boutique manufacturer.

The 810LP takes a purist approach, with no microprocessors; only a single input (with choice of balanced XLR or RCA connection) and fully manual gain, with loading safely out of the signal path. If that isn't enough, there's another socket on the rear panel labeled "power supply," which hints that there may be even more performance to come.

Product of the Year

**BUDGET
ANALOG**

Pro-Ject Debut Carbon

\$399

www.project-audio.com

www.sumikoaudio.net

The Debut Carbon offers a great way to get into the analog game on a tight budget—and the bold color palette is an added bonus. For four hundred bucks, you get a turnkey analog solution with an Ortofon 2M Red cartridge and an upgrade path. The signal cable can be easily changed, the platter upgraded or Pro-Ject's Speed Box added for more performance, should your interest in analog grow. Or just buy one in a cool color and spin some records!



Product of the Year

DIGITAL

AudioQuest DragonFly

\$249

www.audioquest.com

Have we lost our minds? A \$249 DAC as POY? We may be guilty as charged. However, even a quick listen to the AQ DragonFly reveals performance for which you'd expect to pay four figures. While the term "giant killer" is *verboden* here, the DragonFly has made some very specific compromises, but all of them are in the pursuit of simplicity and performance. Fancy casework? Nope. Multiple inputs? Forget it. 24/192 support? You'll have to settle for 24/96. Remote control? Nada. It doesn't even have a wall-wart power supply, but that's a good thing from a reviewer who's lost more remotes and power supplies than everyone else in the industry combined.

What you do get is sound quality that you're going to have to pay a ton more for elsewhere. Plug this miniscule miracle into your laptop or a Mac mini and be prepared to freak out.



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VINCENT V-60



MANLEY Stingray II



MYSTÈRE ia11



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AWARDS

2012 Product of the Year

BUDGET LOUDSPEAKER



Definitive Technology SM45

\$398/pair

www.definitivetech.com

It's tough to make a great pair of speakers for a few thousand dollars a pair. With its SM45 speakers, Definitive Technology accomplishes a miracle for just under \$400 a pair. Eschewing a big cabinet and the big bass boom associated with this type of speaker, the company utilizes the same tweeter from its SM65 and incorporates a smaller 5.25-inch woofer, resulting in a brilliant little stand monitor that covers some serious ground.



BRYSTON BHA-1

\$1,395

www.bryston.com

Bryston bursts onto the ever-growing headphone scene with a statement product right out of the chute, and it's clear that the company has done its homework. Weighing more than most Class-D power amplifiers, there's a healthy power supply under the hood and that's a great start.

A high quality Noble volume control and the ability to drive headphones through standard quarter-inch single-ended outputs or balanced via dual XLRs means you can grow with the BHA-1 as your headphone arsenal expands. And the sound? That's why it's our POY.

AWARDS

2012
Product of the Year
HEADPHONE AUDIO

**Rivals Agree?
 What's Up With That!**



2012 Recommended Components: Class A

*"... it opens a window on the music ...
 The LYRA Atlas is a complete success."*

Michael Fremer, Stereophile, May 2012

2012 Golden Ear Award Winner

"The LYRA Atlas is not a cartridge that will leave you shrugging your shoulders, but, rather, gaping in amazement."

Jacob Heilbrunn, The Absolute Sound, September 2012



DELOS KLEOS SKALA



TITAN i TITAN MONO ATLAS

ISOtek®



**AQUARIUS
 FULL SYSTEM POWER CONDITIONER**

For more than one decade IsoTek has been producing some of the most respected power conditioning products worldwide. Based in the United Kingdom, IsoTek has built this reputation by creating products that follow a clear philosophic principle of isolation and simplicity based upon proper design. Depending on how sophisticated your audio system may be, IsoTek has created a product that will reduce the noise inherent in your AC allowing you to hear and see more of what your components are supposed to produce.

Shown here is one of our newest award winning products. The Aquarius incorporates six unique conditioning stages, a reduction of RFI noise by 60db and removal of Common and Differential mains noise. KERPTM circuitry assures that equal power and resistance is delivered to each of the six outlets (two high current). Further isolation between all outlets ensures that crosstalk and noise produced by different components is eliminated. This is especially critical in our new era of computer audio in which computer products are utilizing the same electrical circuits as other more critical audio components.



AWARDS

2012
Product of the Year
C A B L E

Furutech PowerFlux Power Cords

\$2,999 each per meter
www.furutech.com

We rarely write about cable in the pages of *TONEAudio*, and power cords even less. But the Furutech PowerFlux Cables are something special. If you have a modest system, forget about these—Furutech has some much more reasonably priced power cords that will help your system. But for those of you looking to take a statement system further and wring every last bit of performance from it, the PowerFlux cables do the job. You wouldn't put 89-octane gas in your Ferrari, would you?

AWARDS

2012
Product of the Year
A C C E S S O R Y

GIK Room Treatments

gikacoustics.com

Before you spend a penny on exotic wire, equipment racks or those crazy things that look like coat hangers, invest in some solid acoustic science. GIK demystifies the art of acoustic treatment, with products in various shapes, sizes and levels of trim. Best of all, the company has a great website and a staff that can help you get effectively through the maze of room treatments. Every \$1,000 spent wisely on your room will do more than 10 times that amount spent on wire.

While you're at it, stop at Ikea and buy a big throw rug for that hardwood or tile floor in your listening room. Rant done.





AWARDS

Product of the Year

APP

Turnplay
Apple App Store
\$1.99

A virtual Technics SL-1200, Turnplay is a brilliant skin for the music in your iTunes library. Sporting an Ortofon Concord DJ cartridge and a functioning strobe, platter light and pitch control, they have pretty much thought of everything. You can even scratch back and forth in real time! Now we need someone to geek this out further with multiple turntable, tonearm and cartridge choices.

AWARDS

Product of the Year

2012

NEW PRODUCT

New Clear Audio NC1000 Amplifier

\$2,600

www.newclearaudio.com

High end audio is always a set of calculated compromise. Some products offer more performance, others more functionality and others spiffier look and feel for the money. For this reason, we have never used the phrase “giant killer” in this magazine, because there aren’t any.

But there have been a history of products at their introduction that concentrate strictly on high performance and while overhead is low, can offer tremendous sound quality for the price asked. We think the New Clear NC1000 is exactly this type of product. This Class-D amplifier, producing 500 watts per channel is robustly built, enclosed in modest casework, with a level of refinement that rivals far more expensive amplifiers.

