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Special
Publication

Sound & Vision - The Bristol Show 2016



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Multi-room systems
Best hi-fi system (2015)
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PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Multi-room systems
Best hi-fi system (2015)
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SOUND & VISION - THE BRISTOL SHOW 2016



Welcome To Hifi Pig's Coverage of Sound & Vision - The Bristol Show 2016

Back to Bristol for Hifi Pig's second visit Bristol. Sound And Vision really does seem to be the best of both worlds, an industry meeting place, especially for the British hifi industry but also a very 'visitable' show for both the hardcore hifi enthusiast and the general public. The surroundings are very comfortable in the Marriott hotel in central Bristol with the show being spread over enough floors that it wasn't too cramped, but not so many as to make it difficult to navigate.

The show was well organised with plenty of staff on hand and clear signposting and everyone was very helpful (BIG thank you especially to the cloakroom ladies again). The bar area is really comfortable and a great place to meet up for 'refreshments'.

The show carried on regardless despite the best attempts of the lifts (lots of people carrying kit up flights of stairs on set up day not ideal but these things happen) but running up and down stairs gave

us all a good workout during the show. Visitor figures were up again this year (3% increase on last year) including one charitable Stormtrooper roaming the rooms! It just goes to show how popular hifi is becoming again and this show was apparently the best attended since 2003 and I saw a real mix of people including plenty of youngsters and families.

The various record stands seemed to be having a magnetic effect on the crowds with people buying vinyl by the bucket-load. With more than 190 brands at the show, visitors were also treated to lots of new products and launches. There were some very thoughtfully set up rooms, both in terms of sound quality and visitor comfort....some that I could have happily moved into, and the kit on display covered all budgets proving that hifi is not just the preserve of elite enthusiasts with bottomless pockets.

We look forward to 2017 and next years show when Bristol Sound and Vision will be celebrating its 30th birthday!

SOUND & VISION - THE BRISTOL SHOW 2016

clarity

clear advice from the british audio industry

Clarity is the UK hifi industry's trade association, an alliance of the best of the audio and video industries operating in the UK who are working to bring quality home entertainment to consumers. Our objective is simple: to get more people into more of our stores, so that they can experience just what drives our collective passion. We will do this by running creative and innovative campaigns, while raising the standards of the wider specialist hifi and home cinema industries.

Membership is open to manufacturers, distributors, retailers, the media and individuals working in the specialist hi-fi and home cinema industry – everyone, in fact, to whom the health of the industry matters. All members have equal status – whether they make one valve amplifier a year in the shed or are a multi-national company with thousands of employees and a vast product range.

There are literally hundreds of trade associations in the UK, some you've heard of, like the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) and some you probably don't know, such as Adhesive Tape Manufacturers Association. They've all got one thing in common and that is to look after the interests of their members and industry. And so it is with Clarity - our overriding objective is to help the industry prosper and we, like the other bodies, do this in a number of ways.

Firstly we bring like-minded people together in a forum where ideas can be shared and intelligence pooled to work through common issues and provide solutions that will aid many members. That could be the provision of training or information on emerging technology trends and impending legislation.

Secondly we provide a number of tangible financial benefits that can significantly aid the members' businesses. For example we offer specialist insurance services that cover the retailers for all that lovely expensive product when it's being lent out for home demonstrations.

Thirdly we act as a promotional body on behalf of the members. This is the most visibly obvious aspect of our work, which can be seen in advertising and exhibitions. If you've picked up a copy of a hifi magazine over the past couple of years you may have seen the recent Clarity advertising campaign. Running in every UK hifi magazine every month, we focused on the benefits of buying from a Clarity retail member so you can be assured of the very best service next time you buy hifi equipment.

A trade association should also recognise the individual efforts of the members of the industry, whether they are part of the association or not. At this year's Sound & Vision, The Bristol Show, we once again ran our Best of Show awards, which gives recognition to the efforts put in by exhibitors to make the show a success. A team of very experienced people from the hifi industry acted as

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the judges and visited every room, scoring them on the quality of the demonstration, how much effort has gone into the presentation of the display and what innovations they unveiled at the show. From a shortlist of nominees a final round of voting takes place and the five winners are announced at the Friday night press conference. If you visited the show, you may have seen the “Best of Show” awards being proudly displayed by the five worthy winners.

We’ve also recently introduced our Honorary Fellowship award, aimed at recognising an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the UK hifi industry. This award is now in its third year, having first been awarded to John Dawson, founder of Arcam and then to the respected journalist Paul Messenger. This year the Clarity board of directors voted to present the award to Sony’s Eric Kingdon, a man whose thirty plus year career with Sony has had a phenomenal impact on hifi, making him a very well deserving winner.

One thing that all industries need, and ours is no exception, is a constant flow of new customers coming into our stores and buying the products we make. That means we have to communicate with a new audience as well as those people with prior knowledge. Running a consumer facing advertising and PR campaign doesn’t come cheap, but properly executed it should provide those new customers to whom we want to show just how good music can sound.

We’ve done a couple of big promotional events of late, both of which bring music right into the core of our focus and help expose hifi to new people. At the National Audio Show 2014 we took our first step in reaching out to new people and music fans to help them experience good quality hifi. By staging a live concert on the Saturday evening, with Steve Hogarth, lead singer of Marillion, an artist who has a considerable loyal fan following and combining the concert tickets with the hi-fi show tickets, we were able to bring new people into the show. Using the power of social media, via the artist’s facebook and twitter accounts, we reached out to a very large number of people who otherwise would never have heard of the show.

And any of you who were at the National Audio Show this past year, you can’t have failed to see we

Steve Hogarth, lead singer of Marillion



were running a major event in conjunction with Universal Music and Queen. We were delighted to present the very first UK public playback of the brand new "Queen: The Studio Collection" box set – a full week before it was released – what a fantastic opportunity for fans and audiophiles to hear the albums before anyone else. Five years in the making "Queen: The Studio Collection" brings together the complete collection of 15 studio albums, re-mastered by the legendary Bob Ludwig and mastered for half speed vinyl cutting by Miles Showell at Abbey Road. Encased in a beautifully crafted box and complete with a lavishly illustrated 108-page book, featuring material from Queen’s archive and the personal archives of Brian May and Roger Taylor, these classic albums are presented in the highest possible audio quality for die-hard fans and audiophiles alike. We worked with many of our manufacturer members to put together a simply stunning £70,000 hifi system which included the PMC MB2S XBD-A loudspeakers, as used by Miles Showell at Abbey Road; a Roksan Xerxes turntable; Parasound phono-



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Showing off Queen: The Studio Collection on a £70 000 set up

stage and Bryston pre-amp. The ultra-high resolution system was able to show off the audio quality of the box set with incredible detail and help create a feeling of actually being at the recording sessions, reproducing the energy and atmosphere that was felt when Freddie, Brian, Roger and John originally put the tracks together. The shows were a huge success, with the two planned sessions quickly selling out and having to be run twice more just to accommodate the demand. And because the event was promoted through the Queen fan club, it meant a whole new group of people visited the hi-fi show.

And talking of vinyl, we have teamed up with The Chester Group, organisers of The National Audio Show, to present “Styl:us 2016”, a show specially created for the legion of fans of music on vinyl.

On 23rd-24th April 2016 at the Park Inn, Heathrow, you’ll be able to feast your passion for vinyl at the UK’s only dedicated analogue music event. With new and used vinyl for sale; turntables galore;



Digging for vinyl

SOUND & VISION - THE BRISTOL SHOW 2016

hifi systems; artwork displays; seminars on turntable set up; demonstrations from well-known DJs; plus live music, there will be something for everyone no matter what your relationship with vinyl.

The resurgence in vinyl has taken the UK by storm over the last few years, with sales largely driven by the success of the very popular “Record Store Day” event, and the nostalgia for pre-digital technology that has helped rekindle people’s love of analogue music. The British Phonographic Industry has recently reported that in 2015 sales of albums on vinyl reached 2.1m units in the UK, up from 200,000 just five years earlier. And, on the back of that, the hi-fi industry has seen sales of turntables increase by 98% in volume from 2014 to 2015.

We felt this this revival in the purchase and enjoyment of music in its purest, analogue, form was too good an opportunity to miss and so we came up

with the idea for a vinyl focused event. Holding it in the London area - the heart of the nation’s music industry and the city where, in the 60s, the birth and rapid rise in popular musical culture occurred – seemed the obvious location.

Hifi is all about the music and we are all passionate about making it sound as good as it can. That’s why, when you next go shopping for hi-fi, you should visit a Clarity retailer as they’ll give you the best possible advice and find a solution that’s right for you. It’s

also why we need your help: music is a very social activity, most people like music to some extent, but most people don’t hear it sounding as good as it can. As a hi-fi insider you know just how amazing it can sound, and we hope you’ll agree you owe it to your friends to share your understanding with them and get more people buying ‘proper’ hi-fi, so they too can find new enjoyment and experiences from their music.

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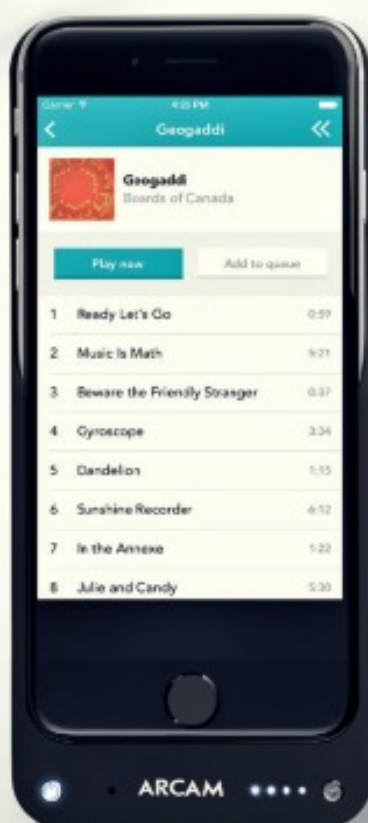
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Clarity Announces the 2016 Honorary Fellowship and Best of Show Awards at The Bristol Show

During the So

und & Vision Show held in Bristol on 26-28 February, The Clarity Alliance presented the fourth annual “Best of Show” awards, at which it also announced the third recipient of its Honorary Fellowship award.

As one of its founding objectives, The Clarity Alliance pledged to recognise those individuals who have made a significant contribution to the UK hifi industry. The third such award, following the Hon. Fellowship of John Dawson in 2014 and Paul Messenger in 2015, was awarded to one of the most respected and long serving industry champions, Sony’s Eric Kingdon.



Eric Kingdon receiving his Hon. Fellowship

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Presenting the award, Clarity's chairman, Laurence Armstrong, said, "We have all known Eric for many years and his contribution to the promotion of quality audio through his work at Sony has undoubtedly helped the industry enormously. The board of directors of Clarity felt that in choosing Eric to be the recipient of this year's Honorary Fellowship, they were recognising, on behalf of the whole industry, the tremendous contribution he has made to the promotion of hi-fi at home and across the world."

Eric Kingdon is senior European technical marketing manager at Sony, whose career with the electronics giant started during the introduction of the CD. His face has been a familiar one at hi-fi shows for years, but behind the scenes, in his role with Sony, he has been responsible for shaping the sound of many of the class-leading products the company has developed for the European market.

Clarity also awarded prizes in the "Best of Show" awards to five companies whose efforts in putting on the best displays and demonstrations were considered to be exceptional by the panel of anonymous judges who visited every room at the show.

Awards were presented to:

"Best Sounding Hi-Fi Room" – PMC



"Best Home Cinema Room" – Arcam



"Best Presented Room" – Audioquest





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What HiFi? Sound and Vision, Awards 2015

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Bristol Show Report By Hifi Pig Reviewer Ian Ringtead

It has been many years since I last attended Bristol and as it was their 29th year I thought it was time to go again. Escorted by my better half who chauffeured as well we arrived on the Saturday morning for an action filled day. When last at Bristol we both found a day was not really enough to see everything in detail but commitments meant we could only spend the day there.

The Marriot Hotel acts as an excellent venue in the city centre and there are plenty of rooms for the exhibitors. The show was spaced over eight separate floors or areas and with over 190 exhibitors/manufacturers displaying their wares there was something for everyone. All tastes were catered for from the very high end to portable devices and headphones, and I was pleased to see so many people attending of all age groups. There weren't just the

usual die hard audiophiles (myself included) but families and teenagers or couples.

I struggled to see every exhibitor as although I had six hours to look around the time whizzes by when you get talking to friends or discussing products with manufacturers.

Many rooms were full and I simply couldn't get into some and either went back later or had to prioritise who I saw. Ideally rooms could have done with being bigger for some of the exhibitors, but hotels rooms are for sleeping in normally. The size could compromise some systems but I felt most exhibitors chose their equipment wisely and many sounded pretty impressive.

The lower ground area was host to old established names like Quad, Audiolab, Wharfedale, Kef, B&W, Cyrus and Chord. I couldn't get into all the rooms as



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- Jon Myles, HiFi World 2015

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- Awards Edition, HiFi World 2015

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- Mono & Stereo, 2015

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HI-FI WORLD



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they had timed demonstrations and time limits constrained me. Quad was showing their exciting new range of Z Series speakers and the Artera One CD player amp and streamer. They looked very classy and well worth an audition. B&W were demonstrating their new 800 series diamond range of speakers and KEF the Reference 3 floorstanders along with the award winning and very popular LS50's in striking new colours. Cyrus had its new range of electronics including the Phono Signature which looks like a great new addition to the growing range of quality products on offer to serious vinyl heads.

A large part of the ground floor area was where all the accessory companies hung out to tempt us with a myriad of interesting extras to improve our systems or add new music finds. I wish I had had time to browse but I couldn't dwell too long and anyway my wife was with me! I am sure we will hear about all the new exciting products over the next year and hopefully I'll have a chance to try them out.

In the conservatory area Wilson Benesch were showing off to great effect their new stand mounting speakers the Discovery II being driven by Peter Madnick's superb Audio Alchemy range of electronics and CH Precision Electronics from Switzerland. He was on hand to demonstrate the system and I had the pleasure of talking to him and discussing the music he played, a real gentleman. (Peter has very distinctive white hair and I recognised him immediately I entered the room, so I couldn't resist talking to him) The system sounded sublime to my ears and got my vote as one of the best sound I heard at the show. Having read about these electronics in the magazines it was a treat to

hear them and see what all the fuss had been about. The Wilson Benesch speakers are no stranger to my ears and being from my home city I was proud to hear how fabulous and superb looking they were. Also on show was the 25th anniversary Circle 25 turntable which looked and sounded tremendous.

Ophidian Audio were showing there popular M series of speakers, a range I have first hand

experience of and wrote about so favourably last year. Excitingly Gareth James the young man behind the company was also showing his new baby the Prophet P1 stand mount speaker which is aimed at the higher end listener wanting a quality, reasonably compact design, finished to higher standards than the M series and selling for £2500 when launched soon. They sounded very promising so I hope to review them later this year. Leema had an all in one integrated amp, streamer and DAC called the Quasar for £3000 which sounded very good through their compact Xen speakers. MBL from Germany are a luxury brand and they had a rather modest system by their standards playing

consisting of its new Noble line N51 integrated amp, CD DAC N31, and their amazing MB126 speakers. By my reckoning about £32000 and this is a cheaper system for them. I really liked it in the white gloss finish and it sounded very tight and controlled given the smallish room.

Henley Designs as always had several rooms due to their large product portfolio of superb value for money components. What caught my eye and ear foremost was the new Project VCS record vacuum cleaning machine which I will be reviewing soon and I can't wait to try it out. At £300 this will fly out of

Apologies to the companies and products I didn't have time to report on, but it just proves what a lively successful show Bristol is. Long may it continue.

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the shops if it works as well as I saw it at the show. Of course the ever growing range of Project turntables were on show including the new Project 2 Xperience SB S shape arm turntable with detachable headshell. Takes me back to the seventies and eighties, when many decks had this very useful feature. Other highlights in Henley's rooms were the new Roksan K3 series which my wife really liked the look of for their clean simple styling (praise indeed).

Stephen Billington as ever was demonstrating his fabulous Music First Audio pre amps and he always brings his Nagra reel to reel tape recorder with him, a delight in itself. Stephen kindly played some music from his own MP3 collection recorded on the Nagra and it sounded superb. My wife wondered why there were so many boxes required to play back music in the system and I said it worked in this scenario of products. MFA's expertise in transformers is legendary, long may it continue.

Entotem were showing off their new ideas and soon to be released additions to the popular Plato system. A new class A amp is to be launched and a Plato Lite system for audiophiles wanting to archive their vinyl digitally without having to buy the rest of the AV system at £1900 roughly. I can see this doing well as the software is so easy to use and really works well. They also have a new IOS application now for i pads and phones to control the Plato. Keep up the good work boys.

I walked into the Technics room excited to see the new Grand Class SL1200GAE. A total revamp of the legendary SL1200 I sold so many of in my retailing days. It looks magnificent but at over £3000 it has tough competition, but I am sure it will sell very well. The rest of Technics new electronics range was on show and it's great to see a classic Japanese brand back producing quality hifi again.

The Mission room sported a new range of speakers the LX-2 and LX-3 soon to be released which sounded rather nice. The company has in recent years been overlooked I feel, being part of a bigger corporation these days, and have a new design team on board. The baby stand mounts sounded good and at £200 should fit in well at that price point. The floorstanders, the LX-3 are £400. I hope they do well.

Sound Foundations were in several rooms showing the wide range of goodies they do and Clearaudio had an exciting new release with a cheaper parallel tracking arm the TT5 for about £1600 and a new cartridge the Essence MC. I can't wait to have a chance to try them out. In another room there were the Larsen 6 speakers from Sweden being demonstrated by their designer. These are new to the UK and again sounded great along with Gamut electronics and Isotek mains products. The Isotek range were admirably demonstrated by Bjorn Hegelstad their world sales director who told me on average he spent 200 days a year travelling. A real 'man in the suitcase'.

Ming Da were on show in Malvern Audio Researches room along with another turntable with parallel tracking arm by Pro Audio that is £3000. It wasn't on dem at the time but just shows how popular vinyl has become again.

Proac were being played along with a Sugden A21SE amp and a Michell Gyrodec giving that classic warm sound of class A loved by so many. Great British companies with a long tradition, whom I have huge respect for. Another was Rega showing off the revamped Planar 3 which looked very debonair in its new piano black acrylic finish and now has a new arm the RB330. It has taken Rega two years of intense research to redesign this iconic turntable. In the immortal words of Craig Revill Horwood 'Fabulous'.

Harbeth were showing the Super HL5 plus and P3ESR world renowned designs and favourites of discerning audiophiles. They were using the **Bespoke Audio Co passive Preamplifier which has been reviewed by Stuart in Hifi Pig, and rather nice it is too. Spondor, now run by Philip Swift of Audiolab fame back in the eighties had the D9 3 way speakers and the larger SP200 Classic floorstanders. The SP200 Classic is apparently very popular in the Far East and Philip felt it was time to introduce it back home.**

That covers all I had time to see and hear. Apologies to the companies and products I didn't have time to report on, but it just proves what a lively successful show Bristol is. Long may it continue.

Ian Ringstead

SOUND & VISION - THE BRISTOL SHOW 2016



Chord Electronics and PMC Loudspeakers



The Wilson Benesch room impressed Ian ringstead

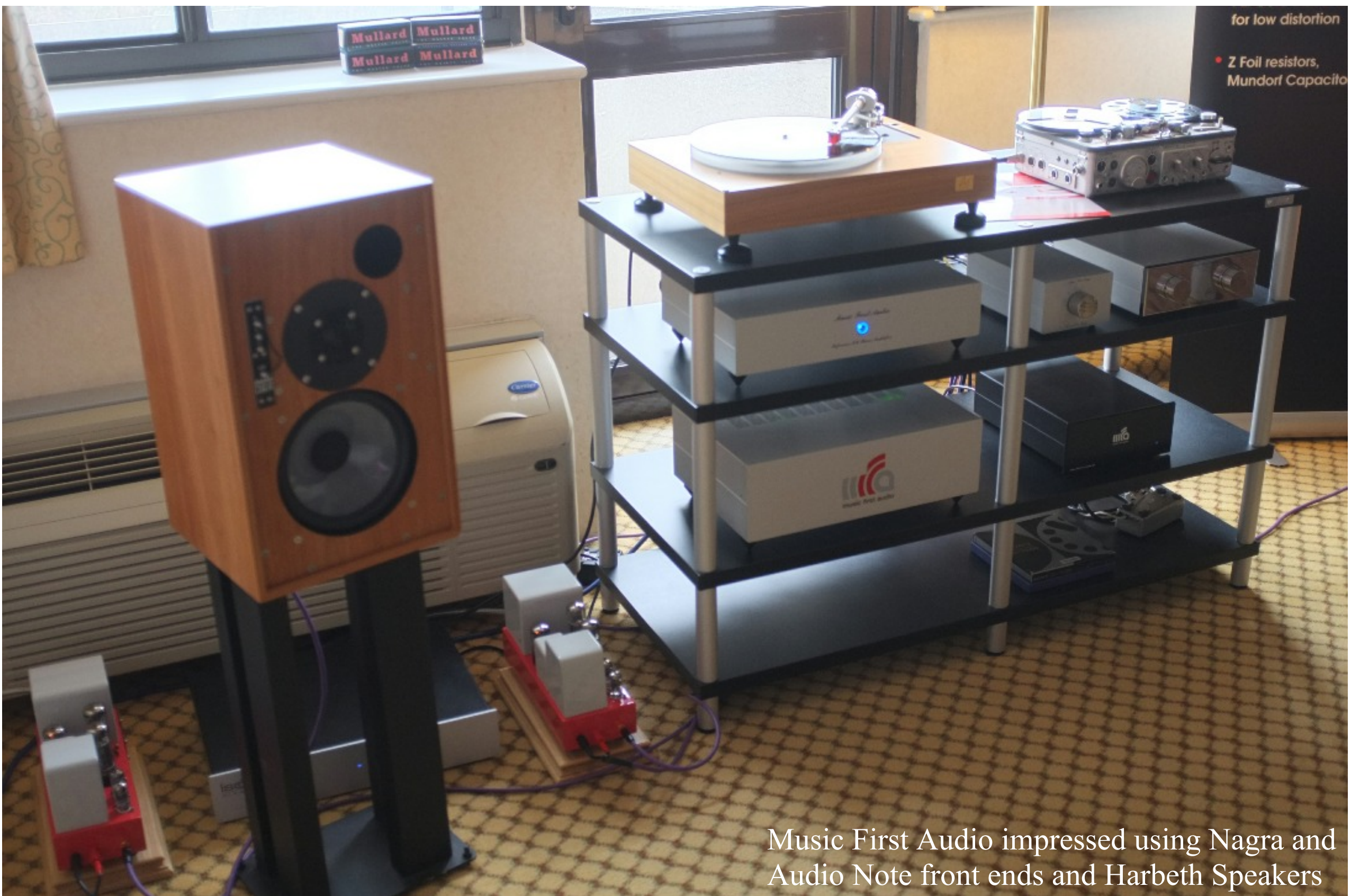
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The Quad, Audiolab and Wharfedale room



B&W With Classe Electronics

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Music First Audio impressed using Nagra and Audio Note front ends and Harbeth Speakers



The new Technics SL2100 vinyl spinner

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The new Pro-Ject VCS Record Cleaning Machine in action

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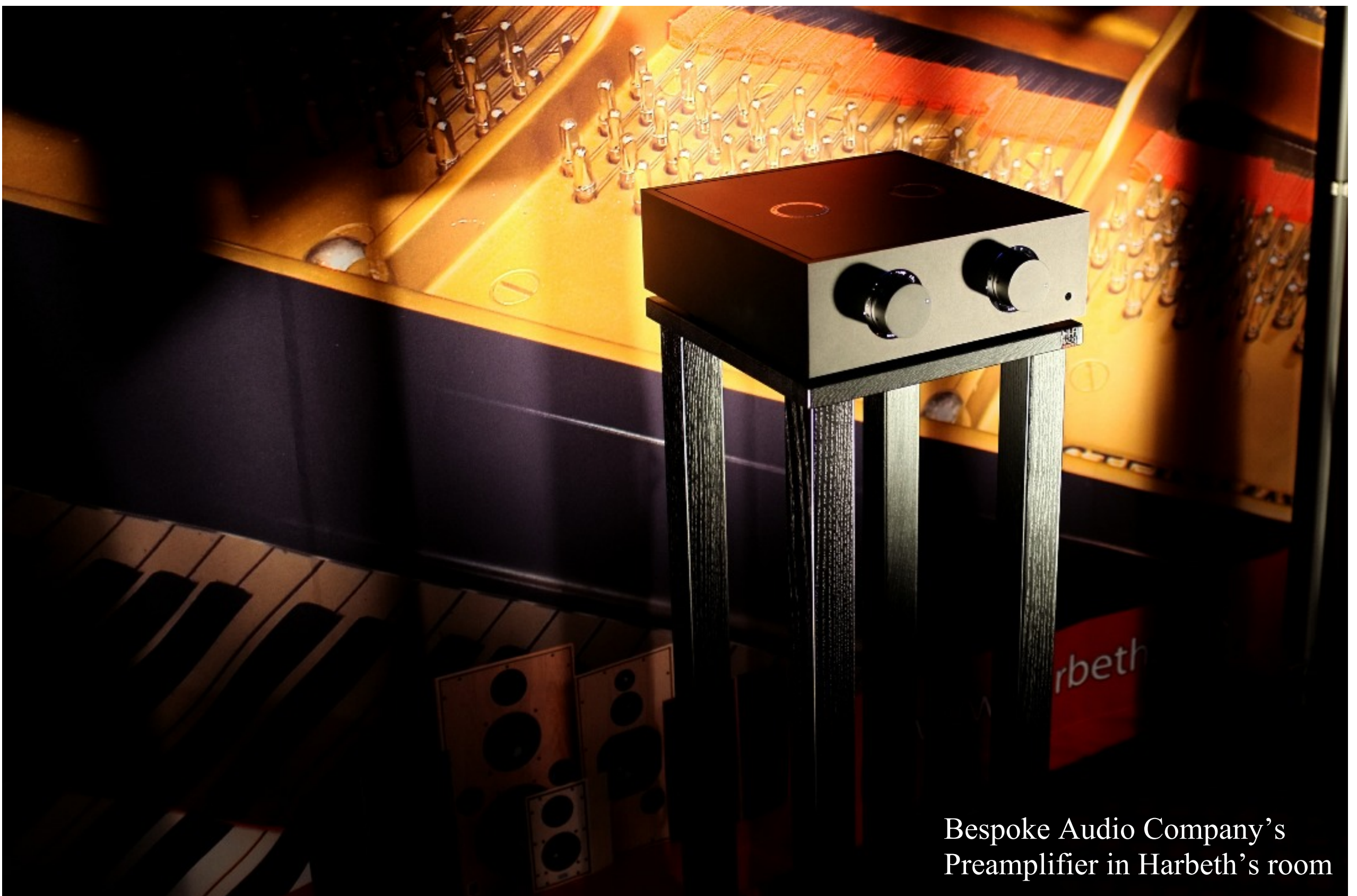


Ophidian's range of loudspeakers



Leema electronics and diminutive Xen 2 loudspeakers

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Bespoke Audio Company's
Preamplifier in Harbeth's room



Entotem's Plato for those looking to
digitize their record collection...and
more

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Ming Da Valves in action

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High-End German brand MBL show off their wares



Sound Fowndations showing off Clearaudio and more

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For every show Hifi Pig visits we give out out Hifi Pig Lives you award to the room that we enjoyed the most. We're not judging the rooms purely on the sound and this is no "Best Sound In Show" award, though the Sound Fowndations did an excellent job in this respect at Sound & Vision 2016. Our award is based on how welcoming the room and the people staffing the room were, the music that was played and the ambiance and Sound Fowndations did great in all these respects in all their rooms – open, friendly, great music and a fab sound! Mentions must also go to The Chord Company for their excellent hospitality, Music First Audio, Chord Electronics and Origin Live who all made the shortlist. However, the standard was very high throughout the show and the Hifi Pig team enjoyed it immensely!

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Monitor Audio Platinum PL 500

The new platinum series of loudspeakers saw its launch at this year's Bristol Show and Hifi Pig were invited along for a closer look at

We were really happy to be asked along to this invite only launch event particularly given that this was to be the first time Monitor Audio's Platinum PL 500 II loudspeaker was to be given a public airing anywhere in the world.

We were ushered into the darkened demonstration room and the first thing that hits you about this loudspeaker is its size. This is physically imposing loudspeaker with a fit and finish that clearly places its marketplace as being at the luxury end of the scale. But at what price...more on this later.

Each cabinet is hand-built with multiple laminations of veneer that are available in Santos, Rosewood and Ebony that are pair matched and then given 11 layers of clear piano lacquer by hand. This, along with the hand-upholstered Inglestone leather on the front baffles, adds to the high-end feel of these loudspeakers that stand over 180cm in height.

Each cabinet has four 8" bass drivers and two 4" mid drivers that use enhanced RDT II (Rigid Diaphragm Technology). This technology uses a composite sandwich structure of very low mass skins that are then bonded to a honeycombed Nomex core material meaning the cones are very light and very strong. On the Platinum Series the material used on the front of the Nomex core material is C-CAM whilst on the back a woven carbon fibre material is used. Another new technology Monitor Audio use in the drivers is DCF (Dynamic Coupling Filter) whereby the more common rigid coupling of the driver and voice coil is replaced by a nylon ring that

is rigid up to the crossover frequency but then acting like a spring above this frequency. The idea here is that surplus high frequency energy is damped.

Further, the voice coils themselves have been designed using underhung coils using rectangular wire rather than the usual round wire, the intention being to get more copper in the gap and get more energy from the driver.

Top end frequencies are dealt with by a MPD (Micro Pleated Diaphragm) high frequency transducer which



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Monitor Audio says acts like a “superfast accordion” and has a frequency response up to 100kHz.

The drivers used in the Platinum Series are fixed to the cabinet using bolts that are tightened to a specific torque and offers the driver an equal clamping force around the periphery meaning that there are no front fixings on these speakers, with the bolts also adding rigidity to the cabinet. Further features of the



cabinet include HIVE II (Hi-Velocity Vent) which is a port that has been straight riffled to accelerate air flow and reduce turbulence and ARC (Anti-Resonance Composite) for the mid range housings and baffle components.

For the purposes of this demonstration Monitor Audio chose to use Chord's DAVE DAC, Chord amps and a Meridian server. This combination offered up a clean, dynamic and effortless sound and whilst these speakers will go down to 22Hz (-3dB) the room used didn't really allow them to be shown to their full capability in the bass department. We were treated to some Jazz and finally some Red Hot Chilli Peppers with which the speakers coped equally well across all genres.

As a Flagship product the Platinum II PL500 is a fitting product. It is big in both its physical stature and in its scale of presentation. In the none too ideal room these speakers performed very nicely with the main characteristics being a clean and dynamic sound.

During the presentation we exchanged a few words with each other as to what we thought the price of these speakers would be and both guessed in the region of £25000 and so it was a bit of a shock when we were told that the PL 500s retailed at £15000 and whilst this is indeed a lot of money, you are getting a lot of loudspeaker for your spend. My notes jotted down during the presentation say simply “high-end content at a realistic price.”

Stuart Smith

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The Chord Company Streamline Their Offerings

The Chord Company are such lovely people and it's always a pleasure to be invited along to their launches and demos and this occasion was no exception. Nigel, Alan and Sally were on excellent form and had laid on some pretty impressive nosh and drinks for the gathered throng of hacks. Nigel was particularly enthusiastic in giving out this fayre and has to be complimented on what surely must be the quote of this year's show... "Sticky sausage anyone?"

But we weren't here just for the food and drinks, splendid though it was, and we were treated to an explanation of how the various cables on offer fit into the hierarchy. So the new ranges of cables are now clearly placed in the overall hierarchy making the buying process much simpler than before...

The cables are now split into Clearway, Shawline, Epic, Signature and Sarum series and get better and more expensive as you move up the scale with the Sarum range being the flagship range.

The Clearway series are the cheapest of the range and uses oxygen free copper conductors insulated in FEP, a close relative of PTFE. The cables are shielded with dual layers of high density foil. There are speaker cables and the Clearway digital in this range with more cable types being added throughout the year.

Next up the ladder we have the Shawline range of cables that includes analogue interconnects, digital and loudspeaker cables and employ the company's ARAY conductor design which means they have to be hand-built. The Shawline Digital uses the ARAY design with the conductors being silver-plated and insulated with PTFE and then a PVC coating. Again



Nigel Finn and Sally Gibb talk us through the range of Chord Company cables.

these are shielded cables as are the Shoreline loudspeaker cables.

Another rung up we have the Epic range which many readers will be familiar with containing the well known Epic Twin and Epic Reference speaker cables. The speaker cables use a twisted pair configuration and silver plated PTFE insulated conductors. The Epic Analogue interconnect uses Tuned ARAY construction with the key difference over the Shawline Analogue being heavier silver

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plated conductors. The Epic Digital also uses Tuned ARAY design and a coaxial configuration of silver plated wires with PTFE insulation. Shielding on the Epic Digital is high density braid and foil combination. RCA or BNC variants are available. Finally in the Epic range comes the Epic Streaming Cable which features silver plated conductors and an adaptation of the Tuned ARAY tech' with the conductors being soldered rather than clamped.

The penultimate rung on the ladder belongs to the Signature range. There is the Signature Tuned ARAY analogue interconnect which features a new PTFE RCA plug surround (also found on the Sarum Super ARAY). The Signature Digital Tuned ARAY



includes digital coaxial, streaming, USB and AES EBU cables all of which feature Tuned ARAY conductor design. The Signature Reference speaker cable uses silver plated conductors and low density PTFE. Last in this range is the Signature ARAY Power Cable which features a high density foil and braid shielding that surrounds a "unique" conductor configuration and Chord's own mains and IEC plugs. Silicon vibration damping is employed and there is a heavy layer of silver plating and increased gauge of contacts within the IEC plug.

Finally at the top of the ladder we have Chord's flagship range of cables, Sarum. These use Super Aray design and come in analogue and digital interconnect speaker cables, power cables and streaming cables.

As always with Chord's demonstrations, you are played a snippet of music, the cables are changed and the same snippet is played again. This is a simple and unobtrusive method of demonstration allowing you to form your own opinions without being "sold" to. What we heard was a clear improvement as you went up the ladder across the range of cables...including the digital cable which, for me, was a bit of a revelation.

Being vegetarian we skipped on the delights of Nigel's sticky sausage, but it was a lovely thought non-the-less.

Stuart Smith



The Chord Company's Alan Gibb passes round the cakes

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On A Mission

Mission's new, Chinese built loudspeakers, the LX range has the budget loudspeaker market squarely in its sights.

Mission are a name that many readers will be well familiar with from their heyday in the 80s and so it was great to hear that we would have the chance to sample their latest offering, the LX standmount loudspeakers at this year's Sound & Vision show. The brand has always had a bit of a reputation at delivering good speakers at good prices but these things really are in the budget end of the market, costing as they do just £200 per pair.

The speakers are the first product to benefit from the company's new design team as well as sophisticated modeling tools and software.

The speakers have obviously, by their very nature, been built to a price and compromises have had to be made but they really do sound very good indeed and their performance belies their price, if what we heard at the show is anything to go by. So yes, the LX is a stripped back design but I reckon they really have got a speaker here that they should be very proud of. The tweeter used has been chosen for its consistency and employs a



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neodymium magnet and a 25 mm microfibre dome.

The LX, and its floor standing stable-mate, are both two way designs with the LX having one 130 mm mid/bass driver.

Like the Missions of yesteryear the LX-2's tweeter is positioned below the mid/bass driver which is done to aid time alignment. The theory goes that by placing the tweeter lower than ear level, the path to the listener is longer than that of the other driver. The LX series uses a 4th order (24dB per octave acoustic) Linkwitz-Riley crossover that has been developed in house, whilst the cabinet has been designed using 3D CAD systems.

The LX range will be available from late Spring and, if what we heard in this demonstration is carried through to full production model, Mission will once again have a real winner on their hands.

Stuart Smith



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Jay's Sound & Vision Highlights

Gadgets News' Jay Garrett pulls out some of his highlights from this year's Bristol Show

Sound and Vision, also known simply as The Bristol Show, has now become one of my regular pilgrimages. Headroom whets the appetite with its selection of head-fi, but Bristol is definitely the main course when it comes to high end audio in the UK.

This year I certainly had my work cut out as I wanted to make sure I found tasty tid-bits that fall in the gadgety camp as well as snuffling things out for Hifi Pig - all that on top of a particularly honorable task bestowed upon me this year as I was asked to help judge for the Clarity Audio awards.

So, between arranged meetings, visits to the bar, and zipping from floor to floor with my piece of paper, I did manage to spend some quality time in a variety of rooms and at stands.

Here are my memories from Challenge Jay - The Bristol edition.

Audio Technica

The Japanese consumer-to-pro headphone gurus were showing off a wide range of cans but I was distracted by the awesome looking headphone amp, the AT-HA5050H.

This beast has eight outputs for headphones of different impedances. Needless to say that this is aimed at headphone junkies, especially those in Japan as this tends to be where people have more pairs of headphones than vending machines to

choose from. This €6,000 tube/transistor hybrid amp does sound rather bloody good though.



Chord Company

The Chord Company ran through their revised range of high-end cables that promises products for all pockets. The demonstration included the new entry-level C-digital, the new Clearway Digital, plus the brand new Shawline Digital and Epic Digital cables. Going up the range, we were treated to hearing the



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new Signature Tuned ARAY Digital, the Sarum Super ARAY Digital and the "Wow! But, how much?" Chord Music Digital.

JL Audio



JL Audio unleashed their Fathom V2 series of subwoofers for the first time at a UK show. JL Audio's highly regarded powered subwoofer systems utilise proprietary patented JL Audio drivers with powerful switching amplifiers, coupled to a large toroidal transformer, apparently. The compact design does lend them to being easily applied to most rooms. They certainly packed a punch in the A/V set up in the room.

PMC

I have to admit to having a bit of a soft spot for PMC and they didn't disappoint this year either - well, they did receive an award at the show for best sounding two-channel room after all.

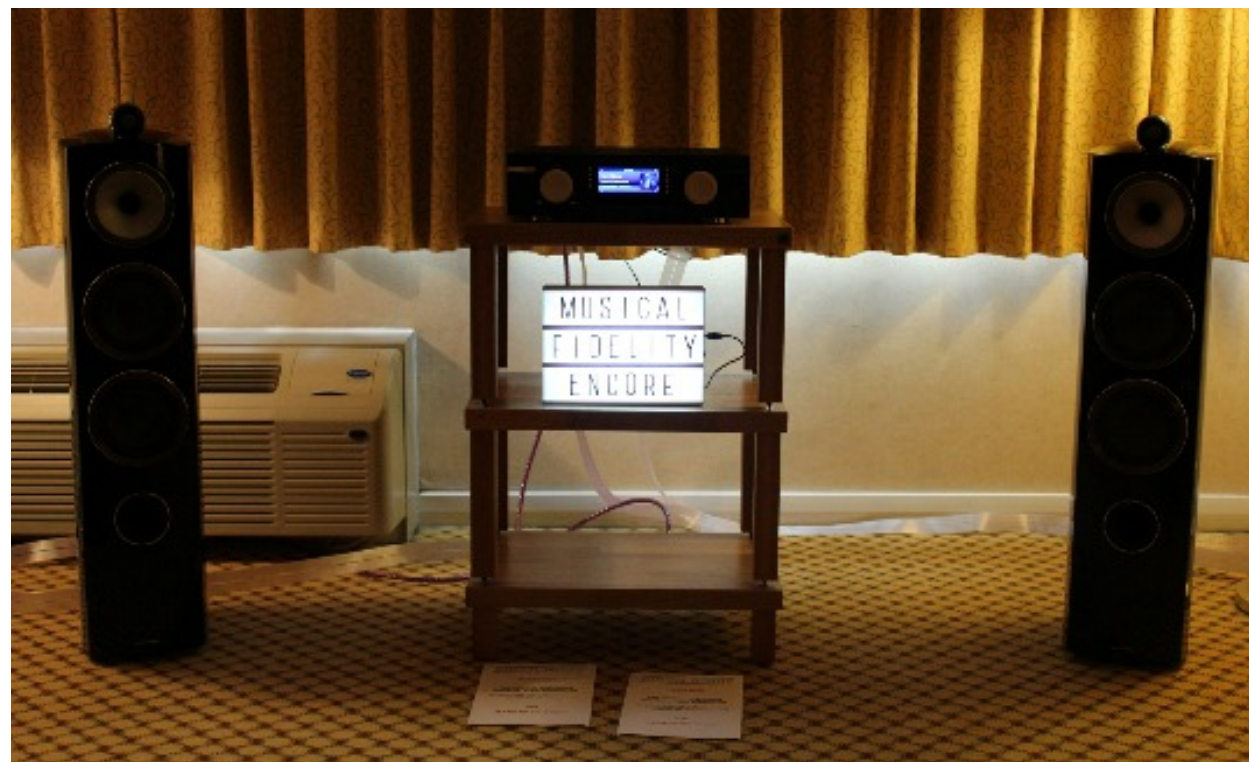


PMC were showing off their new centre speakers albeit not hooked up to anything. The two models are members of the fact range which means that anyone with the budget can now create a pretty phenomenal multi-channel set up. The smaller fact.5C is a two way design for £2,125 and the killer fact.10C (which features the famous PMC midrange dome), is £5,500. If anyone is building a home cinema using the fact range, please invite me along. I'll bring pop corn!

Their two-channel demos switched between the lovely Twenty 22 speakers and the monstrous BB5 SEs which loomed behind them.

Musical Fidelity

Musical Fidelity (winners of the Innovation award at the show) had a very interesting prototype on display. The M6 Encore 225 is basically the M6 amp (I am currently using an M6si) but with the addition of CD player/ripper and internal storage.



This all combines to offer you a very nice all-in-one package should that be the way you want to go.

Around the back of the Encore 225 are three analogue inputs, four digital (two optical, two coaxial), four USB Type A, one of which can charge smartphones and tablets, and one USB Type B. The player can handle full-fat hi-res audio up to 32-bit/384kHz and boasts 225 watts per channel.

Musical Fidelity has given it network capabilities too. Other features include a headphone amplifier, fixed and variable line level outputs and one digital output.

On-board storage is an upgradeable 1TB hard drive, which should be enough for more than 2500 CDs.

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The clever stuff is taken care of by a 64-bit Intel CPU with 2GB of RAM, which can also be upgraded if required.



Information is displayed on the front-mounted high-resolution colour display (although the colours on the display model weren't 'production' grade') and you can control it via either the supplied remote control or accompanying Android and iOS app. Expect retail to be around £4,000.

Monitor Audio

Much to my chagrin Monitor Audio had booked a pair of rooms. After yomping up to the tenth floor (at this point of the day you could spend the best part of an hour waiting for a lift) and making it to the room -



I was greeted by a post-it note stating that I have to book an appointment back on the second floor.

After a deep breath and a few expletives, I did just that. The room downstairs was home to the Bronze series multichannel system whilst, in the other, was their new flagship Platinum PL500II speakers.

These were very much the talk of the town after the demo thanks to their range of scale and effortless performance. Yes, they will hit you for £15,000 but everyone I spoke to seemed to think that was a bargain as they were assuming the asking price to be at least another ten-grand on top of that. I think it is safe to say that I am still yet to climatise to some of the prices at these shows.

Canton

Canton was demonstrating their DM 100 soundbase. This slimline design mounts four 50mm drivers and two 19mm tweeters in the front and a quartet of 100mm woofers on the underside. I'll let that sink in for a moment.



Yes, that's plenty of drivers to squeeze in to a relatively compact chassis, but the results were pretty impressive and is definitely worth checking out if having separate cinema satellite speakers is a non-starter for you.

Canton also brought along a bunch of other new models which looked rather nice. They were the Reference 1K, 3K, 5K and 7K floorstanders, the Reference 9K bookshelf speakers and the Reference 50 K Centre. These have all been fitted with newly-designed Canton drivers made from an aluminium

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cone complete with a ceramic-tungsten structure. Prices are as follows: Reference 50 K Centre, £1499, Reference 9K, £1999, £2499, Reference 7K, from £3999, Reference 5K £5499, Reference 3K, £7999, Reference 1K £16,999. The set up I heard briefly certainly sounded good but the French-made amp (the maker's name escapes me) was definitely a Gallic take on MacIntosh.

REL



Did you snigger when you just read about 100mm bass drivers? Well, REL was demonstrating what a pair of their 212SE subwoofers (£2,750 each) augmenting a pair of Harbeth speakers sounded like.

I think there is a time and a place for 2.1 and 2.2 systems and, personally, I have not found the need. However, I am an open-minded kinda guy and was quite taken by how well sorted the soundstage was in this room. Yes, there was bass aplenty but it was behaved and punchy.

Origin Live



Q Acoustics are always good value for money and my 1010i bookshelves are still going strong as part of my PC set up. The company has now taken their well regarded 7000 satellites and sub system and designed a compact amplifier to power them.

The Q-AVA is a four input Class D amp with twin optical inputs, Bluetooth and an analogue input so covering most eventualities. Although I couldn't find a price for this set up I dare say now that I bet this is punching well above its price point and will be excellent value.

Moon

American brand Moon brought in their Neo Ace all-in-one and its no-nonsense looks (I do love a bit of brutalism) shows that it means business.

The Neo Ace offers network streaming from a NAS via Moon's MiND app. There's no DLNA or AirPlay options but you do get Apt-X Bluetooth. A few rooms seemed to be using the Neo Ace and they all sounded good.



The £2.5k Moon Neo Ace gives you four digital audio inputs, as well as USB, Wi-Fi, ethernet and the aforementioned Bluetooth. All your digital stuff goes via the high resolution DAC with DSD decoding up to DSD256 and 32-bit/384kHz PCM. There's also three line-level analogue inputs as well as a moving magnet phono pre-amp for your turntable. Output is rated at 100w.

Mission

One of my meetings was to see Mission unveil a new range of speakers in the form of the LX Series. These

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compact two way standmounts stands out for a couple of reasons.



First, they look like Mission speakers with the trademark 'tweeter under the woofer' approach to speaker design. Secondly, these little speakers sound like Missions thanks to their bite and punch. A certain Karl Heinz Fink has had his hand in the design and he definitely knows a few things about how to create affordable loudspeakers - his CV includes Q Acoustics among others. Put the Mission LX on your ones to watch, especially as the bookshelf speakers cost £200 with the follow-up floorstanders coming in at around £400.

Elipson



Elipson showed off their Alpha and Omega range of affordable turntables to hit the market in some time. Yes, I am ignoring Crossley. The Elipson decks are all designed and built entirely in-house and they feature an arm that has a patented anti-skate system, automatic speed change and some models can be ordered with a phono preamp built in to the chassis. The flagship model also features Bluetooth

connectivity as well and hearing it squirt audio to the Planet speakers wirelessly it all looked and sounded impressive - albeit in a 60s spy's lounge sort of a way.

Pioneer



Pioneer was boasting about their all new A-70 integrated amp. This Class D design features an all new balanced preamp to partner the range of digital and analogue inputs on the old model. Around the front, Pioneer has seen fit to fit some of the nicest control knobs going and the performance of the amp sounded sweet. Their A50 and N50 rig wasn't bad either.

The company also let slip at the show that a firmware update for the XDP-100R portable player is now available that gives a rather significant boost to the available volume which corrects a major criticism that many have had about it.

Ophidian

The UK-based speaker makers and fans of alliteration were putting their M-series range of Minimo, Mojo and Mambo. These were powered by an Exposure DAC and amplification alongside a Melco music library. They were also utilising acoustic room treatment products from GIK Acoustics. I am not going to pretend that I have heard of Ophidian, or Exposure either for that matter,

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before but the system sounded focused as well as wide. I will certainly be looking to find out more about these brands.



shows and simply move from room-to-room listening to music on equipment that is generally out of my financial reach.

Saying that though, the Mission LX and Q Audio speakers prove that you don't need thousands-upon-thousands of pounds in order to get a good sounding set-up. Yes, PMC, MBL, Dali, et al will happily take your money but your pockets pain will be your ear's joy.

Jay Garrett



Sound and Vision Wrap Up

This year's show was a bit of a blur for me and it looks like I might be doing both days next year if I get recalled for special duties. It is always great to catch up with people that I only get to see at these



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Armour Home



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Keith Monks



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Entotem



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Monitor Audio



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Naim



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SCV Distribution



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Tannoy



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The Chord Company



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Timestep



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Music First Audio



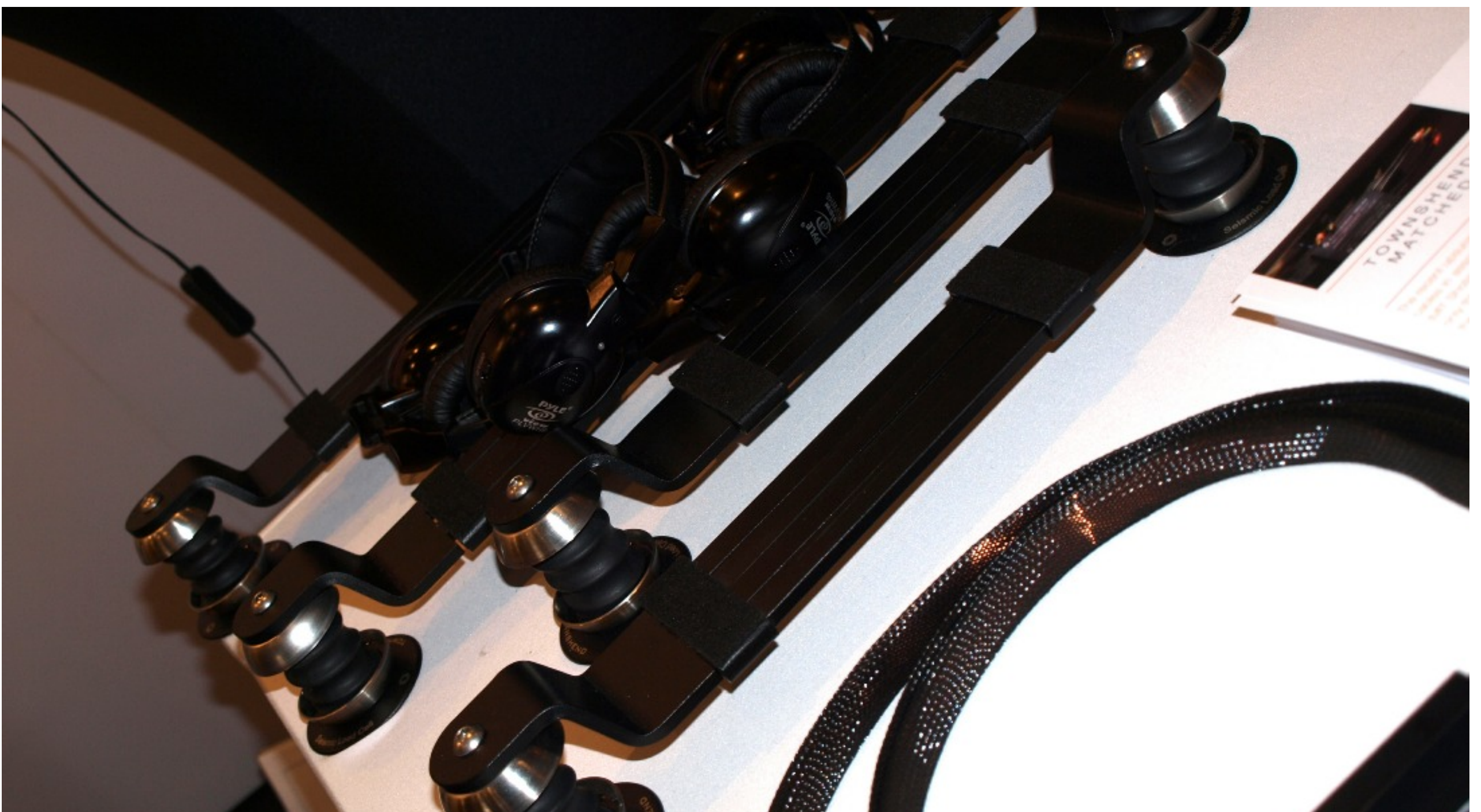
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Unison Research, Opera & Pro-Ject



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Townshend Audio



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Chord Electronics



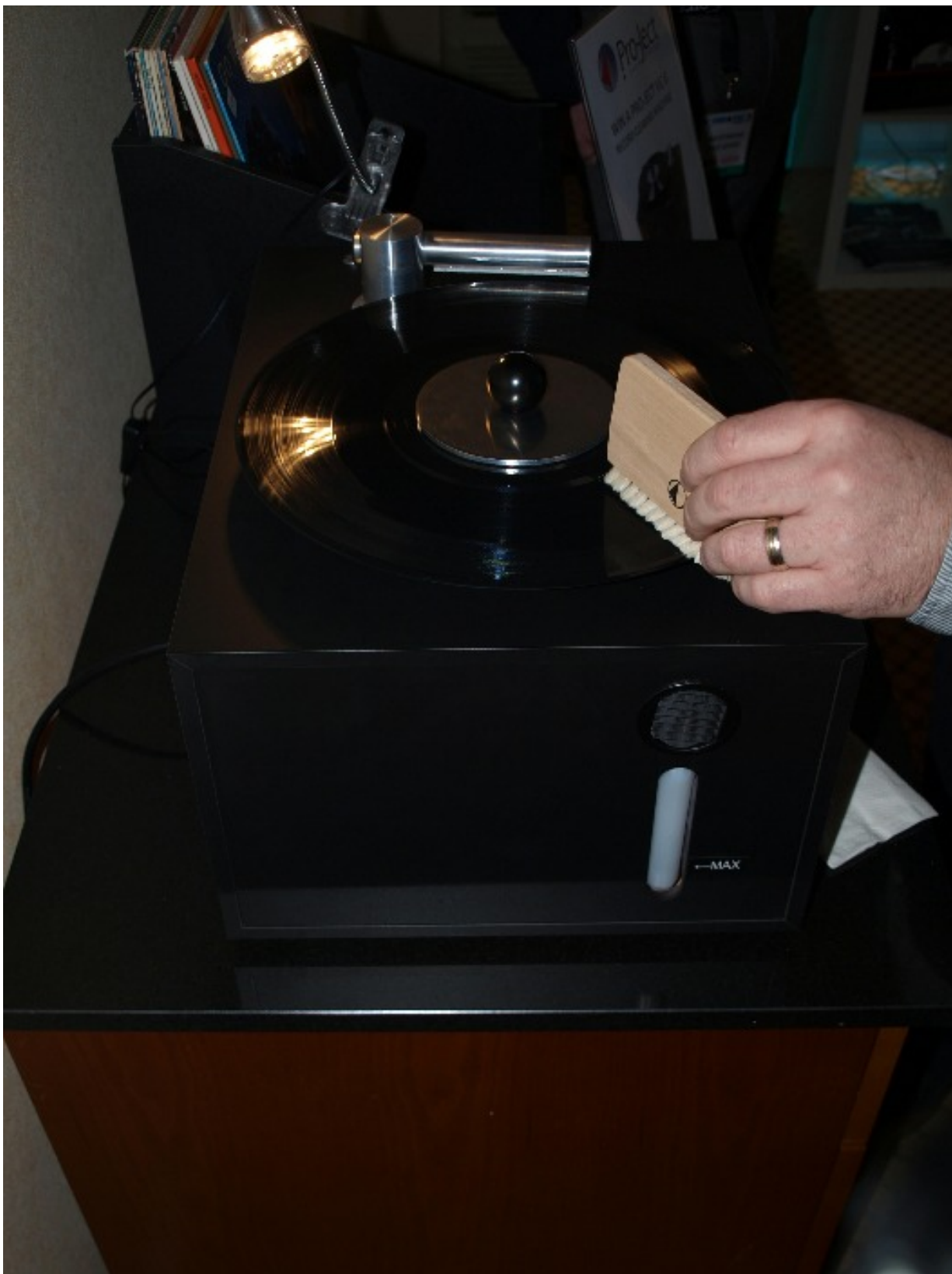
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MCRU



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Pro-Ject, Ortofon & Lehmann Audio



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Roksan



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MBL



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Astell & Kern



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Elipson



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Leema Acoustics



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Ophidian Audio



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Origin Live



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Audio Note



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Icon Audio



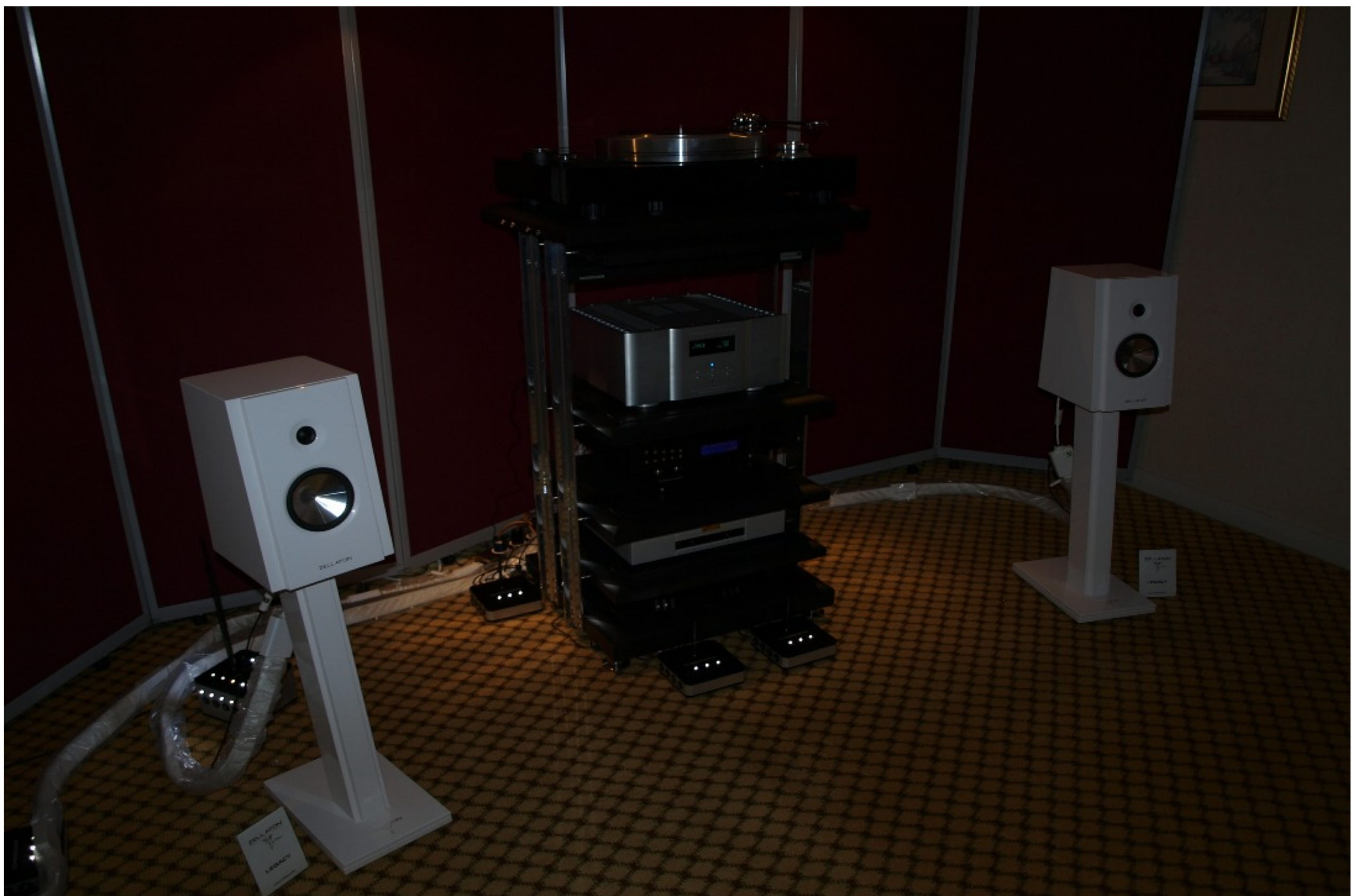
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Totem & Moon



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Flamingo Audio



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Cabasse, Parasound & GIK

Acoustics



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Decent audio, Van den Hul & Riva Audio



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Sony



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Musical Fidelity



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Tannoy



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Canton



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REL



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Astin Trew & Air Audio



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Technics



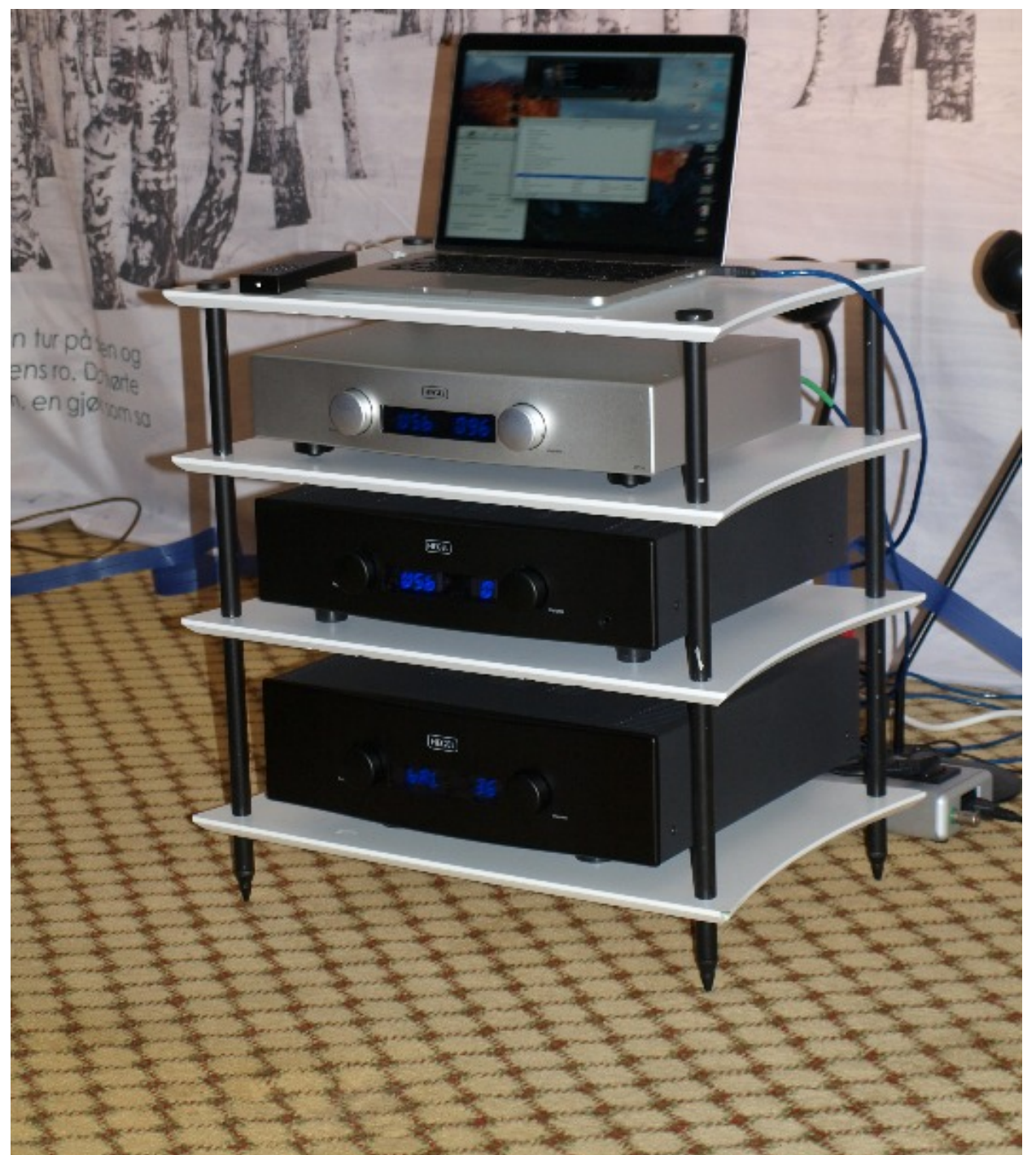
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Harbeth



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Hegel



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Rega



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ELAC



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Sound Foundations



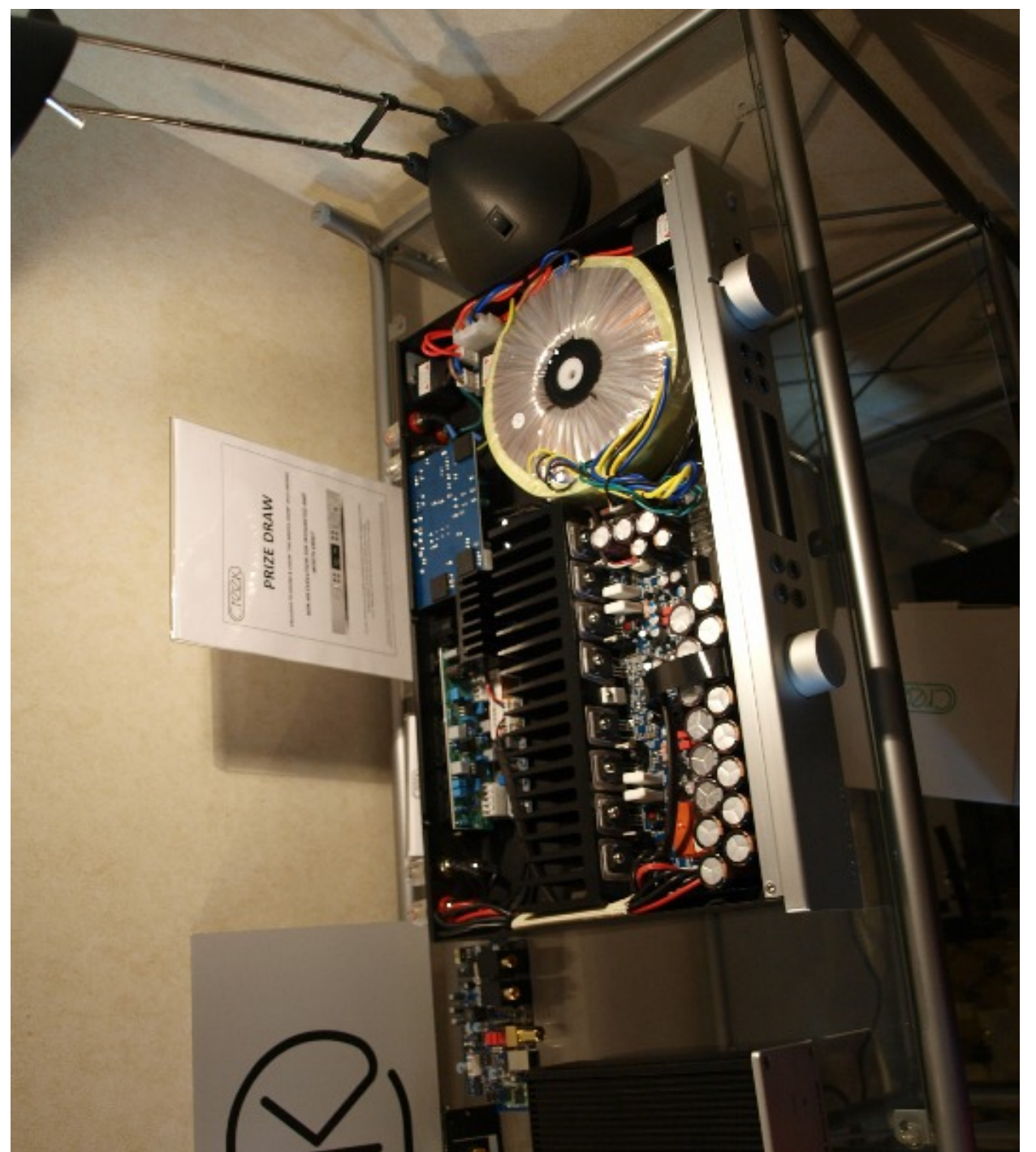
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Sound Foundations



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Creek & Epos



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NuNu Distribution



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NuNu Distribution



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Ming Da Valve Audio



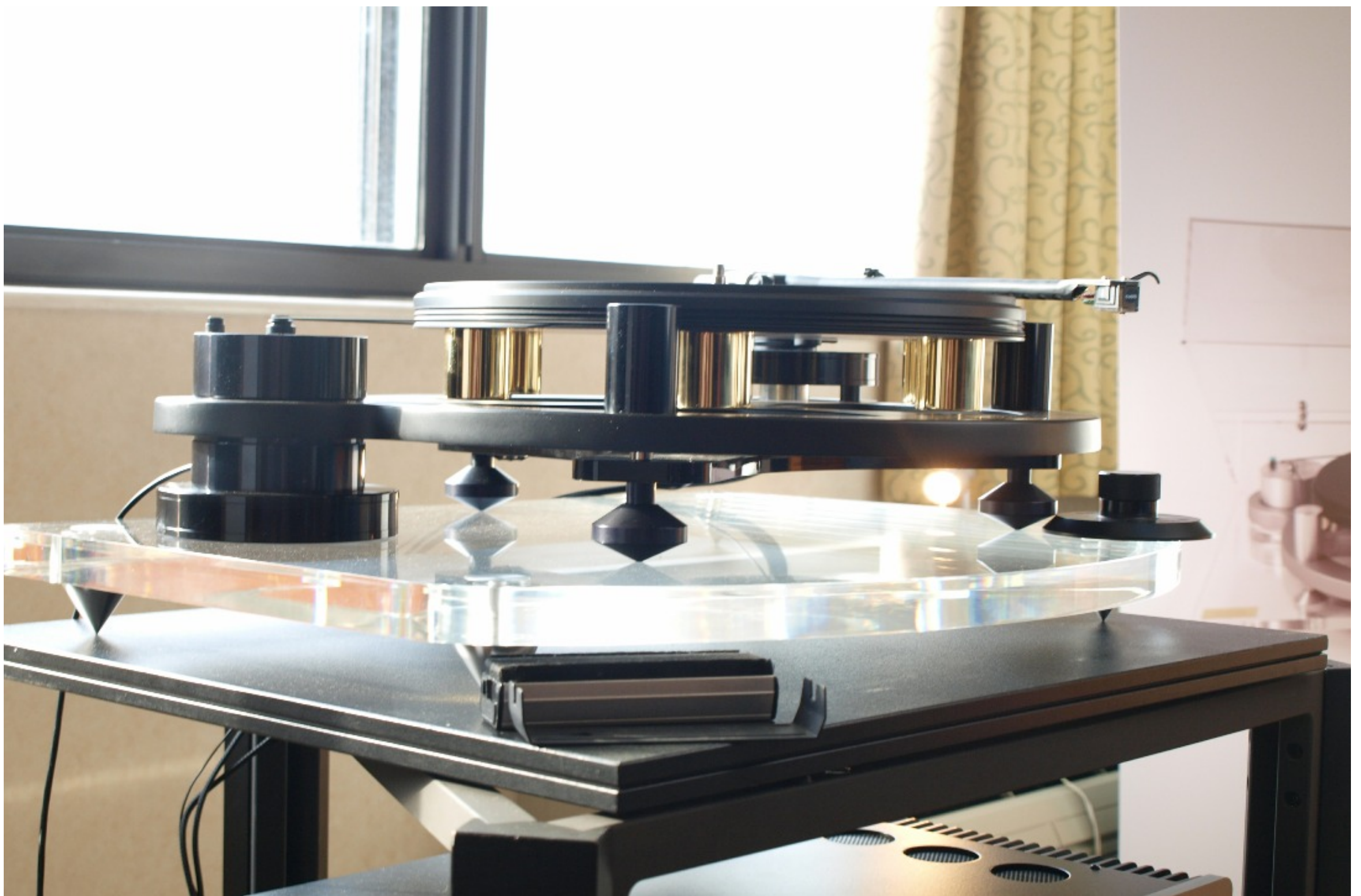
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ProAc



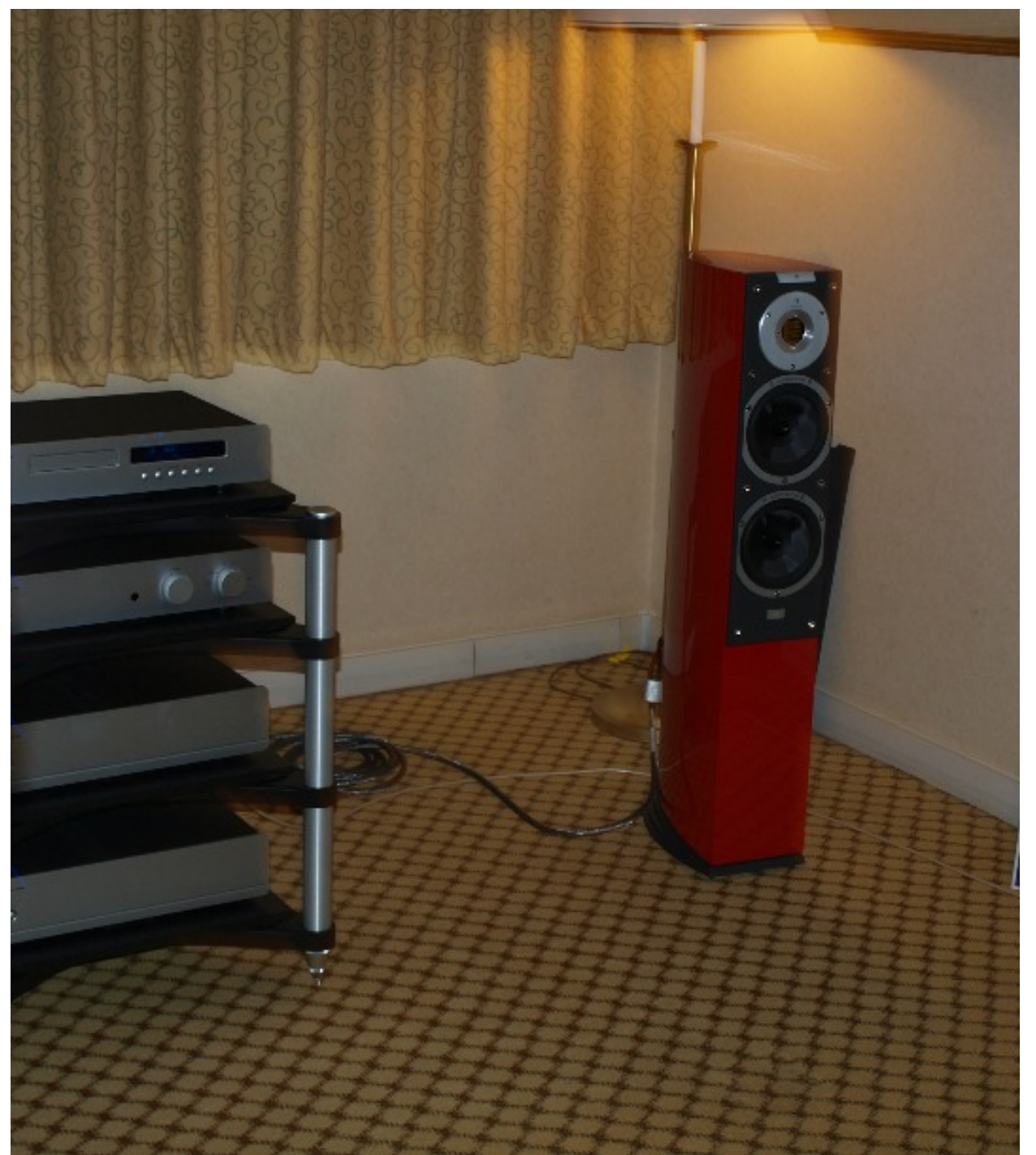
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Michell Engineering



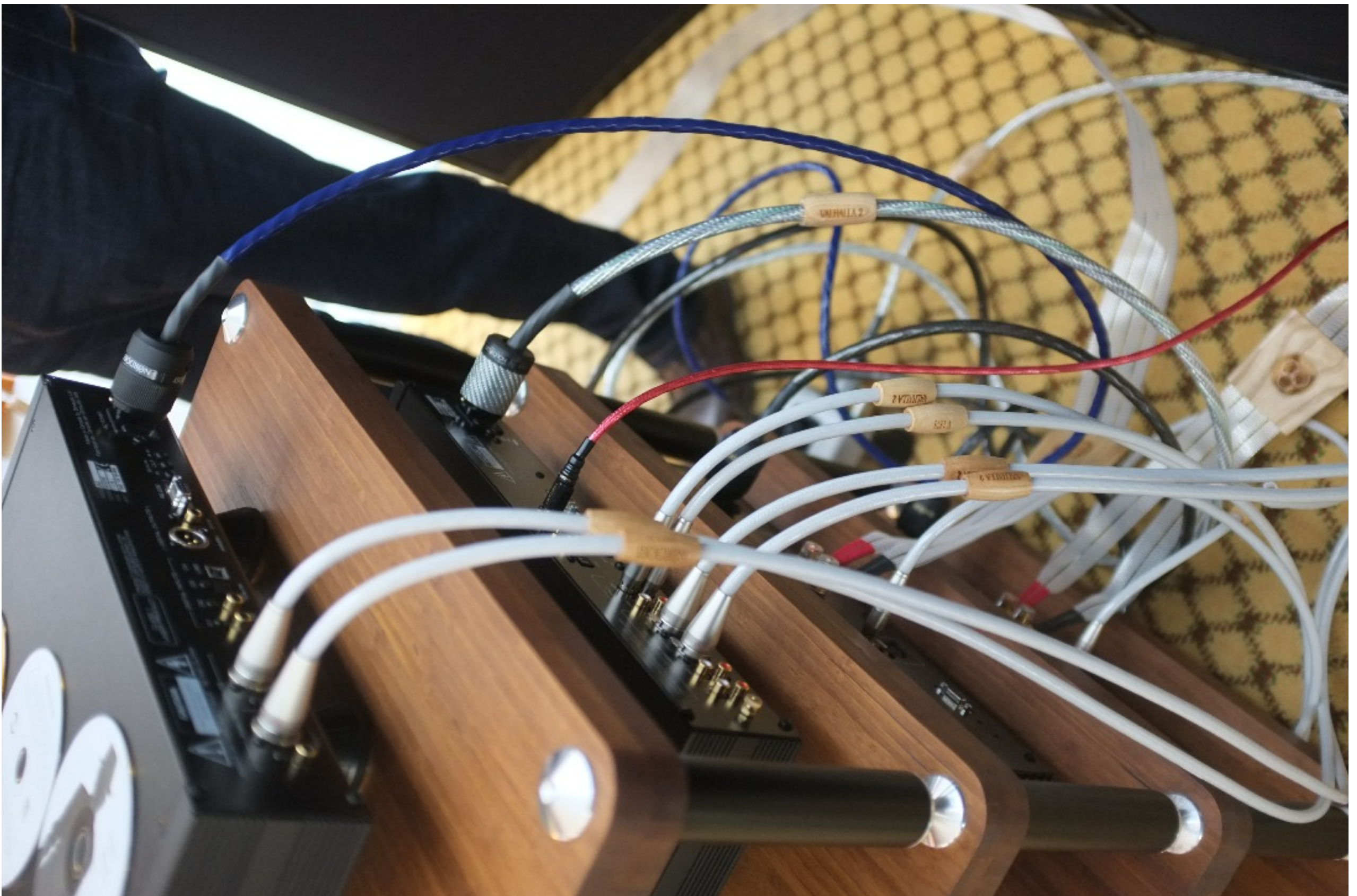
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Exposure



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Nordost



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Kudos



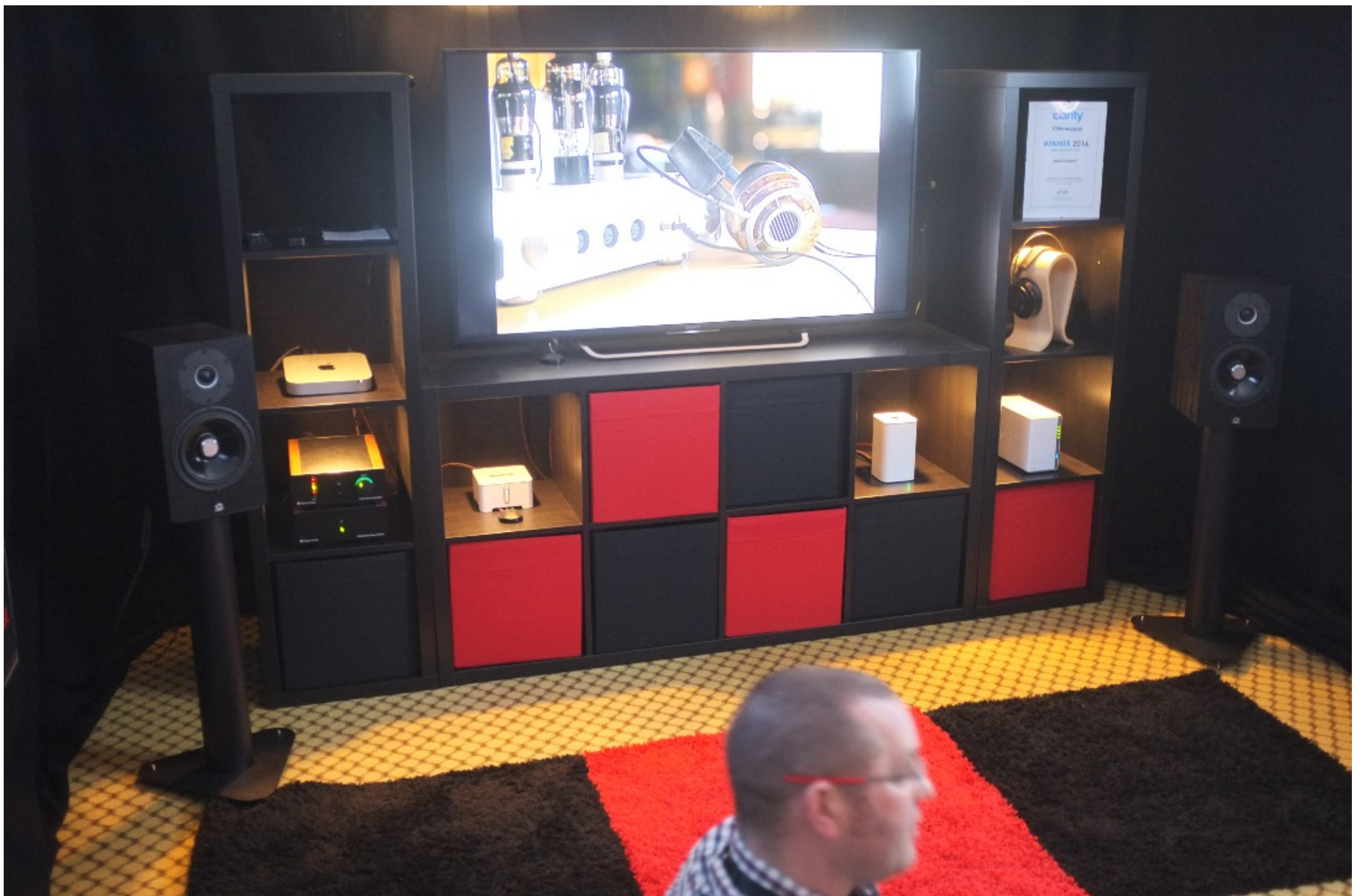
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KOG Audio



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Audioquest



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Dali



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Neat Acoustics



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Quadraspire



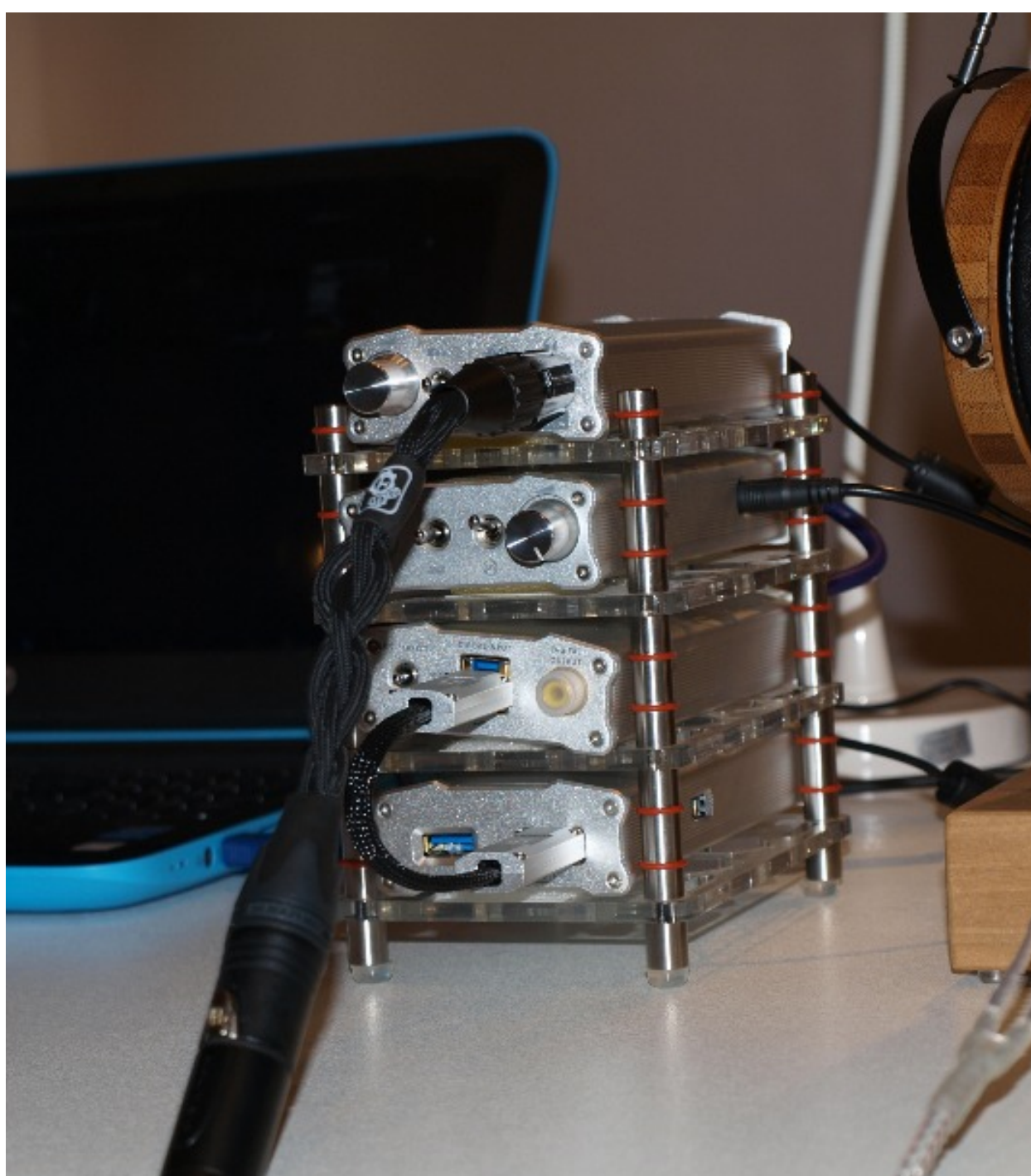
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Devialet



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Spendor



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Arcam



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Sennheiser



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Atlas



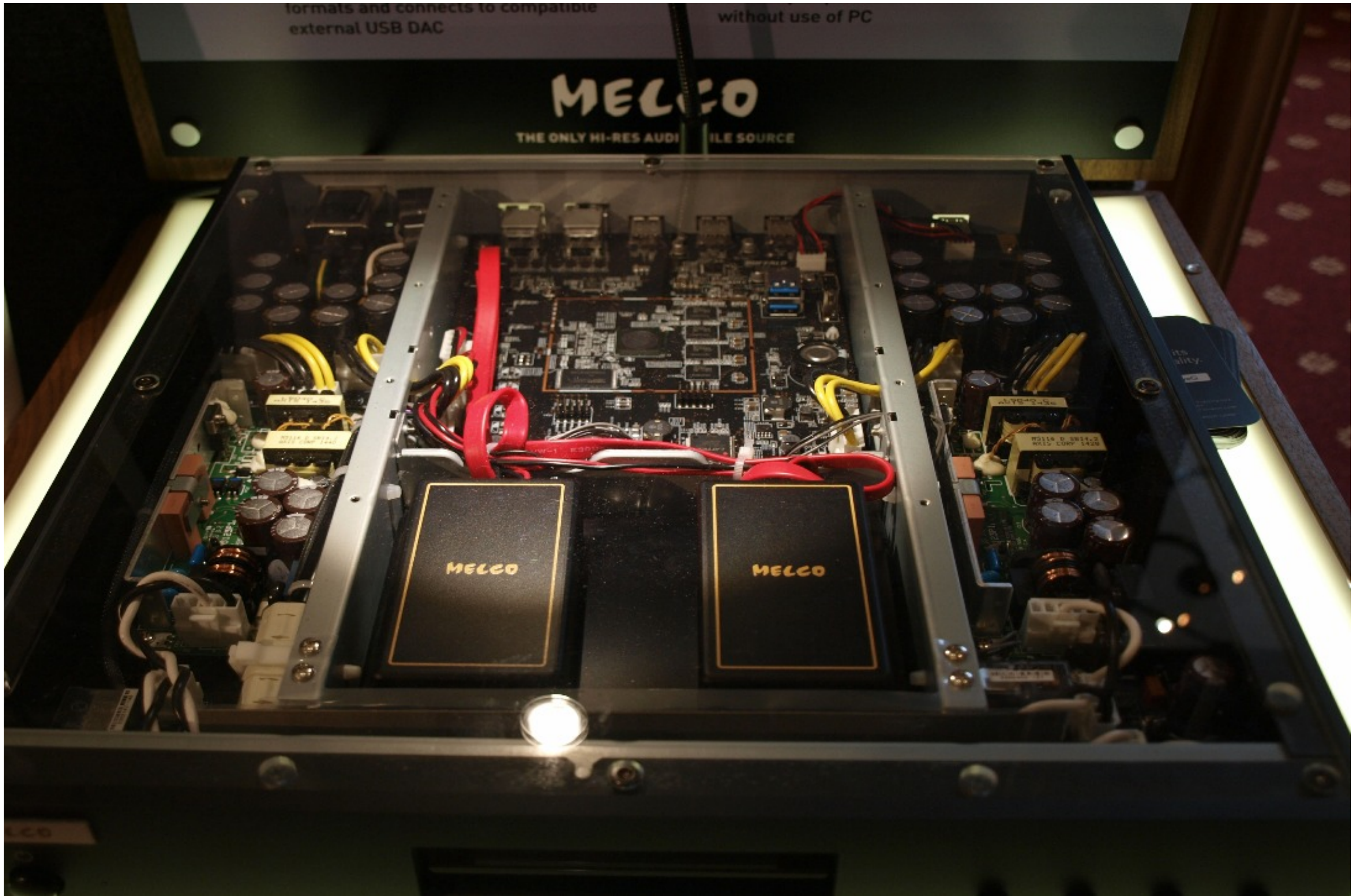
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Audio Technica



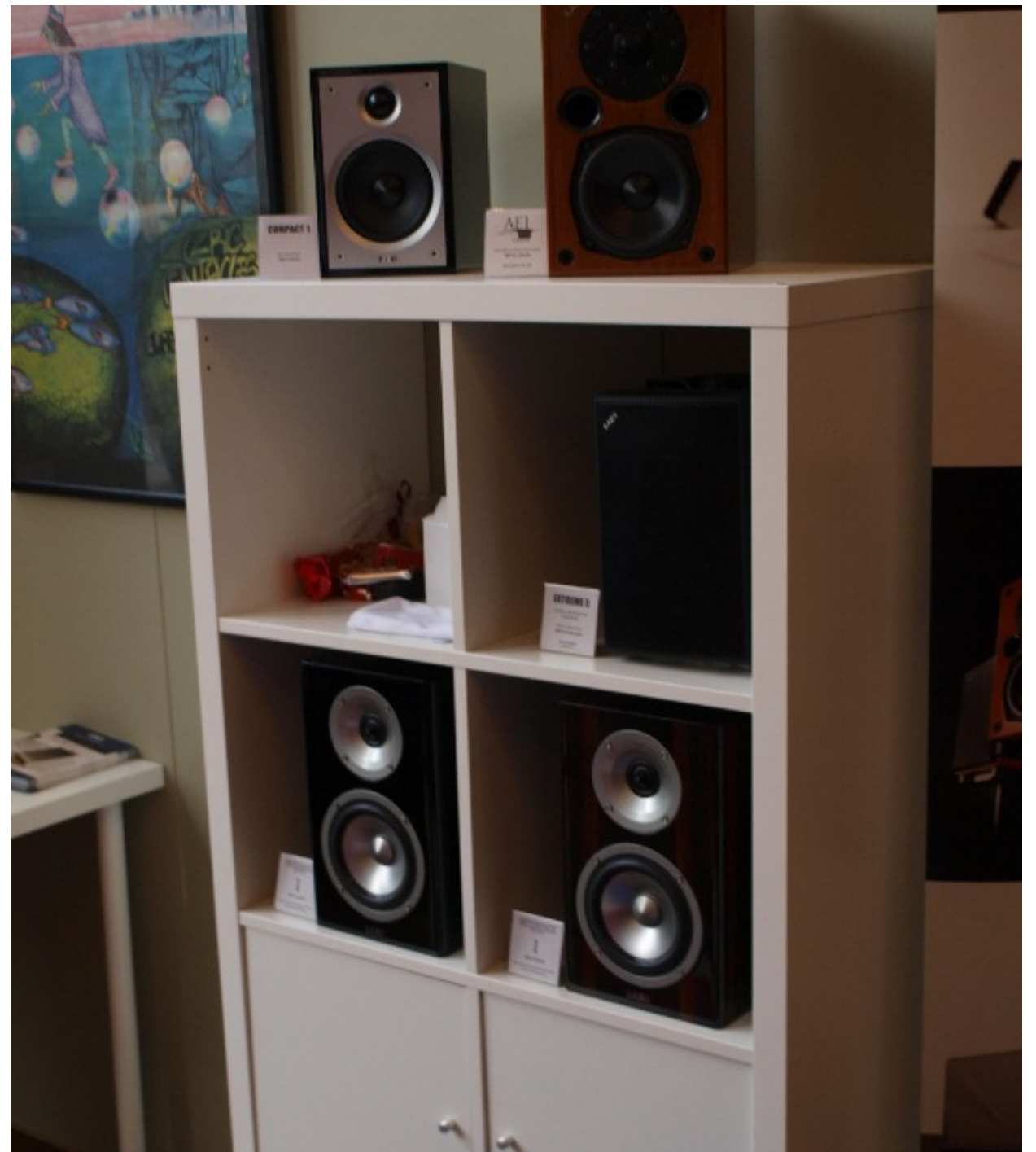
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Melco



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Acoustic Energy



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Innuos



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Q Acoustic



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PMC & Bryston



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Quad, Audiolab & Wharfedale



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KEF



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Moon and Vpi



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Bowers and Wilkins



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Wilson Benesch

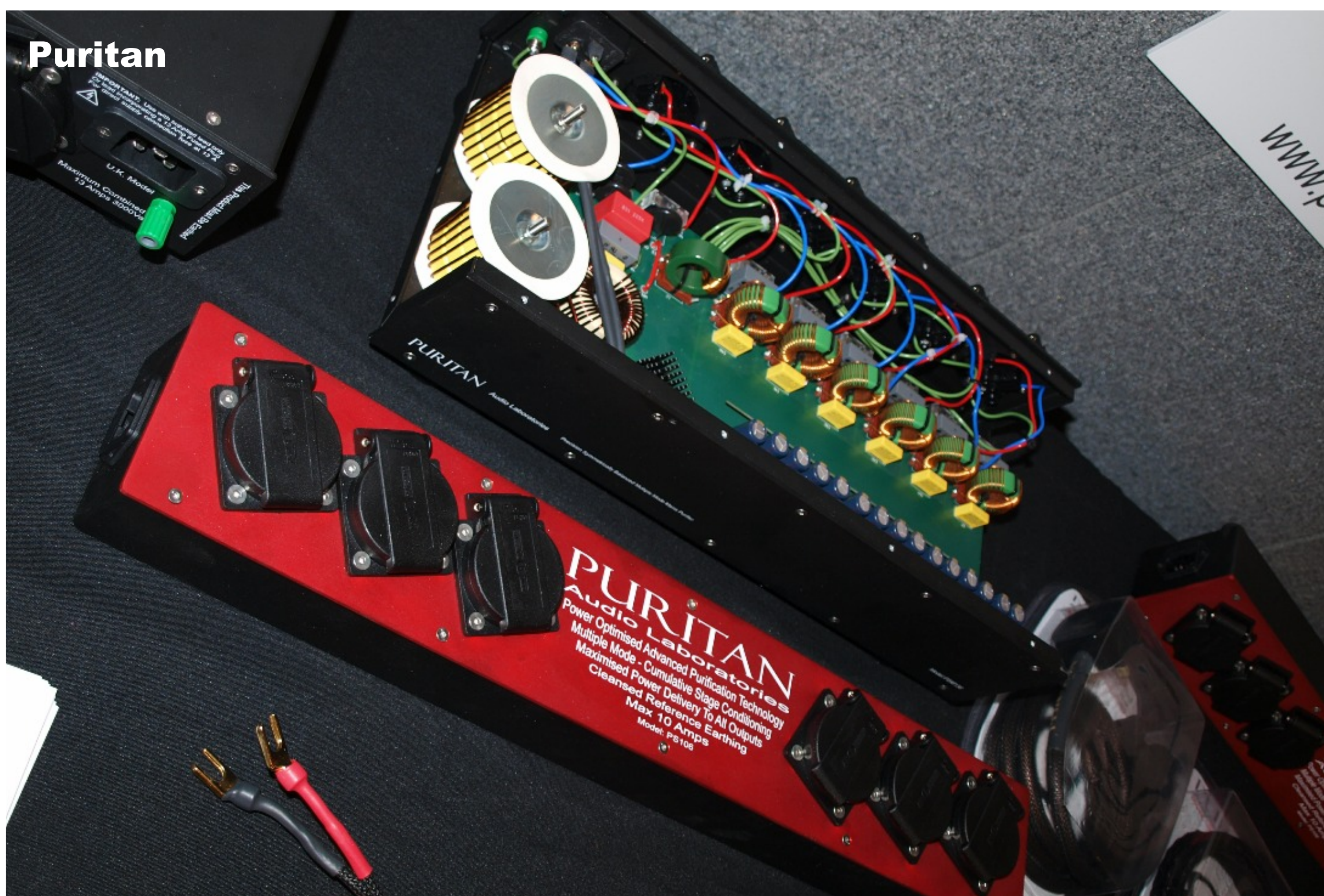


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Vinyl Adventure



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Dynaudio

