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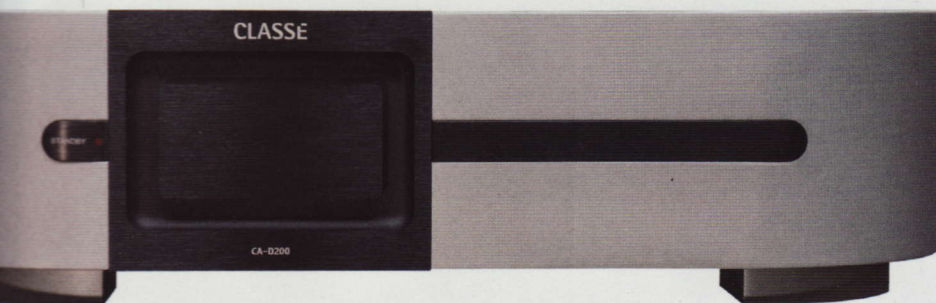
# FutureTAS

Neil Gader

## Purist Power

The Purist Audio Aquila Digital AC is a product of over 25 years' experience and is based on a ground-up design approach. Aquila, Latin for eagle, is designed for the digital format with precise attention to shielding and careful use of ferrite materials. The Aquila Digital AC's construction prevents the transmission of electromagnetic interference (EMI) signals from other digital devices to the power supply. EMI is an undesirable side effect, which can seep into an analog front end from the AC line. Purist also offers the Aquila with an optional Furutech C7 plug, which will allow it to work with devices such as the Mac Mini.

**Price:** \$90/1.0m; \$120 for each additional 0.5m. [puristaudiodesign.com](http://puristaudiodesign.com)



## Classé Class D

The Delta CA-D200 is the first Class D amplifier to carry the Classé imprimatur. The 200Wpc CA-D200 employs sophisticated processing and amplification technologies to deliver on the elusive promise of Class D designs. Boasting a proprietary Classé-designed switch-mode power supply and switching amplification stages, it is the product of a design team with over 50 years' combined experience in switching technologies. DSP is used to optimize the performance of the system, lowering the dead-band-time—the gap produced when the plus and minus halves of the switching amplifier's output stage are both off—to an ultra-low 3 nanoseconds or less. This in turn reduces distortion and noise to an unprecedented degree, thereby enabling minimal use of overall negative feedback, which further elevates the amplifier's sonic performance. **Price:** \$4000 [classeaudio.com](http://classeaudio.com)

## In Synch

The Bryston BUC-1 is a special purpose digital-to-digital converter that enables music enthusiasts to use their computer as a high-resolution music source even if their existing digital-to-analog converter (DAC) does not have asynchronous USB capability. The Bryston BUC-1 converter allows for native 24-bit resolution at sampling rates up to 192kHz. The BUC-1 takes a standard USB output from the computer and delivers bit-perfect data via either an AES/EBU or SPDIF output to any DAC. Most crucially, the Bryston BUC-1 takes control of the master timing of the audio system delivering ultra-low-jitter, high-resolution audio to any outboard DAC. The BUC-1 also differentiates itself from the competition with a robust linear power supply design, which features ultra-stable voltage regulation, and extremely low noise/low distortion circuitry throughout.

**Price:** \$799. [bryston.com](http://bryston.com)







Welcome to the 2014 edition of *The Absolute Sound's* Editors' Choice Awards, our annual Recommended Products list. On the following pages we present the gear that our editors and writers have selected as most worthy of your consideration. These are the components we ourselves would buy—or recommend to friends and family. Each product category is divided into price ranges, with components listed in order of ascending cost (though a few items, like cables and accessories, are listed alphabetically). Each recommendation is also accompanied by a capsule review, the original reviewer's name or initials, and the issue the review appeared in. Note that in a few cases a product may have been reviewed in one of our sister publications, *Playback* or *AVguide.com*, or the review may be pending publication, or the product may not have been formally reviewed but earns a recommendation based on one or more writer's extensive experience with it. Given that this is the high end, where components generally have long lifespans, some of our recommendations look back several years. At the same time, in an effort to be as selective and up-to-date as possible, we have dropped some components that appeared on last year's list, usually because they have been discontinued but sometimes because fresh competition has caused us to reconsider the choice.





perceptions of 300B SETs. Scot Markwell, 128

### Electrocompaniet AW180

**\$10,850/pr.**

The AW180 is a "tube-like" solid-state monoblock amp offering 180W into 8 ohms (considerably more into lower impedances). It provides very natural timbre and exceptionally realistic upper bass and lower midrange. Both low- and high-level dynamic contrasts are excellent. AHC, 198

### GamuT Audio D200i

**\$12,490**

This 200W solid-state amplifier has much of the liquidity, three-dimensionality, and image density of tubes as well as the expected virtues of solid-state: tonal consistency, frequency extension, and bass control. It runs relatively cool, is tonally neutral, and should be very reliable, producing a deep soundstage and enough power to drive most speakers well. Its only weakness is a tiny

wisp of "fuzz" in the upper frequencies, noticeable only in a high-resolution system. KM, 229

### AVM SA8

**\$13,880**

This beautifully made German powerhouse delivers 220Wpc into 8 ohms and can double that output into 4 ohms. The SA8 is unfazed by difficult loudspeaker loads, thanks to its overbuilt output stage and massive power supply that features five transformers. The design is unusual in that the driver stage is built like a mini-power amplifier fed from its own isolated supply. AHC found that the SA8 is so clean and transparent that you will hear far more of the colorations in the rest of your system than you will those of the SA8. The amplifier's sheer power and dynamic abilities are breathtaking. Gorgeous metalwork and German craftsmanship round out this appealing package. AHC, 238

### Classé Audio CA-M600

**\$14,000/pr.**

Thanks to a highly sophisticated passive cooling system, the Classé monoblocks don't run hot; nevertheless, their sheer dynamism and alacrity are stunning. Blinding speed is coupled to a spookily low noise floor. So linear and revealing are these amplifiers that in some systems they may best be coupled with tubes elsewhere in the audio chain. You can search far and wide for a better amplifier at double the price. JHb, 210

### Triode Corporation TRX-M300

**\$14,000**

Think of the M300 as a modern version of the Western Electric WE 91A, complete with a 274B rectifier, a pair of 310A receiving pentodes, and a Psvane WE300B. Image solidity, according to DO, can only be described as magical; solid-state amps would kill for it. Bandwidth and transient speed are pretty impressive for an SET

amplifier. Don't expect bone-crushing bass slam, but prepare to be surprised by its dynamic prowess and the breathtaking acceleration of an orchestral crescendo from soft to loud. Speakers of 96dB+ sensitivity are advisable. TAS' 2013 Low-Powered SET of the Year. DO, 236

### Hegel H30 Reference

**\$15,000**

This Norwegian powerhouse (375Wpc into 8 ohms) combines the bass control and dynamic impact of a dreadnought design with a midrange and treble refinement, delicacy, and sweetness reminiscent of a single-ended triode amplifier. The midrange, in particular, is highly vivid and present, with a palpability and directness of expression RH has not heard in an amplifier near the H30's price. RH, 223



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imparted a warmer cast to timbres. AT, 196

### **Classé CP-800** **\$6000**

Classé has pulled quite a rabbit from its hat with the CP-800, a solid-state preamplifier that corrects the power coming in from the wall and can be used with almost any voltage. It boasts an exceptionally low noise floor and a supremely high-resolution treble. Its tonal character is always firmly neutral. A spectacular performer that comes loaded with options, it has the ability to run external subwoofers. (Recently upgraded with 192kHz for USB, Ethernet for streaming AirPlay and DLNA, and IP control for use with Classé App.) JHb, 230

### **Lamm LL2.1** **\$6290**

This all-tube lineage preamp (with tube rectification) captures 80% of price-no-object preamps for a fraction of their cost, said our reviewer DO. Never in-your-face analytical, the LL2.1 frames details organically within the fabric of the music. Treble, bass, and transparency can be improved by using the right after-market tubes. DO, 198

### **Aesthetix Janus/Janus Signature** **\$7000/\$10,000**

The Janus combines Aesthetix' Calypso lineage with a scaled-down Rhea phonostage in a single chassis. The Signature version features upgraded parts in the identical circuit. The units share numerous qualities: speed and detail; a low noise floor; precise rhythms; dynamics that are almost reference-caliber; and a laid-back perspective. The quiet background and smooth highs add up to long hours of glorious, fatigue-free listening. AT, 196

### **Balanced Audio Technology VK-42SE** **\$7495-\$8995 (depending on options)**

BAT designer Victor Khomenko is rightly proud of the numerous programming features on the 42SE preamplifier. But that's only the start of the story. A great value, this exemplary solid-state design is most notable for its smooth, silky sound and superbly low noise floor. Where it falls short of more elaborate designs is in resolution and dynamics. JHb, 179



### **Zesto Audio Leto** **\$7500**

The Leto lineage preamplifier is cut completely from the same sonic cloth as the Andros PS1 phonostage PS reviewed last year. Like the Andros, the Leto is a contemporary all-tube design, boasting the roundedness, dimensionality, and body of classic tubes without their tonal anomalies, bass-end deficiencies, and relatively high noise levels. Also like the Andros, the really distinguishing characteristic here is a wonderful freedom from the usual sorts of sonic hype and electromechanical artifacts. PS, 230

### **Pass Labs XP20** **\$8600**

Very quiet, with no trace of solid-state hardness, excellent musical life, and the best low-level detail AHC has encountered. Sound-staging is as real in imaging, width, and depth as the recording permits. Excellent deep bass, and clean, detailed upper midrange and treble that get the most out of flute, clarinet, strings, piano, and the full range of male and female voice. AHC's new reference preamp. AHC, 192

### **mbl C11** **\$8800**

With civilized sonics, both airy and open, dynamics that are lively, and dimensionality and imaging that are exceptional, the C11 is a joy to use in concert with other Corona gear, where control and communication via Ethernet link is glitch-free. It is also equipped with one of the most sonically transparent analog volume control (via a motorized potentiometer) that we've come across. NG, 228

### **Cary Audio SLP-05** **\$8995**

Sporting eight 6SN7 vacuum tubes in its main chassis and a 5AR4 rectifier tube in its outboard power supply, this zero-feedback, balanced lineage ranks among the best. Highly transparent, it transports you to the recorded event, combining tonal naturalness, a lifelike sense of instrumental body and weight, air, and dimensionality in a way that brings recordings to startling life. WG, 205

### **\$10,000 and above** **Apex High Fi Audio Pinnacle** **\$10,000**

Functionally, the Pinnacle performs double-duty as both a headphone amp and a lineage preamp. A convincing design on a technical level that happens to deliver plenty of tube magic. Harmonic textures are sweet, velvety, and pure. Its overall soundstage exhibits considerable grandeur, though it slightly congests space between instruments. There is a romantic blush about the lower midrange. Low-level detail is plentiful and the treble range is gorgeously nuanced with firm transient control. DO, 214

### **conrad-johnson ET5 Preamplifier** **\$10,000**

The latest addition to conrad-johnson's enhanced triode preamplifier lineup offers world-class soundstaging replete with 3-D image outlines. Bass lines

are tightly defined, while the upper registers are open and free of gratuitous brightness. Tonal colors approach the vividness of the real thing without euphonic adulteration. Expect no sonic editorializing from this preamp! It refuses to stray from neutrality and maintains an even-handed perspective top to bottom. Forthcoming

### **Mark Levinson No. 326S** **\$10,000 (optional phonoboard, \$1500)**

The No. 326 possesses greater transparency and fidelity to the source than previous ML preamps, with less of the characteristic ML house sound. Astonishingly focused and detailed, yet smooth, suave, and sophisticated. Superb features and ergonomics make the No. 326S a pleasure to use on a daily basis. RH, 161

### **Jeff Rowland Design Group Corus** **\$14,900**

This lineage is, perhaps, the most beautifully made piece of audio electronics RH has seen. It also offers an extraordinary user interface and outstanding feature-set. The sound is simultaneously resolved and relaxed, drawing the listener into the presentation. The bass performance is exemplary, with excellent pitch definition and bottom-end dynamics. The Corus is very quiet, allowing low-level details to come to life. A joy to look at and use on a daily basis. RH, 228

### **Boulder 1010** **\$15,000**

A preamp that complements all of the sonic virtues of the Boulder 1050 power amp, and does so with exceptional resolving power and detail. An excellent phonostage. The ability to adjust the level of each input to match. Excellent remote control features. Superb Boulder construction. AHC, 188 and 208