

'HIGH END DAYS' PARIS

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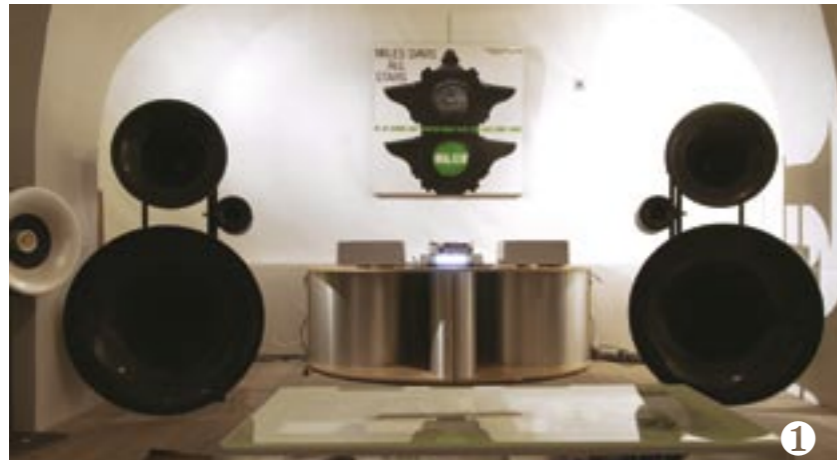
High End Days', which took place on the 13th, 14th and 15th of March in Paris, offered something special to anyone interested in hearing music reproduction from some of the very best hi-fi systems available.

Instead of exhibiting in a hotel or hall, with the risk of sonically compromised rooms and sound drift between systems, SPAT, the organisers of the usual Paris Salon Hi-Fi Home Cinema show (see *Hi-Fi News* Jan '09), brought the French concept of *portes ouvertes* to hi-fi. Truly top-end manufacturers, including Focal JMLab, Audio Note, Avant-Garde, Cabasse, Brinkmann, YBA and Rockport Technologies were invited to choose their preferred location to present their systems.

The systems thus benefited from dedicated listening rooms, with an open invitation (and the publicity went beyond the hi-fi press) to hear products rarely heard by the public.

Apart from being able to hear genuinely top-flight systems in comfortable, sonically optimised listening rooms, one of my favourite moments during the event was when a professional musician asked if an excerpt could be played from one of his recordings on CD.

He listened enraptured and afterwards explained that he had not realised how close top-class hi-fi could come to reproducing the moment. High End Days indeed!



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1. L'Objet Sonore demonstrated Avant Garde's Trio & Basshorn speaker system. You'll need a big room to accommodate the Basshorn modules, which are over 2m wide. Each contains two 12in drivers and 350W power amps, yet sensitivity is 102dB. Hold on to your hats!

2. Sound and Colors showed one of the most visually striking systems, with the Souldution (sic) CD player and preamp coupled with power amplification and speakers from Cabasse. It drew plenty of interest, so it's just as well that Cabasse's €100,000 'La Sphère' speakers boast a wider than normal 'sweet-spot'.

3. Présence Audio Conseil hosted the 2m-tall Grande Utopia EM from Focal's Utopia III range, now with an electromagnet on its 40cm bass driver. In the foreground is the Viola Cadenza preamp [see opposite, top right].



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1. Continuing its Focal Utopia theme, Présence Audio also demonstrated the three-way Scala Utopia, which echoes the 'moving skeleton' appearance of its bigger brother [opposite]. Electronics are by YBA.

2. Clearaudio's Maximum Solution turntable with TT-2 parallel tracking tonearm and Da Vinci cartridge sits next to a Goldmund Eidos 36A CD/SACD player. While the player may not be as striking as the deck it is just as beautifully crafted – as it should be at €32,350.

3. This tasty selection of kit from Acoustic Gallery includes a Brinkmann Oasis turntable and dCS Puccini integrated CD player. Underneath is the Puccini U-Clock and a Nagra VPS (valve phono stage) while a MBL 5011 preamp sits below. Also shown are PS Audio and Hydra power conditioners.

4. No skimping on the source: on the GP Audio stand at Présence Audio Conseil were three boxes from dCS – the Paganini SACD/CD transport, DAC and Clock. On top is the Viola Cadenza preamp, feeding the Viola Symphony power amp [left of picture] that was used to drive the Grande Utopia EM speakers [opposite].



1. From Sound and Colors, the Ayre MX-R monoblocks and Magico Mini 2 speakers produced magical sound for more modestly sized rooms. The larger 85kg Soudution 710 stereo power amp (pictured centre) and the VTL MB450 monoblocks (nearest speakers) were not in use here.

2. Olivier Roger, the French importer of Brinkmann turntables, shows *HFN* the direct-drive Brinkmann Oasis (with Brinkmann 10.1 arm and modified EMT cartridge) on its specially adapted HRS support.



3. On display at Acoustic Gallery were these magnificent Mira Grand speakers from Rockport Technologies. Standing 1.74m tall their slim width is deceptive – look closely and you'll see the sides contain a couple of 10in woofers to augment the midrange units and Scanspeak tweeter on the baffle.

4. An eclectic mix of rarely seen kit. At the bottom, a Weiss 'Jason' CD player from Switzerland with 'Medea' DAC. From Matthew James, Cello's Chorale preamp and Master power supply. Micromega's Epure turntable sits up top.