audio research H N G H D E FINITION

AWARDS 2018

Stereophile! Recommended Components: REF6

Recommended Components: 2018 Edition Preamplifiers

Preamplifiers

Editor's Note: Apart from the CAT, Shindo, and Placette, all the Class A preamplifiers offer balanced inputs and outputs. And unless noted, the preamplifiers listed do not have phono stages.

A

Audio Research REF6: \$14,000

Replacing Audio Research's Reference 5 SE of 2011, the Reference 6 is a product in which everything-parts, circuitry, the whole megillah-has been revised, the upgrades including a heftier mains transformer, an improved volume-control circuit, and new custom-made capacitors. The audio circuits include three 6H30 dual-triode tubes per channel, while the power supply has one 6H30 and one 6550WE tube. The eight pairs of line-level inputs are evenly divided between single-ended (RCA) and balanced (XLR), alongside three pairs each of single-ended and balanced outputs. Among the Reference 6's electronically controlled functions are its 103-step volume control, signal-polarity inversion, and a mono switch. MF noted the Reference 6's unimpeachable specs, and reported that while listening to favorite recordings through it, he heard "intense surprises that I'm sure can't be measured. Record after record, I found that the Reference 6 greatly increased my understanding of very familiar recordings." In measuring the Reference 6, JA noted "superb channel matching," "inconsequential ACsupply noise," and, overall, "little hint of the presence of tubes in the circuit" (that last observation intended as a compliment). (Vol.39 No.12 WWW)





Stereophile! Recommended Components: Reference Phono 3

A

Audio Research REF Phono 3: \$14,000

Intended as a replacement for their Reference Phono 2SE, Audio Research's Reference Phono 3 is a hybrid tubed/solid-state phono preamp that offers two independently configurable inputs with various gain and loading options, all of which can be stored in its memory. It has a FET input stage and uses a total of six 6H30 dual-triode tubes in the signal path, plus an additional 6H30 and a 6550WE tube for power-supply regulation. The Reference Phono 3 treated MF to "an embarrassment of tonal riches, with silky, textured delicacy emerging from 'black' backgrounds"—and that was fresh out of the box! Mikey's conclusion: "If \$14,000 is within your budget, the Reference Phono 3 is a must-listen." (Vol.40 No.1)





Stereophile! Recommended Components: Tube Dampening Rings

Audio Research Tube Damping Rings: \$4 each ★

Damping rings for all AR products are now available to the public at large. They're made of a proprietary polymer material that converts kinetic energy to heat, and their improvements are not subtle, exclaims BJR: tighter, cleaner, deeper, more dynamic bass; more coherent transient attacks; crisper, more extended highs; plus "improvements in the reproduction of subtle gradations of low-level dynamics." Give 'em a whirl—the cost is minimal. (Vol.23 No.2, Vol.26 No.8)





TAS: Golden Ear Award 2018 – VT80SE

Audio Research Corporation VT80SE stereo amplifier \$8900

The latest version of this amplifier in Audio Research's Foundation series, the VT80SE uses a hybrid circuit with JFETs along with 6H30 driver tubes and KT150 output tubes to produce 75Wpc. It also includes a first-for-Audio-Research auto-biasing system to automatically set the bias for the output tubes, which allows you to use a variety of other valves: 6550s, KT88s, KT90s, and KT120s. When the output tubes need replacing, all you have to do is plug in new ones and the biasing circuit automatically sets the bias for them. It also adjusts the bias as tubes age, assuring the best sound at all times. Whichever valves you use, the amplifier is protected from catastrophic tube failure by individual tube fuses. A timer shows how many hours are on the output tubes. The VT80SE exhibits Audio Research's typical wide-open, detailed but not etched sound, with rich harmonic content and quick transients. Stylistically, the amplifier matches other components in the Foundation Series, which includes the LS28 linestage, the DAC9 DAC, and the PH9 phono preamp. It does not have a remote, but it can be turned on/off using the 12-volt trigger connection to the linestage. Like all recent Audio Research gear, it's extremely quiet.









TAS RMAF 2018: Best Sound (Cost No Object)

Best Sound (Cost No Object) The system in the Crestone Peak Room had the Sonus Faber Aida 2 loudspeakers (\$130,000/pr.), Audio Research 160M mono power amplifiers (\$30,000/pr.) and S Reference 9 CD9 player/DAC (\$13,000), Reference 6 linestage (\$14,000), HSR SXR equipment stands, and Kubala-Sosna cabling.









Rocky Mountain International HiFi Press Awards (RIHPA) 2018: Best mono power amplifier



- Mono Power Amplifier
 - Audio Research Reference 160M
 - CH Precision M1
 - Engström ERIC
 - PS Audio Stellar M700
 - VTL Siegfried Series II







TAS 2018 Editor's Choice Awards: GSi75

NG, 218

Absolary Integrated

\$26,500 [Simature \$14,500]

This hybrid amplifier com-

hizes the tube paramp stage

paramplifies with a newly

of Abuchus's supects Passion

designed 150% or solid-state

sinner, the laternated scenario

remarkably like a puse tube

design. Specifically, the late-

gated delivers much of the

orig character of Absolute's

Passino SET corres annihiles.

with a sicharry of texture has

monic density, and a proprose

adding to its should incom-

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\$30,000

\$24,500

design-and not just any take

contrast stars. Descrite the trans-

the absolute sound of amorpher regimes Roger rearse to that of the Hir Rows? a ratherhad (adets house are Gibbooi Specifically designed Well, at \$19,000, this 300-watt your thing), but the SIA-25 is for 4-ohm speakers (though integrated unp costs about the pinnele of a based never it can drive any speaker from again to be undesestimated.

2-32 ohans), the EHE-300 MR2 is more than just souther tobed integrated amp; it's a standard setting achievement With all that powers, face of decturates and low-sensitivity sealarst are no knoper stock rith solid-more. And with a detime tracefreable traceers this is an integrated amp you can pass down through the autiophile prosystions 5Ho. shees musical essentment of the Swiss school of sound. AT 360

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Audio Research GSI75 This truly is a component. that mexits that most handled about of teams, the Swins Aamer Kasile of andio pandsets. It is the perfect integratof any for arrow looking for soperb performance in a modest space. From USB agent to plannovtage to head observ tack, it is hard to know what mean new surfacefully could desige Portward by faur KT-150 tabes, this integrated amplifies computs up to 5 watts, which should be adequate for most lossfopeak ees, through it is best to avoid concluse it with decreacefune ands. The prest advantage of the KT-150, mush the best of for high-powered tobes on the market, in that it is beauty and the beast. It offers the peach. and shap of a 6550 rate with the lineximeters of an FE.34. \$25,200 IFth 264 T+A PA 3000 HV

\$18,500 As is the case with the amplifiers from benchmark Series brands like Soulistion and CH Porcision, T+Ab HV Secies integrated amplifies is ultra-wide bandwidth, T+A sho employs additional top-ties touches like highly organised porree supplay and dod moon yrannet. sical discosts, fully balanced.

15 percent of Alan Taffel's orfeorace CH Parcision genu. Yet when he witched between them the most staking thing he beard was their other oneir similarity What T+A has done is to make it possible for autiophiles of more modext (through still significant) sesonares to get in on the entracedinary build-enality socie merit and character, and

Ypsilen Phaethon \$25,000 Vesilos has buillantly evalued the electronic DNA from its flarship Arliest monoblocks and PST100ush2 preamp into

its sole integrated anno The people is a 110Wpc hybrid. assing amplifies stilling only Oure active gain stages. Few others capture the earthr sense of "being theys" like the Phaetheon, It does this with wide coinc and velvety textual contraits, micro-detailing harmonics, and a tive-like gip Quality of construction. is Hearsdean-sevente beaute penads of satis-finished almeniateurs and heat ticking that would take the demigod himself to log up Mr. Olympen. Includes a sensore control. olas fine invest NG 278 Vitus Audio SIA-025 Conventional window states

that integrated supp are hopelently compensated at hirth. Vitor Andio obtioosh didn't get this mental when it curated the SIA-25. Built to the same Obmerian standards as its persones and arnes, this

25Wpc Class A (on-the-ffy witching to 100% pc Class AB) integrated gives you the best of separates in a single chantin-liquidity parteners. a 3-D sonodstage, and the returns which all feedback ciaraiter. facest resultations of timber How close does its second and dynamics. It may not fill

98 Nach 2018 Bedatowed

DISPLA

and pasin five mideater that Riva Arena/Festival make this amplifies special. \$249 (optional Arena battery Beautiful leather-clad convend 5993/5499 and minimalist controls enade Ritch two new windess main soom systems in the Wand class and elegance, RH, 290 senies offer straining senad **Constellation Argo** couldt from would packages The compact Arms (\$249 The Argo integrated ampliand the larges Festival (\$499) firs's mission is to delives the are both every to set up and classic Coostellation strand int consect via Google at a lower paice point. To-AirPlay, or Blastooth, and accomplish this, Countellabegin streaming music. Both tion's designers meaged two have deeper han than expect existing Performance Series ed firm their compact enince down from the ultimate closures, and play locally with

best high-end separates and it

gaugeous to befuikf. The size of this amplifies is deceir-

ing-it puts out enough clean

parry to compete with some

of the largest and most pow-

earthal support/dock associations on

the market and its enrolliest

second shows that peopedy

implemented Class D can

compete sonically with any

cienal topology. The chani

also metaics a very high card

ity internal DAC and a feelb-in

state-of the art discusts \$23.5

phonostage. Prevented and so-

permit's transparent, sounding

nearly as full-backed as takes

hut with greater speed, the

the finest of systems, DS 283

-IN-ONE SYSTEMS

U.300 would be at home in

half of a Centure II power amp. The splicing was a solid case, and a maximum SPL of roccess, as evidenced by the 106dB, it speeds almost like a Acen's seductive-test-canceal pair of fooostacting speakers. **KH**. forthcoming tire forming out-detailed sound Tanhars are benetifully romplet firm top to bottom

physicetage and a DAC cash.

sive vecsetäry and value. AT, speech sensed arresoluction with twenty-flast-couttory con-Anvik Acoustics U-300 nectivity. Bloescould confive paodocts: the Pube (\$697), Prompting out a substantial Node (LLP). Dorscoule 600Wpc into a 4-shee least. (\$609), Vault (\$999), and Date stable jobs 2 shows, the deek, (9900). With them you can flatusietic 12, 500 was encouriered anot strength high are audio up to be competitive with the

Reference Series) components ease. The Festival is particuthe Vicps II paramplifies and lash important, with 200%

Divesound System Soon the Argo will repport a \$199.51199

NAD and PSB have trained up to deliver hi are, wholeherew and/o that combines

to 1920Hz/24-bit throughout







TAS 2018 Editor's Choice Awards: REF10

the absolute sound

feedback, the full function model has free low inputs and a tabed phonostage with mm/mc inputs, a completely separate power transformer. dedicated fibra carmiter, and variable impedance loading. And the sound is gosprous. GH, 225 Viola Audio Laboratories

Crescendo \$32,500 Machined from a solid block

AU

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of aluminant the visually stranging Carstrough has not risible front-panel buttous. Instead, the unit is controlled via a supplied Apple (Touch that panwides a whole hout of functions beroad those of traditional paramphiliers.

But it's the Caescendo's sound

quality that sets it apart. The Conrad-Johnson GAT transparency, the series of Saries 2 mothing corning between you \$24,000 and the minir, the semational This new remion of Contrable resolution without a and Information GAT Economic totach of the analytical, the impeoves the circuity while wide dynamic entreesion, and the exceptional bars yault the styling. For all the staides that Carsenado into wudit class C has made toward a mose motul presentation, the pro-

tenitory RH, 243 unce of the GAT make Lamm L2.1 Reference it clear that at its heart the \$22,790 ingney semain a lover of The I.3.1 Reference is a hotaid the tube second. It's the Excelisity design bert not in the usual professo of persisten-easetted. The recent succedy is all obtensive uniformable and tube while the auties elevair mercine The last of main the is solid-state MOSPETs are clasity of senand, and the proctiliomary of arpaoduction air used in Class A, no-feedback circuitzy for the gain beguling, indeed, JHb, 276 and buffer stages. Souically,

Balanced Audio Technology the L2.1 is cleady deserviour of the "Reference" oppella-Bes 11 tion, holding up as it does a \$24,995 misson to the monie. It core This formidable two chassis

through pervices limitations preamplifier reporsents BAT's of solid-state parametric firsting allowing the mostic to flow with samining and emprisons enoristion DO, 278

Audionet Pre G2 \$13,000 With a rated hauteridth of DC-2MHz and thoushthis

features like 15.49 of variance per input for level matching sensative as tred as environ-man-106 Harch 2018 Medents and

DISPLA

ing, the DC-coupled PRE G2 of detail from percediants. Like in an very stille an it is nonically accountiched Characterized ency and prodution, it is one of the most cernnic and satural-scending solid-state licestages GW has auditioned. It plays music from any source with incremble locality spekinticated foreine an

pot-on tomaity, rendering enhelese restaurce heat risting demantic involvement at nor volume level, GW 279



taining the traditional CI displayed [H. 222



Reference

\$23,000

tion 725, IV had never beaut a better solid-state paramolifies that this little seen. Not only did it have all the things you woold expect from would class

moooblock amplifiers, it

aste phonorstage, JV, 236

MBL 6000 D

\$26,500

solid state-inv-descena taunieut speed, outstanding for and evolution, tremen dom gup and took in the

bers, vacashingly low coine and coloution, but like its compution pieces, the 501

avaanilt on the state of the art. and it's largely unconstill. The 16-tube desires sports sensrate control and power-supply anodides that provide an

estuentely low noise floor. In Mition, the signal itself is amplified by just a single gain , environment a star torait per sity. The sends is an entremely

portworful and refused sound. that appears to entract a wealth This superb solid-state paramp hing timbors. The tastile is just

its siblest applifiers, however, low that it consistently produce the Rey II does less toroad. these has encourse and demantic a mose pluthly upbeltment details that simply speak and ble perventation, a characteristic through other pingt constraints. that is receiply assumpt in At the same time its transient the table. A begoling counts speed and authority we highly notion of slaculty and sichness resistic. To see the cale, it make it difficult not to hanker is absolutely neutral in total for the Rev II, 1Hb, 250 balance, with excellent imaging and social-baging, and viperio VTL TL/7.5 Series III ambience orthieval JV, 164

has a upplie finne on incordible

Audio Research Reference VIL's new linestage is the best 10 Line Stepe

mar it has merufriend. Its team-\$10,000 sient fidelity, drasmic power, This priory two-box (power has watches weathing supply lipestary) peracuplifies in a tirse shud ancoro design, with heet gip as mennesizing Like its pandecessors, the 7,5 individual left sight/circuits entities an interminits "clear powered by separate supplier and "diaty" box to prevent oth enough capacitance and the signal fixers becoming dynamic sevence to feel a large sutaminuted by noisy parts amplifier Like in enquestion But these the similarities cod piece, the Reference Phone The Secies III version of the plannoitige paramolifies the Ref 10 Line Stage has 7.5, which features a host of uppeaded parts and improved the macaner shifty to peniet ejecuit design, has conquered there-dimensional images on a the slight bit of electronic wast these dimensional scoulgrain that the Stairs II version stage. When you add the most Efelie midtand timbers in stdio and supposileled (for a tube personal teaminut anonana and power-ange coloc and close, you get a highly sealetic persentation on music of every

kind IV Absolars Passion \$31,000 (\$40,000, Signature Edition)

This after minimalist siz gle-coded taiode pocamplities is about as preaky as a paramplaties gets, with an entir aquie signal peth, jost firm subslaced lapois, so annote bufumon and has fortune initial these smallers with a farest-pariel knobs (volume property, percented deputy and input selection). The of tone color that made erect ciamit is built miner cost onhind of music sexual not just object parts and techniques, lively and detailed but also and housed in a massive beautiful and that much more dominous chersis clod in sich. andistic. Coutes with a first leathes. Sonically the Passion is very much like the companion Parsion 845 permet amplifiers with a complete lack of ganin. etch, and solid state glace over

the absolute soun EDITO CHOICE AWARDS





TAS 2018 Editor's Choice Awards: REF250SE



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the conners of a concret hall while also expectly encounting for level detail. As estamoly linear annihiles, the Rev.II does have a somewhat offerly purvientations that; major of its competition, particularly in the tastile. JHb, 250

\$40,000 Very high sesolution and vu-Suptoous toor color generally dou't go together is hell gen and when they down in Che A triade taby circuits-they do so at a price in neutrality Not so the Class AB 250Wpc Crustellation Performance Series Century II streets area which has gaugeous color and texture on top, coupled with an increase shifty to produce very fine details without etch ing or "spotlability" them Among the localest, highest orsolution solid state anors

JV has yet heard. JV Exaturic Crandison MI \$40.000/pc The Mi monoblocks are refined tigers. "Refined" hermore they demonstrate marity control, and spelling. or clasit: "Taves" became each ann effortlevdy delever

ohms and 1200 wates into 2 challenging loads. The MI's pursestation, like the sext of he Grandieve stack, is more soluter than that of tradition al Japanese gear, which trade to be hid back AT 200 Absolare Passion 845 \$45,500 (\$57,750, Signature Version) These gaugeous, leath re-chat single-ended-minde soaoblocks delives the elipsies of SET classify in a

cost on object inclusion. tation-grapsoos timbar, a unsoch and selaned tisble. termendens sonochtage dept and dimension for hart do. an with entruph power to drive real-would loudspeakers

Industry Hard 2018 85







TAS 2018 Editor's Choice Awards: REFPHONO10

the absolute sound

Soulution 755

A new aniral to JV's system,

entasty re-thought and greatly

the 755 photostage is an

improved version of the

Soulution 710. It now assive

with user-selectable loading

via its AMOLED panel and

distortions, and properties for

a correct amplifier dearthy

(flass obviating the need for

a lineitage). Its performance

of the traditional Sociation

of detail and ropenh pitch-

definition in the hass. The

thing about Soulation is the

that detail is worven into the

the way takes persent detail.

fabric of the mosie (rather in

visture inclus, blocus, hody,

\$72,000

to proprietacy transformers. The sam, as abview, is to supply increased detail, a lower noise floos, and above all, a mose artised sound. On all counts, BAT has succeeded hand-

AU

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search: The VK-PSE is dead \$12,000 quiet, allowing you to hear deep into the gupoves. These is no hist of sibilance or place Reflex, the unit lass a full and hells second but without the actifies of micro-detail so tion nufireant of by auslog

terminand by audiochiles 1Hb. Moon BIOLP \$13,000 impressive, posticularly its heatie power-supply design and vibration-isolation meamares. It's also solidly built, and offers a wide appy of gain and loading options that makes optimizing its performance for any cartaidge a map. Wouldclass by any meaning, the

EIGLP combines a dead-quiet backgarmind, a printing chairy of timbre, outstanding dynamics, and an expansive and well-defined sonadstage. Even under the microscope of the Magico Q7 koodspeaker, this Simendio importen not just with its auticephile attainates, but most importantly with how anniesh competitor it makes intening to LPc TAS' 2013 Phonostage of the Yess R54,251 Audio Research Reference

Phone 10 \$30,000 Like its companion niece, the Reframce 10 Line Stage, this ren chasis tenchorisen conc. sted, entirely deal-mone (fater porces supplies through output electric), tube phonostage has sensationally lifelike tone color

ity phono psessup that ARC

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DISES &

It is, in fact, extremely fact, absential and extended with simply phenomenal production of low-level detail. On both instruments and voices, the Silver Rock Toinidal comes and tousl weight, tarabeteabove to being the most realisdoos dynamic severyes, and tic plesoortage JV has beaul. notamply there dimensional The orde trace of its hattest/ imaging, molting for a route mandocmec/solid-state topolpersentation that is unmistakour might be a dight leasures is the midboox If you want to ably "sight" from midbass to too tashie. The highest fidel liesc shoolately everything on

has made (which is vering a it as if the performers are inmonthful), and certainly one the soon with ton-rowie of the most residuic phonos gouns have to go a long, long tages on the market, JV, 342 ver (and spend a lot most double, see helow' to beat out **Constallation Persons** this little marvel. One of IV's princes IV 276

Designed by John Cail, the Present is one of the most Middle tonvistor phono ups JV has auditioned. Catable of feats of seeds

hereads, the Persent cost code secretes information that many other photostages mire; it also accorns it without sportighting these details by upletely leading array their tone color (though the Persent is no the coolish. analytical side). Like all of Constellation's Performance Seales jurisducts, the Presents does a standard setting job of hulancing extractedinarily high sevelation and transient upped with blickle ration the second

is Lifeliket timibae, PC 223 Audia Consulting Silver Rock Toroidal \$34,975 This second, buttery com-

sord Swiss phonostage tors arthro then siding analytically tosoullal-cose transitionmers at ou in suffice. At fast, this might make Sorderion prist the input and the output in a solid-state circuit in which the seens "less" detailed than RIAA conserve is induced come other mannes. It is not via coils. The revultant sound On LP pleyback the 753 is cenis not what JV espected. Typ-

tainly capable of the fool ya ically, hattery power comes at and/out absolute stored listena paice in dynamics, and transwe long for It is also capable formers at a picke in extension of delivering the thalls and chills that musicality fermions (at both each of the factories spertrum). The Silves Rock encurry. One of Soulidiese's traff acts aeithes of these penalties. neest nonducts and IV's other.

ordeomacs. JV, 276 VAC Statement Phone Stage \$80,000 At eighty-thousand dollars, this two-chanis (separate porer nipply), slå tabe phonostage from VAC's Keein Hauss in

little impact. VF, 273 the paret expensive choses paramplifier IV has andtioned. You're seally pound to have to be devoted to vised (and to madcap spending) to an LP-and you want to hear affirst this group out seamber.

Botel BCD-1572

You will hear occur of the slight comparision or outsight visitable, impacted handwickly daniar at your your local levels on fractionicalments on hand mars, and enough gain to daire transients that you statisticaet hear with other photostapes. especially those equipped with input transformers or IFET is phenomenal, combining all front early. Plus you will get the most enquisitely dark sich timbury and beautifully share, lightning trainieut speed, president textures you've bread with entremely high resolution this tide of an WIT without are of the fat-points hot-

But. if you've got the dough

to have to go a very long

war to find a vaporing up

can be upped to \$2dB at

has more input headcoore

than any other phonostage

IV has had in his revtem. The

Statement Phono State press

hits a "dynamic colleg," the

wher others to be and transistore

phonostiges so often do.

rough provides nor analytics, as the

Capable of 764B gain (which

and the itch, vou're also going

tran-end or trethe soli-off of 40 SET IV. 263 Batal CD14 CD

The CD14 CD places doesn't try to be sorthing but a CD observer. It more a hashing averaged ed Walfree DAC chip, which is capable of sampling astes on to 1976Hz of course, as the sampling rate of CDs is 44.11Hz, the DAC's capability is orrechill. The CD14 will also play MP5 files, but you'ld need to brain those eats CDs fact

(thread) no USB issuest that would allow you to olar them off a USB flash drine). Analog output is on subslanced RCA. acks-these's no balanced SLR out. The CD14 semafe good, through the bars lacks a

/s!

Long ago Rotel demonstrated that high-east sound need not come at a high-end poice.

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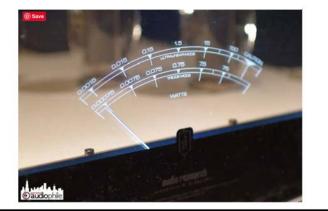
audio research ΗΙ G Н Π F F N

AXPONA 2018: Lee's Best of Show: Best Sound Systems REF160M

AXPONA AUDIO EXPO NORTH AMERICA

AXPONA 2018: Lee's Best of Show

Posted on June 14, 2018 by Lee Scoggins in AXPONA 2018 // 0 Comments







Stereophile's Products of 2018 Joint Amplification Components of the Year: REF160M









Best 19 Stereo Amplifiers of What Hi-Fi?'s Lifetime: GSi75



If you wanted high-end quality without having to buy separate components, this one-box solution worked a treat.

A valve-powered amp that could stand toe-to-toe with the finest pre/power combinations, it had nifty features, an excellent built-in DAC and fine headphone performance.

Nevertheless, it was the sound that gave the GSi75 distinction. With terrific dynamics, excellent detail and a transparent sound, when this amp was in full flow, there was no stopping it.

WHAT HI*FI? AWARDS 2018





Congratulations on A Great Year



AUDIO PESEAPCH HIGHDEFINITION®