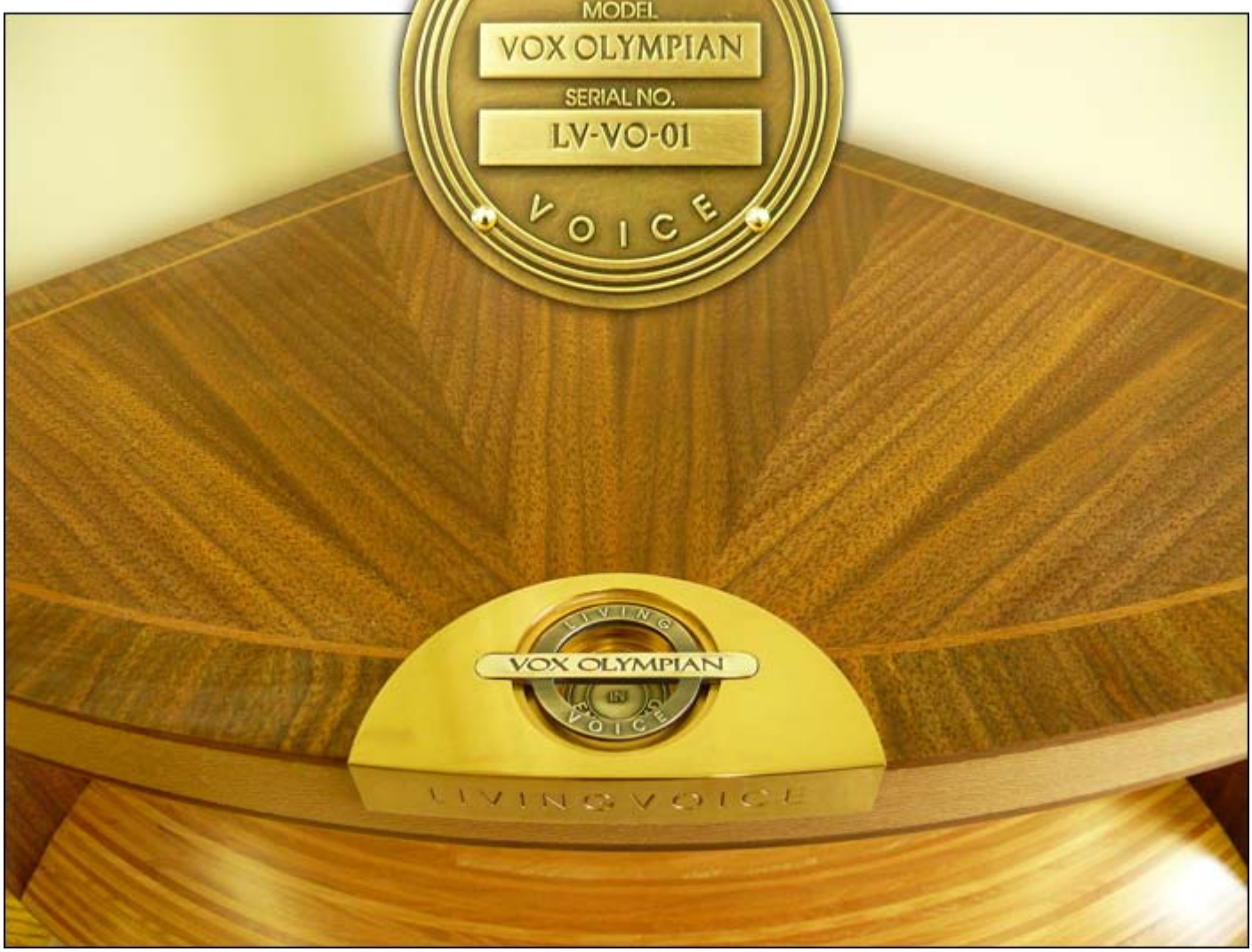
RoadTour Living Voice



When owners Kevin & Lynn Scott had business in Switzerland and stopped on Lake Geneva for an afternoon chat in Vevey, I had profiled the Living Voice Vox Olympian 5-way horn speaker project from afar

exactly one year ago. Now it was time to visit their Definitive Audio showroom in the East Midlands of Blighty to experience the operation and first working pair in person. The 2010 Yacht Show in Monaco's Port Hercule would see the public unveiling of the first Vox Olympian *production* unit in late September a few weeks after my visit. As I learned, formal production benefits from certain extravagant refinements in overall finish and cosmetic trim.

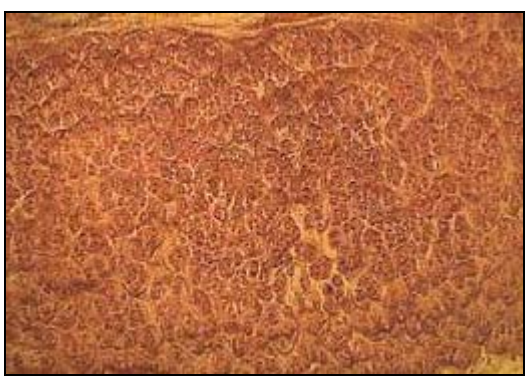
The final speaker at left shows the full-grain French finished UK-grown Black Walnut with solid Lacewood string inlays as merely one example of available upscale trim. This particular finish is the result of a collaboration between Vitavox maker Octave Audio Woodworking Ltd. in Bristol and master craftsman Tudor R. Harris. The latter's portfolio* includes the reception room at the palaces of HM King Abdulla II of Jordan. He works with some of the world's premier yacht and interior home designers like John Munford and Terrence Disdale. He also consults for Silver Lining, one of the most prestigious furniture makers extant. Tudor's finishing work to the cabinetry involved sealing all of its wooden pores with roughly fifteen base coats that were blocked down flat.

Tudor's temporary work lab installed in situ at Definitive Audio's Derbyshire facilities

Golden Odyssey & Golden Osprey

**Amongst many others, Tudor has worked on and maintains the Golden Yacht Fleet built at the Blohm & Voss yard for Saudi Crown Prince Khaled bin Sultan. This fleet comprises the 80m Golden Odyssey, the 66m support vessel Golden Shadow, the Golden Osprey, the Golden Eye seaplane and the Golden Cat catamaran. Ditto the 80m MY Constellation built by Oceanco for the King of Qatar; the 70m MY Reverie built by Benetti for Kieje Inge Rokke; the 67m MY Anna built by Feadship; and the 47m Hyperion sailing yacht built by Royal Huisman for Jim Clarke*.

Tudor's final polishing grit for the Vox Olympian was 9 microns just as he would use for piano repairs prior to their final gloss coat. Tudor then applied five to six hand-buffed top coats to arrive at a traditional high-luster French finish with sharp wood edges and a hard mirror glass surface. That's very different from a polyester coat's thick layer of plastic and meniscus edge over the wood. Tudor R. Harris originates from a 3rd generation of piano traders—his brother is a piano tuner/repairer—and routinely repairs Bechstein, Bluthner and Bösendorfer pianos in luxury yacht installations. With his expertise, Living Voice can offer rare wood finish options like silver precipitation. This ancient recipe involves working a mixture of silver nitrate, hydrochloric acid and ammonia into the grain before sealing it off.



Amboina veneer

Chatting with the British expat who makes his home in Rotterdam, Tudor remembered working in a yacht interior with lacquered Vellum, Amboina Burl veneer, pink marble staircases and gold-plated handles whose owner had commissioned a Bösendorfer grand piano in Amboina to match. Tudor spends significant working hours on yachts so big they carry a full sail boat strapped to one side, a speed boat on the other. For operational scale, he brought up vessels like the Echo which consume 30 tons of diesel for one day of mild cruising and $250.000 in refueling fees through a brokerage firm whilst taking some two days to fill up. In fact, special oil tankers dock 12 miles offshore to serve as floating gas stations to remain outside national jurisdictions and save their patrons gas taxes.

To illustrate the pursuit of extremes in this sector, Tudor recounted a Russian oligarch walking his new custom

commission yacht for inspection. After determining that its pool depth was mildly shallower than on his former vessel, he demanded that a new pool be retrofitted. This did involve having to chop the entire yacht in half to increase its draft and length. The wood finisher merely shrugged his shoulders. In this sector, impossible isn't an option. As though to lighten up disbelief, he then called on the 1950's Aristoteles Onassis yacht *Christina O.* It's legendary also for its curved bar whose stools were upholstered in whale foreskin. Whenever famous beauties sipped their martinis astride one of his stools, Onassis could deliver the strategic punch line "my dear, you do realize you're sitting on the world's biggest dick?"

Original Christina O.

Back on point, when Living Voice talks of *bespoke* finishing, they are quite serious. As Mr. Harris suggested, this could mean Silver Lining-style Shagreen (stingray leather) or rain deer skin stitched up like coach leather. It could mean bog oak, massa birch or quilted sycamore. What the Vox Olympian target audience really demands from its chosen purveyors and suppliers of luxury goods is *surprise us!* With the proper infrastructure in place, Kevin & Lynn Scott are prepared to deliver.

Tudor R. Harris, British artisan living in Rotterdam

Or as Kevin put it, "visiting the Monaco Yacht Show as we have for the last two years recalibrates your perception.

and everything else will look after itself. At first this might reek of obscene consumption at the very highest level. Then it makes way for a renewed appreciation of exceptional craftsmanship at an equally exalted level. Such artisanship and skills are kept alive *only* because the necessary resources are available. This is fundamentally no different from the royal arts patrons of the past. Their employ of or commissions from famous composers, painters and sculptors subsidized many artworks we today treasure in museums, public gardens and concert halls and take for granted. Coming back to our final pre-production prototype pair, we realized that while it was sonically locked in splendidly indeed, cosmetically it wasn't good enough yet. Since last you saw us, we spent an entire year addressing just that."

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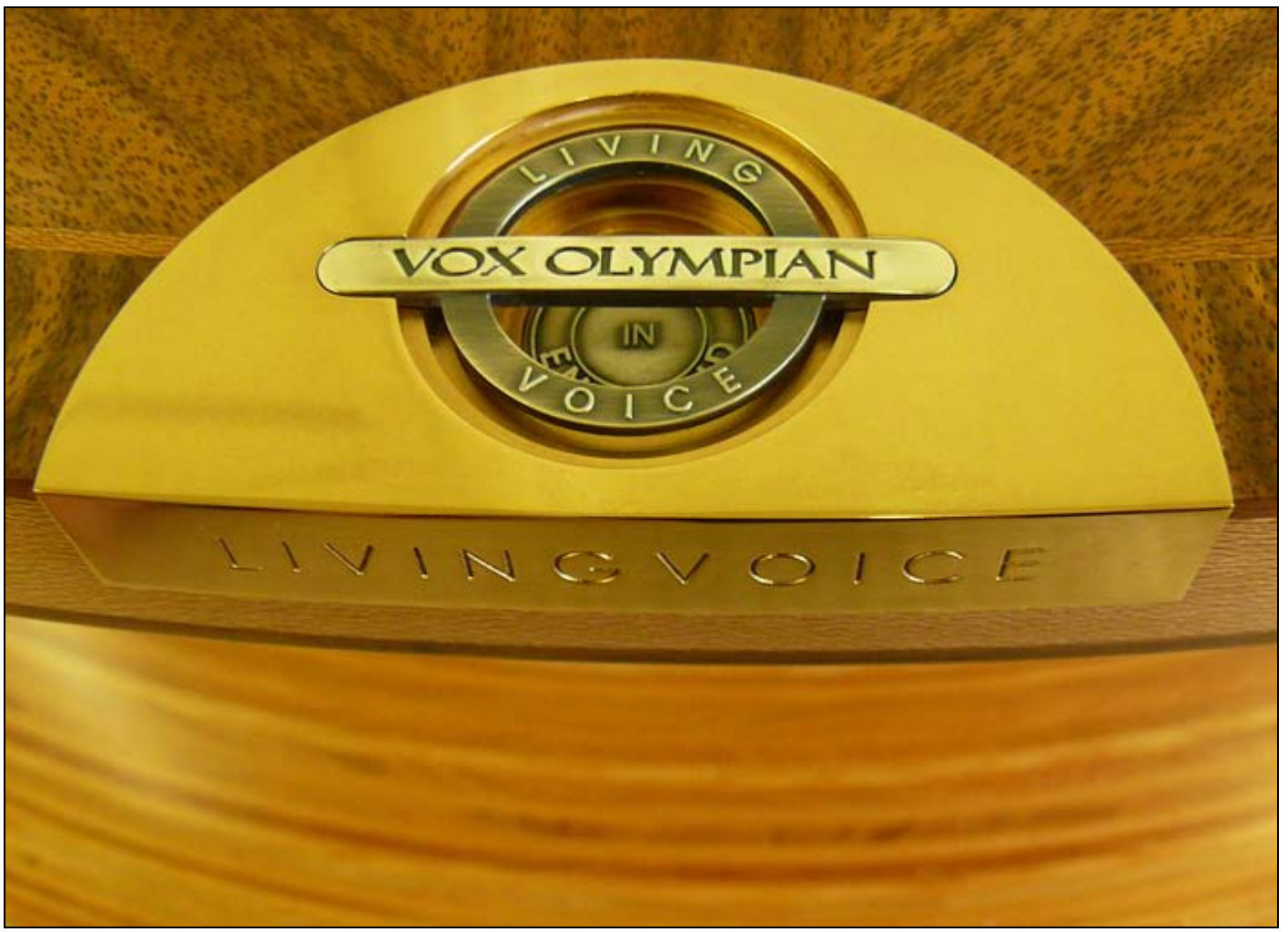
The informal photos on this page show the first production pair undergoing Tudor R. Harris' finishing work in preparation for the Monaco Yacht Show 2010. Because the loudspeaker drive units weren't installed, we'll see certain details the fully assembled speaker would deliberately conceal.



The logo descends in concentric steps to read "Made in England" at the bottom.
The Living Voice Vox Olympian inset floats above.

In keeping with the nautical scheme, wood and bronze are a leit motif.

Once the midrange horn is installed, this lovely fixture won't be visible.

Here is the 7-section cast bronze trumpet or bugle which loads the compression treble unit.

"Each section contains recesses for microscopic gaskets that compress upon assembly to avoid a pronounced resonance. The gaskets are made from an elastomer, which we encountered when designing our G8 equipment isolation stand. It's really meticulous work but a handsome thing."

The amplitude of the concentric threading inside the bugle increases towards the exit and diffuses reflections.

The rheostat attenuators for the top three drive units.

The binding post bay.

Here is the exposed worm drive assembly for the ultra tweeter module.

The bronze end cap for the tweeter which in-house is referred to as Boadicea's bra cup.

The threaded bronze receiver plate for the bugle.

The bronze coupler for the Vitavox S2 midrange driver. The underside of the horn structure is lined with Alcantara to prevent scratching the bass bin during installation.

The short vanes in the throat of the midrange horn.

The logo at the proper angle to show the country of origin engravure.

One production area of the Living Voice/Definitive Audio facilities showing, from the back, Peter Fulsord, Kevin's product development partner and left-hand man.

The super tweeter unit with the back removed.

"Nylon thrust grub screws affix the HF unit to keep it square within its sliding assembly which is coupled to a worm drive for ultra-fine path length adjustability against the tweeter and midrange units. This super tweeter works up to 40.000Hz. It is a very prestigious TAD ET703 unit from Japan with 0.07g of moving mass and a 20.000 Gauss cobalt magnet. We encapsulate it in a bronze pod and even remade its rear chamber from bronze. That benefits not only appearance but sonics."

The midrange unit.

The midbass unit.

"The two lips on the front of the bass cabinet are the substrate of the horn. Bolted to the lower panel and pointing up at the ceiling at 45° is the above 15-inch midbass driver with Alnico motor. That fires into a compression chamber venting up at 45 degrees in the opposite direction away from the listener. Then it turns down to the floor, follows a 180° turn up and exits out through the mouth slot. It's a sort of Z-shaped horn which works up to 500Hz. There's a controlled degree of openness for the back of the driver which vents through the front via the two curved triangles at the lower edges of the 'smile'. The woofer's 7.5-ohm impedance of course increases with our loading.

"There aren't many surviving makers of superior hifi compression drivers and high-efficiency bass units. Most know of Ale, Goto, TAD and Cogent. Our choice is Vitavox. Their drive units are manufactured right here in the UK by Octave Audio who also craft our Vox Olympian enclosures. As far as I know, nobody except Living Voice employs Vitavox transducers in a commercial hifi product. I've worked with these drivers since 1988. For me the Vitavox S2 is the most serious drive unit I've encountered yet. But I'm not at all precious about it. Should I some day encounter something better, I'd use that. I once did try to develop a scaled-down model at a lower price point with other drivers which simply served to emphasize the fabulous quality of the Vitavox units."

At right we see one cabinet in mid process of final finishing. Missing of course are the super tweeter module, the bronze HF horn and the midrange horn.

Any discussion of the Vox Olympian project spanning a 5-year gestation period but beyond that incorporating and refining prior R&D from the firm's Air Scout and Air Partner horn-loaded models—refer to my prior article on this history—would be sorely incomplete without covering the unusual context of Definitive Audio.

That's because Lynn & Kevin Scott operate both a manufacturing shop *and* by-appointment retail atelier out of an industrial space in Harrington Mill which they've occupied for the last twelve years. As the UK importer for the legendary Kondo brand of top-level Japanese valve audio, this husband and wife team travels all over Europe to install and voice audio systems. This provides them with very unusual insight into the on-site performance variability of their own speakers and electronics - and very solid experience on getting the best from their gear in any environment. By routinely accepting trade-in components, they also own quite the arsenal of equipment for comprehensive familiarity with competing products.

Why that would be an asset for any hifi manufacturer should be obvious. To appreciate the environmental milieu and contextual culture in which the Vox Olympian was conceived and crafted, we'll next look at the Harrington Mill complex and the Living Voice/Definitive Audio facilities within it.

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Definitive Audio resides in an 1850's textile mill complex next to one of the East Midlands' many canals.

Today Harrington Mill is a vestigial remnant of the textile, upholstery and furniture industries which once were a core of the local economy but since have been widely outsourced to China and Poland.

The all brick construction is a lovely throwback to past centuries and avoids modern concrete, steel girder and glass schemes.

The tall chimney makes for quite the landmark.

The bulwarks give these buildings a fortress-type appearance. Only a moat is missing.

The Harrington Mill complex is a sizable industrial affair.

To expedite deliveries and pickups, the mill relies on these winches for easy access.

Ensconced by reject cabinets, the Definitive Audio loft contains this massive battery bank to run entire systems off the grid.

After a four-hour listening session, a quick check showed 94.7% of battery power remaining. This is a setup any hot-blooded audiophile should aspire to.

This is the foyer as seen when descending the steps from the storage loft.

The two main listening rooms are off to the right, with one door visible, the other outside the photo to the very front.

A New Audio Frontiers amp with Jeff Rowland kit.

Standing against the stairs is an 1812 Velodyne subwoofer.

Some massive 500-liter twin 18-inch sub cabs are stacked against the walls.

One side of the alcove facing the entrance of the building.

The end of the alcove with trade-in or retail equipment from Brinkmann, Canary Audio, CEC and New Audio Frontiers.

Looking down the alcove past some Living Voice speakers in the very front.

The other end of the foyer.

A bank of regulated power supplies from Kevin Scott's earlier days.

Living Voice Avatar speakers and Kondo mono amps.

An Art Audio Argento amplifier from Tom Willis who lives 10 minutes away.
Definitive Audio rewires this 300B parallel single-ended amp with Kondo, replaces the signal coupling caps, the stock pot and adds a proprietary outboard filament supply transformer with Kondo umbilical.

More Kondo gear plus New Audio Frontiers and a Jeff Rowland phono amp.

Drive unit grave yard.

A look at multi-cell Vitavox exponential horns in the warehouse where Tudor R. Harris had erected his temporary finishing tent.

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The smaller listening room during our visit sported three wall-mounted turntables, Canary Audio 300B monos, Kondo 211 monos, a Kondo M7 preamp and Resolution Audio's Opus 21 and new Cantata digital sources.

This wall shows a very small section of the Scotts' music library.

As the foyer suggested already, the folks at Living Voice enjoy very comfortable working conditions.

These turntables are not prone to foot-fall interference. From left to right, they were an SME-30, a Kuzma XL both with IOM cartridges and an SME-10 all with Kondo silver-wired tone arms and power supplies.

Room N°.1 is a lovely auditorium.

Living Voice Avatar OBX-RW speakers are also what the Scotts listen to in their home - albeit driven from a Kondo Ongaku integrated with a top-line C.E.C. belt-drive player.

The bigger room housed the first exploratory pair of Vox Olympians whose crossover until a day prior to our visit was a deliberately clip-lead infested breadboard affair rather than hard-wired enclosure. Since photographing an open crossover would have given away secrets, the speakers' brains had now been hidden in closed boxes with access lids. The production speaker of course seals its crossovers in two discrete sub enclosures inside the bass cabinet. More on this in the listening impressions.

Kevin Scott on the couch for a bit of perspective.

These speakers were driven from Kondo Gaku-Oh push/pull 300B amps, a Kondo M-77 linestage and Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player.

An angled side view.

From behind, with a Living Voice G8 equipment rack between the speakers, temporary subwoofers to the outsides. That back wall is jam-packed with LPs.

As shown on a previous page, production has completely tidied up the rear view with bronze end caps.

The nested super tweeter with exposed worm drive wheel.

The 45° outwards rotation of the super tweeter is locked and optimized for widest dispersion.
Unlike the production pair, the wood finish on this first pair was open grain.

The Italian cloth for this grill was specially commissioned and knitted.

On what music he uses to fine-

nominally happy with its performance, Kevin pulled out a few quick samples from his stack. He's particularly fond of the *Vivaldi's Gloria*, *Händel's Utrecht Te Deum & Jubilate* disc.

"What I look for are many *many* musicians at the top of their game in a stupendous performance. The whole of that is very difficult for any hifi system to reproduce. This particular recording has masses of voices covering the full range. It's got female vocal duos, oboe bassoon duos, counterpoint, unison playing, boys' chorus, nice natural acoustics with period instruments, an extremely difficult score and unusual string tone.

"I love mezzo soprano, soprano in general and Schubert's *Lieder*. That Mahler is a little bit rich and dark but a great musical performance and as such very insightful. I really like Christina Schäfer's *Winterreise*. But I use a broad range of albums. I wouldn't want to rely on just one recording. The recordings are as individual in their character as any items of hifi equipment."

As should be clear by now, Kevin & Lynn Scott are very serious music lovers as well as successful hifi retailers well removed from the high street paradigm. They are also entrepreneurial and highly resourceful developers of unusual loudspeakers whose ambitions were groomed by their longstanding ownership of the Kondo franchise. This all pooled quite inevitably into the Vox Olympian project. It explains why this speaker couldn't possibly feature a fixed sub-bass system—that will be built from a menu of options to suit the owner's room—and why it had to incorporate very extensive adjustments that go well beyond the expected on both facility and the effects on the playback *experience*.

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With the facilities and product covered, we'll now take a virtual stroll through the designer's head to get his perspective on the audio business in general and his design work within it. What follows was culled and transcribed from many taped hours of casual conversations.

Kevin Scott talks shop.

On what makes them tick: There's a high-end dealer from whom I buy equipment I like. This is the second time he told me this. "I'm so bored with it all, I don't listen to music anymore. I've got a life now." I hope he gets over it. Losing interest and love for exploring music would be the end for us. Likewise on the manufacturing side of this equation. Some people make product because they have to. Some make product because they *want* to. That's us.

On reviews: At one stage we did lots and lots of hifi shows like Bristol, Manchester, London, CES and Hong Kong all in one year. That gets expensive fast but we had reviews in all of the publications. At one point the editors of World, Choice, Plus and others were all using OBX-R2s in their domestic systems as primary speaker. We had reached this sort of critical exposure mass and I saw this as a problem. We're not a company after all which changes products every 18 months. A good loudspeaker today is a good loudspeaker 15 years from now. It's not suddenly a bad loudspeaker. But a lot of big companies need to refresh their brand consistently to keep up with the competition. Suddenly they want a yellow or piezo

tweeter, a woven or carbon-fiber reinforced diaphragm when fundamentally, there's no real change. It's just window dressing.

So we withdrew from having reviews. At first I was uncomfortable seeing us move into a publicity decline. After a slight dip however, the if you like enigma of not being visible in the media yet having loads of buzz and vibe going on in the forums and chat rooms kicked in and we saw an actual upturn in business. Since then we haven't really had reviews. Edward Barker wrote up the R2 for you and I didn't even know he was a reviewer because he'd bought the pair. He has listened to the Olympian while it's been squeezing itself through the sausage machine and he has heard what you heard. He also heard the first through third prototypes and I hope he can make something of it as that would be quite interesting. But I've had nothing else reviewed, just one informal coffee table exposure in one of the annual majors. This has been the state of affairs for us for years. Yet business has improved. I think with reviews everything has been turned up to the max. There no longer is any pianissimo and mezzo forte. All descriptive categories have been set to redline at 10 and shout at you from the high-street magazines: "Amazing, amazing, amazing. 5 star review. Editor's Choice."

***On evolution**:* Instead of replacing our loudspeakers, they have

evolved. Our R2 and RW did so significantly but only when necessity became the mother of invention. Quite often those improvements happened reluctantly because a capacitor manufacturer went bust or a cabinet supplier closed his doors. In other words, it was never about components or parts we grew eventual reservations about. I *loved* the cabinet we used to source from Castle right here in the UK. When they folded, it was a very long road to get those Danish Hornslet cabinets to sound right.

From a marketing point of view this sounds like a terrible confession to make but our Auditorium and Avatar cabinets are made from chipboard – a very *particular* type of chipboard but not MDF. Compared to MDF which is saw dust set in glue, chipboard uses very large shaggily shaped softwood particles. The reason for our use of chipboard is that when I started out, I sold JPW speakers which came out of the Dartmoor prison's inmate rehabilitation scheme. Those boxes were made of veneered chipboard and sounded great for what they were – real budget wonders. Then JPW polished up the range (same crossover, same drive units) by making the enclosures from MDF. That killed them. They suddenly sounded very gray, dull and ordinary. The Snells with their life and vitality too used chipboard.

During our initial prototyping, I had to learn about just the right grade and thickness of chipboard to use. We tried 400, 520, 640 and 750 densities and neither the most nor least dense were best. We got to a grade we liked for that speaker with those drivers and were very successful with it. Once we moved from having the cabinets made by Castle to Hornslet, we had to supply the Danes with our chosen substrate. We used to get it from a Welsh plant which supplied Castle. Suddenly we had to source it from a multinational company with suppliers all over Europe.

Unbeknownst to us, our original substrate had been made from seasoned and recycled *various* wood species (up to five) whereas the new material from Finland was simply virgin spruce and nothing else. The density of wood fiber and resin was *identical* but we just couldn't get the same sound. We looked at glues, how Castle had assembled the boxes - at anything that could be conceivably different. We finally tracked down the real reason. This was a really painful process.

The right chipboard created a naturally vibrant, energetic, powerful and radiant sound. Thicker panels made those qualities diminish so we use 18mm thickness, not 22 or 24 which any marketeer would prefer. What's annoying is that veneer on high-quality MDF looks fantastic. The same veneer on chipboard doesn't look anywhere near as sheer because it isn't as *flat*. Hornslet did figure out how to lay on a perfect veneer over chipboard but that was another learning curve. Their workers don't like working in chipboard. It eats their blades and cutter heads from three to four times faster than MDF. The second problem is that seeing chipboard, the workers assume a cheaper product which means they don't pay the same kind of care and attention. This initially multiplied our rejection rate of cabinets.

I eventually wanted to use a different material in these cabinets *somewhere* to break up the uniformity. So I tried an MDF front baffle for the money shot and had some other cabs made with MDF in the back. Of course the Gods decided that the penalty for pursuing better sound came from the MDF back plate and chipboard for the sides and front. It was so much better having the drivers seated in this very

lossy dispersive material. By the way, the other thing which sounds very good but which we don't use is waterproof flooring-grade chipboard. You recognize it by being green.

In the early days we'd go to hifi shows and people would like our sound but then come up and put their hands on the cabinets and complain that they could feel them vibrating. I'd ask whether they could *hear* any troughs or peaks or resonances that interfered with the music. Of course they couldn't.

But it was a real perception hurdle to overcome when the prevailing paradigm was the high-mass loudspeaker which acts as a black hole for the energy that's supposed to be released from the diaphragms. They call it very uncoloured but that's deluded. The sound has *lost* all its color.

Back on enforced evolution. Vifa lost the tooling for our driver and we didn't care to have our drivers made in their new Indian or Chinese plant. We wanted to remain with Danish driver manufacture but were presented with a fait accompli. Had I not been so very old-fashioned to sit on very substantial driver stock, we'd really have been in an untenable spot. It took about 9 months to get new delivery of many hundreds of drive units and we first had to reverse engineer them from the units we had evolved together with Vifa over the years. Prior to the financial crisis, we had been too small a business for their accountant to want to bother with custom orders for discontinued transducers. Ordering 500 at a time wasn't very interesting for them then.

When the world changed in 2008, they did want our business back badly. Reverse-engineering our original driver was simply a painfully horrible thing to do. As it turned out, the redesign was better. It had evolved. But, we haven't called

nor want an R3. I am very happy with the R2 as it is. If I could make it better—within this format of speaker—I would. So we withdrew from having reviews.

On boutique and generic parts: In our £3 - 8K Auditorium/Avatar range, we use the Scanspeak Revelator tweeter which is a fantastic conventional driver but the real DNA of course is the crossover. That goes back to having a fantastic gastronomical experience. The ingredients must be good but without the vision of the chef, it's all for naught. It's what you *do* with the ingredients, their proportions and balance and interactions with each other that matter. Call it advanced judgment and finely honed sensibility.

On listening: You wouldn't put on a talking book and then have dinner and chat with friends. But that's exactly what a lot of people do with music. It's disrespectful and wears out their sensitivity to the medium's ability to transport them. There's not just dynamic range but *emotional* range. The listener has to provide that and make it available. As dealers, we don't expect our clients to know anything about audio. It's our job to deliver the experience. The only requirement this places on the prospective buyer is his or her emotional availability.

On battery drive: The amount of clutter and artifacts battery drive gets rid of which you previously blamed on the loudspeaker or electronics is amazing. If I go into the mill on Saturday or Sunday—and bear in mind that we're the only business there which occasionally works over the weekend—we're on a separate power sub station so all of those powerful solenoid winches that lift things up, all the office computers and assembly machines are off. Then the sound quality from the national grid is fantastic. You've got that vanishingly low impedance and no turbulence or hash on the ground. The sound is calmly powerful, beautifully resolved, succulent without being overripe and has that heterogeneity of the emotional expression, the separation of the textures. The whole thing is just so *calm* and assured and actually better than the batteries. But every other time of the week I plug the system into the national grid, it's just awful. There was a time when I couldn't do any demos on Thursdays at all because that's when the textile plant in the vicinity ran its big dying machine which agitates all of their fabrics with that massive solenoid. The sound on Thursdays was simply appalling. With anyone coming in from London for an appointment, we'd be utterly humiliated and embarrassed.

One of my clients has a house in the Far East and a yacht. For his marine Kondo/Living Voice system, I wanted a battery supply that would be separate from the general power for his boat. That's how we first got in contact with the right people for whom we laid out our requirements and who then programmed how various power inverters and chargers should work. The same client had four power cuts in his house alone while I was there to install our off-the-grid supply. This battery solution became a real life saver for him. With another customer in the south of France and a big Kondo Gakuoh/Living Voice system, the sound was atrocious yet I had no explanation why - until I stuck my multi meter into his power line and measured 192V instead of 230V. Undervoltaging a filament on a valve amp is worse than overvoltaging it. With the wrong high-tension voltage, wrong negative grid supply and wrong heater voltage, he wasn't listening to the amplifier as it was designed to operate. Line voltage stabilization from batteries was the perfect solution - again.

When I combined this case evidence with my own work situation, it was a clear case of getting on with it and I'm thoroughly delighted with the outcome. Ours are sealed gel rather than water batteries so whilst having higher impedance, they're incredible safe and durable and work in difficult circumstances. You can use them on their sides or upside down without problem. There also are *ludicrous* 2V cells which you would use in a forklift truck or milk float. For all 12V applications, you'd parallel six. These are massive and I'd fancy having 12 or 24 of those. They have incredibly low impedance and massive surge capability. That should really be saucy. They're very long but narrow so you could lay them sideways and slide them into a special rack like torpedoes. An amplifier after all is no more than a modulated power supply. Many people would be better off with a more modest system that's run off such a stable battery supply.

On rules: My dogma is, don't be dogmatic. Don't be precious about *anything*. It's the classic audiophile dilemma. There's your basic grilled tomato which tastes quite bland. They put a pinch of salt on it and suddenly it's *oh good morning*. Now they put salt on everything because they believe that's the universal panacea. For example, because the 2-meter Kondo power cords are quite dear, I once decided to roll my own and cut them back to size to 1.5 and 1 meters. That didn't sound as good - very annoying. But it was a valuable lesson because now I can look someone straight in the eye and explain that the 2-meter power cord, even though more expensive, clearly performs better. I'll happily let them compare it to a shorter version.

As many DIYers would, we've looked into putting Kondo silver wire into our smaller speakers since we love that wire. That was a major step backwards and thoroughly unexpected since we use Kondo jumper wire from the outboard crossover to the binding posts. So we took the silver out and put our own recipe back in. Much better. Now we wondered whether our recipe wouldn't also work better between the crossover and binding posts. Not.

On the Vox Olympian, we tried all manner of things. The one issue we had in the end was with the cabling to the 15-inch Vitavox. The Kondo cable was clearly superior everywhere else but for that driver—as you heard for yourself—our flat ribbon copper is equally if differently persuasive than the Kondo. We actually considered running an additional pair of binding posts just to let you have two *instant* choices for internal bass wiring because this difference is not obtainable by adjusting the tonal balance elsewhere. We were in a real dilemma which of those two wires to choose. If you listen to forward-moving staccato, the copper ribbon is my choice. If you listen to the big chromatic passages, there's something scrumptious about the Kondo wire. So we did our best to optimize the speaker for the Kondo because on balance, that matched my own disposition. Still, I can entirely understand someone like you making the other choice and we'd accommodate that. It's how we do all our development work. You put on more than one cable on a driver and compare. On the bass driver we doubled up the cable to drive down the impedance. This didn't sound better at all. So the point is, there are no clear-cut rules, just endless well-documented and systematic trials. It's

time line. On the other hand, we wouldn't want to replace our speakers with a new model in 18 months. And we won't have to. We take the time to get them right the first time around.

On the super-tweeter orientation: The 45° outward angle is unequivocally the right thing to do. I've listened vertically and in very fine gradations from there. Going inwards was plain wrong. I've even used a Sugden A21 to dumb down the ancillary electronics yet the basic flavor remained. If one had the balls, wouldn't it be fun to go to a hifi show and run the Vox Olympian off a Sugden A21 with an Opus 21 front end? It'd be gorgeous.

On simplicity: Our compound sensitivity for the Vox Olympian is about 102dB. Even with our little speakers I feel that the more amplifier output stages get paralleled and serialized, the less subjective dynamic range one is left with. The music becomes gray and emasculated like a Mundorf capacitor wearing body armor. That's where higher sensitivity speakers allow simple two-stage amplifier circuits to shine. Even our small speakers are 94dB and work well off the type of valve amps we fancy most.

On two-ways: I find three-ways with a high pass, low pass and band pass unappealing because you listen to the midrange through a band pass filter. I don't like that idea. I'd prefer a two-way with a sub or a two-way with a super tweeter. The Vox Olympian really is a two-way with a super tweeter and subwoofer. What I like about the MTM arrangement we use in our little speakers is that if you listen to a well-done 2-way, there's an uncomplicated simplicity to the presentation that's musically very valuable. A 5-inch driver with a tweeter can be very coherent but it won't have any waft, shove, power, bandwidth and extension. You listen to a 10-inch 2-way instead and it's got some nice chuffy chug but it beams as you move toward the crossover point and it sound like pastels or blotting paper - powdery and grainy in that important zone. Can you make a 6.5-inch driver that works as a two-way? Yes. Can you make an 8-inch drive unit that works in a 2-way? I've heard them in the old Snells. Those did it beautifully which I think took some doing. I made a Kondo 8-inch two-way and was so encouraged by the results that it's something I shall revisit in the future. Those 8-inch Kondo drivers with silver dust caps, paper diaphragms, leather suspensions and Alnico magnets in superb cast baskets were saucy looking things. I had them for a year and took the opportunity to design a crossover for them. We got very good results. It was massive but beautifully proportioned sound.

With a 6.5-inch driver you can certainly get seamless invisible integration with a tweeter. Now put two of those drivers in parallel and you've got the same surface area like a 9.25" woofer. This gives you better traction to go low with some air-moving capability yet the simplicity and legibility of a two-way remain. You also end up with half the excursion, half the IMD and twice the sensitivity. This moves up the spec for the mid/woofers such that our

Revelator needs no series resistance to pad it down to match. As you well know, in the catalogues of any driver vendors the HF units are always 3 to 4dB more efficient than the mid/woofers. It's very difficult to burn efficiency in a tweeter without screwing up the sound. In our small speakers, there's no resistor on the tweeters. The tonal balance by design relies on the paralleled mid/woofers.

The physical tweeter offset is for two reasons – no destructive interference on the front baffle by avoiding equal path lengths to the edge with a golden ratio location; and with toe-in, you're actually effecting time alignment. With care, those speakers disappear. The single rear port is equidistant to both drive units. And yes, some of my customers want a more illustrious OBX-RW.

What we have currently they call too cheap. I won't raise the price because the speaker is what it is. Eventually we'll simply need a bigger Avatar that's more expensive because it's demonstrably better. A bronze substrate chemically patinated for the driver mounts would perhaps look and sound terrific?

On scratching one's head: We cryogenically treat the binding posts, hookup wiring and capacitors of the Vox Olympian and R models with a UK facility. We tested two firms with the very same parts which nonetheless returned sounding *wildly* different. Unfortunately both companies were quite cagey about details of their deep immersion processes. All we could do is have our chosen company *guarantee* that they'll apply the identical process each time they process our parts. Also, we wanted pure copper binding posts. To get machined rather than stamped ones requires an Alloy usually with a microscopic amount of Tellurium. I didn't like the sound. You'd think that brass posts—60% copper, 40% zinc—would sound terrible but I've heard many I liked. Finally, I know that they don't look slick but stamped baskets sound good. We've compared virtually the same drive unit in a cast magnesium basket and a stamped God-help-us steel basket with all the bad connotations and unmarketability which attach to it. The stampers sounded fluid and powerful with quiet backgrounds whereas the Magnesium versions were bleached and gray.

On outboard vs. onboard crossovers: With our IBX you can hear an intimate grip with the crossover onboard; with the OBX's outboard crossover you get a *slightly* looser sound (nothing objectionable) but enjoy the advantage of more

having them 9 or 10 inches apart which sounds better than 7 or 8 inches. So we house our external crossovers in standard-width boxes. You could place them in an equipment rack if you wanted. Not only does offboarding remove microphonic parts from the high-pressure environment of the speaker enclosure, you can also mount them on an elastomeric support structure. This gives a far quieter background for greater low-level ambiance retrieval, filigree and upper harmonics; better saturated tonal colors; higher textural differentiation; and a more heterogeneous presentation. It's also calmer and more musically organized to become a net gain by some margin.

Many two-ways fall apart when the going gets tough. They get confused because the crossover points start to drift due to improperly laid-out components. The inductance values change and the parts start talking to each other. You see a lot of speakers with their inductors oriented wrongly relative to each other and the capacitors and resistors. Impeccable crossover layout is vital. We've applied exhaustive mental illness to this subject to be certain of its importance. It's a recipe I wouldn't mess with now. On the Olympian, many of its target customers probably wouldn't want to be bothered with external boxes but we will offer that as an option. For the internal solution, the components are laid out widely on an elastomeric substrate and housed in fully sealed cavities.

On Vox Olympian DNA: I started my design work with the RH330 (330Hz cut-off radial horn) because I developed a relationship with Vitavox and obtained good results from it. Since I didn't have any problems with the driver, I remained on the path. I did have a small issue with it in the Air Partner which was a little tubby and chesty but otherwise loved it. The Air Scout was much snappier and had a crisply walking bass but didn't really go low enough to require the sub I designed for it. So with both the Air Partner and Air Scout, I ran the RH330. In the intervening gap between those models and horns really coming to the fore—in a small way we might have had an influence on that because whenever we showed our horns at hifi shows, the reactions were always favourable and powerful signs of a world beyond infinite baffle and reflex speakers—I encountered certain horn designs I admired even if they sounded slightly weak or fragile. Intellectually, the spherical geometries Acapella and Avantgarde pursue are very appealing with their symmetrical radiation rather than our controlled dispersion. I was simply content with the results I obtained from other solutions and show demos of spherical horns did nothing to persuade me to pursue them. I found them a bit plasticky.

< Air Partner

Air Scout >

I did however have experience with exponential sectioned solutions which sounded terrific. I also had huge respect for the brains and engineering behind Vitavox's David Young now retired. I heard of people preferring the sound of his arrays without the four-cell subdivisions. So I tried some without the fully sectioned vanes to the front. There was a certain advantage to the full vanes as I used them in the Air Scout and Air Partner even though they looked a bit brutal. As you moved across the room in an arc, they would focus and defocus, focus and defocus. Then I listened to the non-sectioned Vitavox and liked it very much. I damped it with polyurethane foam in a 300Hz horn, then laminated Birch ply, then Beech ply to like that even more (identical geometry, different build material). It didn't sound cuppy, nasal, beamy or suffered any particular hot spots. I don't care if people cite a particular polar response. I go with what I can hear. It's also easier to make my kind of horn structurally massive. Doing the same with a spherical horn would quickly look ungainly. But I'm sure you could do a spherical horn really well if you applied yourself.

I had some Tractrix geometries made for the Vitavox S2 midrange unit and tried using that on top as a tweeter which didn't work for me. I then looked at the performance of the 2002 and 4003 drivers and bought them. I far preferred the 2002* in my application and also had a disposition towards the Alnico magnet over Neodymium. I've actually not heard a Neodymium midrange driver which I like. There's something rather cold-hearted about them that to me lacks humanity. I got on really well with the 2002 however and wouldn't care if it had a chocolate magnet. I tried all kinds of geometries on its front, buying off-the-shelf geometries for endless experiments which ended in a graveyard at work. I finally ended up with what we have today, that very unusual truncated section of an exponential which we evolved over time. On the HF unit with that slot-dispersive arrangement, I've used bullet units with 30:30 dispersion but unless you're sitting very far from your loudspeakers, I think bullets are inappropriate for domestic use. If you listen to a variety of slot dispersives like a JBL 2405 and even something as modest as a Beyma, they have a dispersion pattern that's far more attractive than bullets.

On the 703 I haven't modified the horn geometry at all. It's exactly as TAD supplies it. We clamp it in that massive bronze pod which certainly helps. I'm sure that if you put your mind to it, you could make Tractrix or conical horns work beautifully. There are many ways to skin a cat. You take the technology, make your choice and the DNA of your loudspeaker becomes its crossover. The real secret is that there is no secret, no inherently superior approach. You must pursue your chosen path to its very end and not be prematurely content. Keep looking, keep trying different things – including different music, different rooms and different listeners.

** The TAD 2001 is a 6.9kg tri-slot phase plug 1-inch Beryllium compression driver with 19.500 Gauss magnetic flux density, an Alnico 5 motor and 450Hz to 27.000Hz response at 111dB sensitivity.*

On downscaling: While some readers may wish for a financially downsized Vox Olympian, it would *still* be expensive. That's the annoying thing. Consider the drive units. The 703 and 2002, S2 and AK151 are darn expensive. If you could get rid of the two tweeters and use just one; if you could get rid of the S2 and use something respectable, you could get rid of that bass driver which is very dear. There are plenty of cheap bass drivers that work very well. There's a huge amount of R&D from the very big companies that have gone into bass drive units for professional applications. There value for money becomes a real knockout. It's the upper range drive units that seem more difficult to execute well.

On adaptability*:* As I learned with the Air Partner, you take such a speaker into different rooms and suddenly you have no treble. Or far too much treble, no bass to speak of and no meaningful effective way to rectify any of it since your crossover is locked in. That's why the Vox Olympian *had* to be so very adjustable. I experimented with L-pads and T-pads for the back panel pots but couldn't get as good a result as with simple series resistors. Because you vary impedance with such adjustments, the drive units had to be movable to compensate. It would be lovely if an L-pad did the business with its constant impedance but the sonic losses were simply too high. The crossover rheostats are made for us by a US supplier to our spec, with wire of our choosing wound on their standard rheostat former in the direction we indicate. We use those same rheostats in the RW models.

On chassis materials: In Kondo's amusingly Yinglish brochure, it says that they use copper in their chassis for the sound of *stretch* which I take to mean supple and vibrant. And they write that they use silver for the sound of *shiver* which is self-explanatory. Copper chassis to me sound rich, resolved, full and *kind*, not dry, striated and monochrome like aluminium which is gray and foreshortened. Steel is dark and granulated. For speakers, wood or bronze are far better.

The prototype Vox Olympian used a Birch ply midrange horn. I became really despondent at that stage because the sound was slightly dry, opaque, desiccated and pale. It lacked *succulence*. It was neither supple nor alive. The first change was to a Beech midrange horn. That was lovely. Then we went for a full-on Beech bass enclosure. The difference in sound without *any* geometric changes was profound. If one had all the time and money in the world, one could romp through endless materials at a heady clip. While Beech as a material is extremely hard, it doesn't at all sound hard. I might eventually like to try a midrange horn in Maple. That could sound quite special. Maple guitars have real projection and vividness after all. Of course I wouldn't want to overcook the midrange. Balance is everything. The difference between the aluminium and bronze bugle was in many ways far more profound than any of the endless crossover permutations. The small energy conducted inside the trumpet, any destructive interference and resonance modes alone there wouldn't seem to explain the magnitude of it. But should I refuse to implement a winning recipe just because I fail to understand exactly how and why it works so exceptionally well?

Shop talk conclusion: The most important bits to our work include having a clear vision of what we're trying to sonically accomplish; keeping an open mind; pursuing changes very methodically and with full documentation to be able to rewind or skip back in the process at any point; and to not settle for good enough. All the rest of it is 'just' time and money.

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Audition time: As usual, I'd burned three compilation CDs to reference familiar music against an unfamiliar system in an unfamiliar space. I initially prefer less complex material to gain my bearings and inspect specific performance parameters in isolation before mixing them up in any spectacular symphonic finale. As mentioned, Kevin's man had replaced their working clip-lead crossover board with a properly hardwired box for our visit. This involved new wiring, new solder joints and new binding posts. Without making any compensatory adjustments yet on the speakers which the pair of collaborators had meticulously dialled in over many months prior, Kevin launched into the first track. It was his favorite Schubert lied which sets Goethe's 1782 *Der Erlenkönig* ballad to impassioned song.

Utterly seamless and glowingly organic, the sound for my taste was overly fleshy bordering on the humid. 'Ponderous', 'portly' and 'cloying' would have been unfairly excessive descriptors but doses of overt richness and fullness were in clear evidence.

As it was late by then—we'd arrived in the afternoon and I'd already taken the tour of the premises and snapped the obligatory photos—we retired for the evening while Kevin let the system run overnight. The following day the sound had clearly settled down and worked through the virgin solder joints and posts but I still had some misgivings. As Kevin would do for any client, he asked in which directions I might want to shift the sonics to appeal to *my* expectations and tastes. I wanted more leading edge, sharper separation, more upper harmonics and leaner grippier bass. The first thing he suggested was replacing the Kondo speaker cable on the Vitavox 15" bass driver. This he changed from Kondo SPz to Living Voice's proprietary flat copper ribbon cable. It was exactly what my doctor ordered.

Translating ongoing instructions into electrical/mechanical equivalents, he next increased the output of the midrange and HF elements by reducing their series resistances by 0.5 of an ohm using the rheostats built into the crossover design. I was happy with the result which gave more leading edge and attack and reduced some of the earlier humidity. I now wanted *slightly* more upper harmonics so he next adjusted the output level and reduced the crossover point of the super tweeter by increasing its user-adjustable series capacitance. This improved the overall tonal balance but introduced a slightly desiccated bleached and frenetic quality to the tone and musical performance. Kevin therefore immediately repositioned the super tweeter on its user-adjustable worm drive by two small gradations to compensate. This neatly eliminated the dryness, slowed down the overall flow and introduced a more golden hue. Backing this off to a halfway point was spot on. At this point we

switched in the high-current regulated battery power supply and waved goodbye to the national grid. Each step was unequivocal and far from a casual improvement. Next Kevin suggested we move the tweeter pod by 1 millimeter from 18 to 17 to compensate for the earlier crossover tweak. Asking frivolously whether by any chance we could revert to 17.5mm for an in-between value, he merely grinned and made it so. Suddenly *something magical happened*. We both agreed that it had occurred and thereafter refused to experiment with any further adjustments. Don't mess with perfection.

This meandering 4-hour journey through very distinctive sonic flavors affected the presentation *profoundly*. Whilst in the thick of chasing perfection, we'd settled on the Yasmin Levy "Me Voy" track from her *La Juderia* album. The center of gravity shifted from her throat into her diaphragm and back, she became more youthfully risk-taking and fierier, then less on edge, inherently calmer and plainly older - a woman with maturity rather than a somewhat affected young lady trying very hard to impress while clearly overdoing it.

Usual sound-byte reviewer talk of treble, midrange and bass had transcended into tracking how very fine adjustments—half a millimeter of physical repositioning!—impacted the emotive/compelling axis of the experience.

The Chinese erhu on Hassan Issakut's "Zindan" from the *Hayat 1 Hayat* album changed in timbre and texture. At first the sound was solid and dense, then it grew too twangy and flat. Then suddenly it escaped the either/or polarity and turned into something different altogether.

It became crystalline *and* remarkably fluidic. String and wood coexisted. Neither was shadowing the other. Deep inside this synchronicity, a secret window had opened up. This exposed something more real, dimensionally more potent, microdynamically far more expressive. Once achieved, this perfect mid-point balance translated to all the other tracks. While I initially assumed that this bull's eye was personal—referencing our starting point, I reasoned that Kevin simply fancied a thicker more opulent sound—it quickly became apparent that with my type of music, our perceptions overlapped perfectly.

Ping-ponging the presentation in first bigger, then progressively smaller squiggles between opposing poles of performance attributes, arriving at the still point where opposites become perfect complementaries and *shift out of duality* happened for both of us simultaneously. Whether that would be universally applicable I can't know. It's ultimately a very trite and only academic concern.

That's because the Vox Olympian's chosen driver complement and physical implementation work with such uncolored *precision* that the built-in extreme adjustability guarantees not merely the initial adaptation of transducer to chosen electronics and room for proper tonal balance. It then goes the very important extra mile—or millimeter—to match emotional persuasiveness to *any* customer's hard-wired preferences. While I didn't have sufficient time to deliberately upset what we'd achieved just to explore other possible flavors, Kevin assured me that with very little effort, he could shift the sound into something much harder, more charged and subjectively speedier should I wish to. After observing how he'd implemented my requests as though the speaker possessed actual dials and gauges for "a bit more steam here, a bit more pressure there, a click more heat over yonder", I was confident beyond measure. The Vox Olympian really is that true chameleon that can change its spots on a dime.

Rather than imposing his sonic vision on the customer, Kevin Scott has designed his most ambitious speaker to make its owners happy. You don't have to see eye to eye with the designer to get there. Just guide him to where 'there' is for you. *Personalized magic time*.

We spent a brief evening at the Scotts' home to listen to some Aavo Pärt over the resident top small Living Voice speakers with outboard

crossover and a Kondo Ongaku driven from the top C.E.C. deck and Kondo's M-77. With the very first piano note hanging in space with maximal redolence and inner glow, I had my confirmation. If one were to whittle down Kevin's audiophile credo into one solitary word, it would have to be *succulent*.

Not being familiar with Kondo gear, that's likely a quality its owners would ascribe already to the electronics. It's surely far from coincidental that of all the choices of gear to import to the UK market, Definitive Audio has settled on Kondo. Now audiophile expectations would want descriptions of how Kevin's unusual bronze bugle affected the presentation.

That's assuming of course it wasn't invisibly nested in the totality of the sound to stand out as a definable separate entity. Alas nothing stood out in that sense. The only quantitative critique of Kevin's Vox Olympian presentation as I heard it was the lowest octave being merely hinted at.

While he owns the Velodyne 1812 subwoofer and had their engineers visit to demonstrate its own many adjustable features, he prefers complete hornloading for its textural continuity. Given space constraints, he built himself two still *somewhat* compact 2 x 15" bass horns whose physical dimensions are insufficient to generate full power below 35Hz.

With more time, it might have been fun to press the mighty Velodyne into service for some

20-40Hz reinforcement and run Mychael Danna's "Gold Dust Bacchanalia" from the *Kamasutra* soundtrack which sports truly endowed infrasonics. With more time, I would have wanted to extricate the Kondo M-77 preamp to drive the Gaku-Oh monos direct just to learn how much the famed preamp impacted specific qualities of the performance. Our cats and my empty editorial seat simply put a limit on the visit's duration.

My upshot and takeaway from this RoadTour were simply this. I've never previously met an audio designer with the specific set of skills and physically optimized facilities of Kevin Scott who wears the hats of system tuner, setup man, retailer, importer, designer and manufacturer interchangeably. This creates the very necessary bigger perspective most hifi designers sorely lack. Add to this a quite unusual resourcefulness to push artisanal aspects into luxury yacht territory and the Living Voice Vox Olympian as a *custom production* speaker has no equal at least in my experience.

In unexpected ways, it also is a teaching tool par excellence. With its designer on the controls, this well fussed-over inanimate subject can show us how measurable technical quantities in the amplitude and time domains translate into qualitative hues and aromas that alter subjective lighting of the scenery, slow or speed up flow, rotate timbres and textures, affect performer personalities and their apparent age. You'll shift tonal weighting, transient impact, vitality, energy, density and whether the performance is more intellectually abstract, otherworldly transcendental, here/now emotionally intimate or propulsively energetic. Any ultimate statements are in vain because this speaker can be so comprehensively tuned. Relatedly, this also becomes an exceptionally keen tool on optimum playback volumes. A click too high or a click too low and from track to track you know what's just right. At this level of execution, *everything* becomes relevant. (Note to Kondo: The M-77 needs a remote control for volume.)

The usual talk of bass, midrange and treble really is the most primitive kindergarten stuff. Soundstage breadth, width and image focus aren't far removed. What the Vox Olympian's expansive calibration palette adds is the necessary exactitude to 'stop time' and step outside the usual push/pull scenario of either/or. Where many designers are strangely incapacitated to set up and demonstrate their own creations to very best effect, this Living Voice speaker comes packaged with a designer in tow who clearly is a high-order setup master. He also has a well-honed sense of tolerance for personal preferences. Those could sharply diverge from his own. The more the merrier in fact. There's no my-way-or-the-highway petulance. There's no prerequisite to agree with his values. Finally add a very substantial music appreciation education which should be the backbone of anyone working in this sector but often isn't. All of this informed and *endowed* the Vox Olympian. As much as an inanimate object can be said to have life, this one has it.

This admittedly lengthy coverage conveyed hopefully what a personal audition at Definitive Audio might hold in store for you from lovely environs to a good palette of quality ancillary choices, from a huge residential music library to very gifted generous hosts who've opted to work far away from the high streets with their particular brands and publications. There are far too few such opportunities left where one is guaranteed meaningful encounters with what this entire obsession with music and better sound *should* all be on about. This was—and is—one of those few. While the Vox Olympian is for a terribly exclusive clientele, the £8.800/pr Avatar OBX-RW model I experienced in the Scott residence does speak with the same succulent voice. It's simply been scaled down in magnitude (likely perfectly appropriate for less ambitious spaces). For that reason, I've committed to a formal review of it later in the year already.

To inject an appropriately musical note, knowing of my fondness for Indian classical music, the Scotts whisked us off to Leicester's Curry Row where the UK *Sense World Music* label operates its own traditional Indian bazaar. I duly walked off with 22 new CDs recorded very well (which sadly can't often be said for Indian productions). If your audiophile upgrade budget currently doesn't stretch to new speakers, a few quid for new recordings should surely be on the menu. For Indian vocal and instrumental music, give this website a try.

Vox Olympian. It's a steeply ambitious name. In an industry filled with immodest claims, much chest thumping about nothing and robotically unattractive ultra-priced speakers with perfectly ordinary drive units, not living up to such an illustrious name could seem to be a foregone conclusion. My experience was quite different.

The quality of the drive units is truly exceptional across the board. The physical stature is smaller than expected, the different visual motifs are nicely integrated and balanced. The choice of materials is distinctly nobel and luxurious. Attention has been paid to the smallest of details as it should in these leagues. The choice of possible finishes is limited only by the imagination and wallet. Bespoke in loudspeakers for once means what it says.

The almost infinite adjustability is the finishing but most vital touch to insure that the speaker's performance matches the room, ancillary electronics and most importantly, the owner's requirements and tastes. Like a premium vocalist's free play with inflective nuances of subtle tone modulations riding on projection power to transcend concerns over technique and machinations, this speaker then makes one forgot all the 'how' and 'why' aspects which so endlessly fascinate career audiophiles. All considered, the name actually seems rather appropriate. ***Vox Olympian***.

The final granite plinth will have Living Voice hand-cut into the front edge

Bridget Riley from the Op-Art School

Postscript: No visit to England would be complete without fish & chips, a proper afternoon tea in an arch-conservative shop like Fortnum & Mason's—their aromatic Lapsang Souchong was superb—or at least a passing glance at one of London's many cultural opportunities. Our day trip to the city included the Modern Art exhibits at the Tate Museum. Two images seemed fitting reminders for the parallel illusion of perfectionist hifi. With these paintings you *know* perfectly well how they're flatly and incontrovertibly - well, flat and two-dimensional. Yet your eyes would beg to differ. The longer you stare, the more motion there is.

Ditto superior hifi. We know it to be nothing but illusion conjured up by soulless machines. Yet properly set up, it creates its own undeniable motions. It's energy in motion. *Emotions*. Living Voice knows how to tap and deliver those...

Srajan Ebaen

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