



Estelon Aura Loudspeakers

Review by Gregory Petan

Having been in the audio world for going on 30 years, I've been keen to the rise and fall of many brands. Names like Classe, Apogee, Wadia, Thiel, and Sonic Frontiers, once ubiquitous mainstays, have long gone by the way of the Dodo. On the upswing, digital from DCS and electronics manufacturer Vitus' growth has been amazing to witness. I had the honor to have been the first to review Vitus in the US. Though as quickly as Vitus and DCS have grown, I cannot think of any other brand other than Estelon to capture the imagination of the audio world as quickly, while seemingly avoiding even one misstep along the way.

Hailing from Estonia, Alfred Vassilkov studied electro-acoustics in St. Petersburg. One morning over breakfast with his daughters Alissa and Kristina, the group decided to team up to bring Alfred's dream to create the world's best speakers into reality. Estelon introduced its first

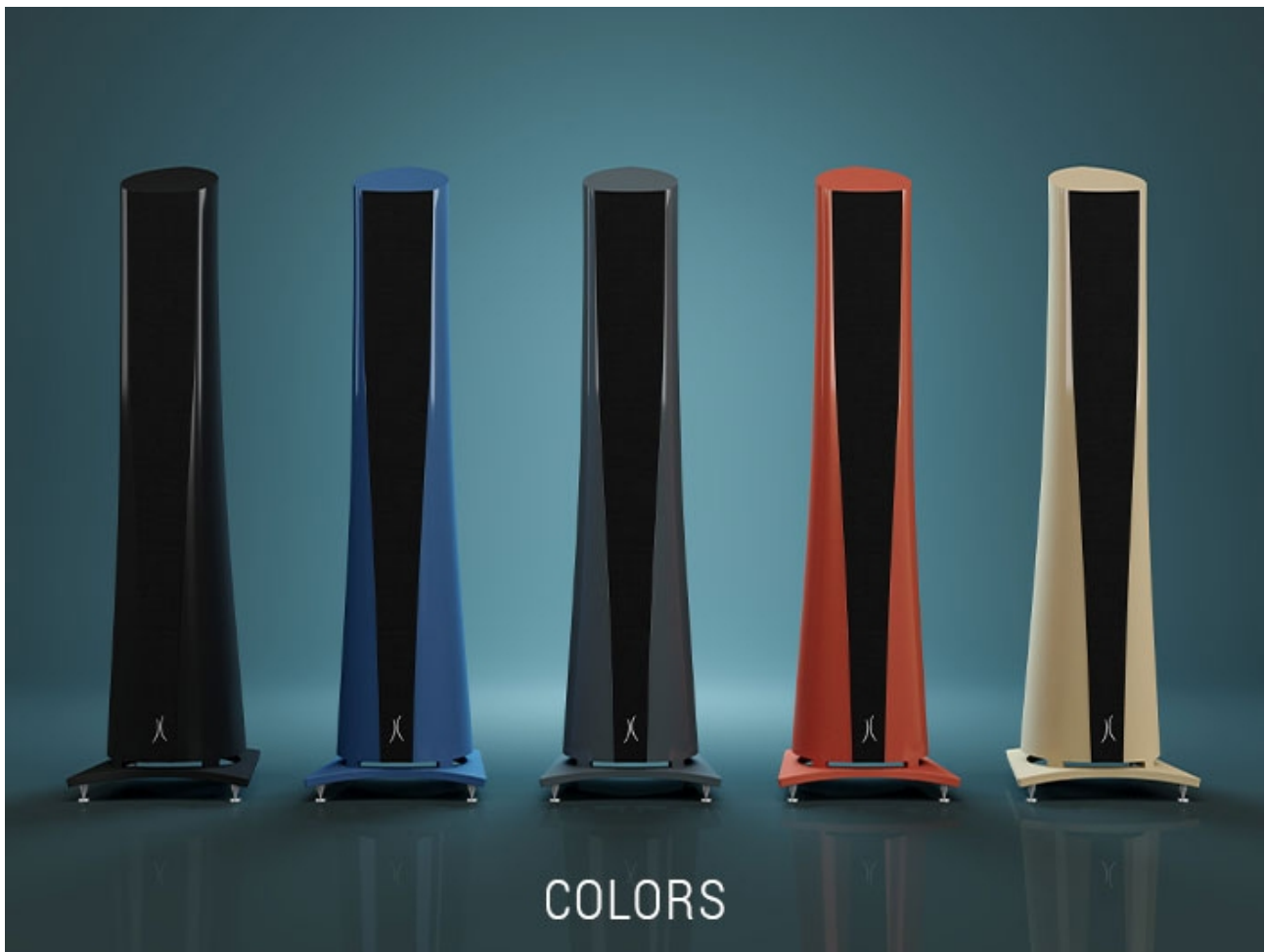
speaker in 2010, and has since racked up numerous awards and rave reviews from the audio press. The lineup has grown to 11 speakers, ranging in price from the \$19,900 Aura to the \$269,000 Extreme MkII.

The shape of Estelon speakers is unmistakable, and unlike anything that's come before it. The shape and contours of the cabinets, driver placement, and varied density of the cabinet at different physical points is 100% purposeful, with the form literally following function. The Estelon YB, and all higher model cabinets are crafted from a proprietary marble-composite material, and are injection molded using a highly sophisticated process. Both the cabinets and molding process are patented by Estelon and exclusive to the brand. However, the Aura cabinet material is a specially developed composite that



is thermo-formed to create the end-result. It's a less costly material and process, and has many benefits and some of the traits of the more expensive Estelon models.

The long, lean, and curved lines sweep upward from wide to narrow creating a graceful silhouette that just makes anything and everything else seem... boring. The Aura really are sublime in their stance. As attractive as they are, I could imagine Estelon speakers doing very well working with architects and designers catering to the well heeled music lover. The Aura's modest footprint belies the rather tallish height. The available white satin surface is flawless and a joy to caress. While the Aura is currently limited to a white finish, the upper echelon models offer a stunning array of colors and meticulously hand-painted finishes. (edit: New colors are now available)



Once removed from the boxing, the Aura are refreshingly light and easy move around. A set of supplied spikes anchored them into position. It's necessary to tip the Aura on edge if spades are used to access the clamp style binding posts set back in a carve out under the base of the cabinet. I'm not a fan of this style of binding post, and less a fan of how tight a space there is to work with. Tightening down the clamp mechanism resulted in scraping my knuckles in the cramped space provided. I'd prefer a set of dressy binding posts easily accessible on the outside of the cabinet, but I get this compromise keeps the silhouette as clean as possible. Though for a speaker as elegant as the Aura, every aspect of how one interacts with it should provide a high end, tactile experience. Rant over. The three way Aura has a 2-5" Satori-Egyptian papyrus midrange drivers, and a 1" Scan-Speak textile soft dome tweeter.



Bass is handled by a downward firing 10" Faital hard pressed paper cone sub woofer. Internal wiring by Kubula-Sosna. Despite some consternation on the part of Aldo Filippelli, the US agent for Estelon, based on the size of my room (33' x 60' x 14') the Aura's 35Hz rated low end extension was effective and perfectly integrated to its mid and tweeter. Having my huge room, I'd go for the larger X Diamond MkII or Forza. (XB is too small a speaker for your room size and will not load the bass as effectively as with the Aura in a big room)

I just finished with the like priced PS Audio FR20s when the Aura arrived. I really enjoyed the FR20's warmish powerful and natural sound. Switching over to the Aura took some getting used to, a grace period of seven days was allotted for breaking in the cold speakers. I'm not sure how much playing time they've had, but they really improved over a good long week of run in.

System for the review was the Krell K300i integrated with streamer, the Krell K300p phono stage, Triangle Art Signature turntable and Zeus cartridge. The fantastic new kid on the block WAY cable interconnects, power cords, and speaker wire (review to come) made for an outstanding system and great synergy.

With its sinuous profile, the Aura may be mistaken at first glance to be positioned as more a lifestyle speaker than true high end, but I'm here to tell you, they are all in on high end performance. Working from the macro to the micro descriptors, the Aura are equal parts clean, clear, focused, and vibrant. There is no peach fuzz or gentle darkening of tonal shade compared to the FR20. No, the sound of the Aura is thoroughly modern. There are no cues that harken backwards with pleasant colorations or resonances that offer familiarity. The clarity and openness demonstrated by the Aura strikes as new,

fresh, and of the moment. The Aura pulls off a very tough trick. The ability to reproduce the upper midrange and lower treble with dynamics, focus, clarity, and vibrancy. Horns, cymbals, the right hand of the piano, and the upper range of vocals shine through without being overly forward or edgy.



There is less ambiguity, great transparency, and deep, deep silences. The first track I played was Stanley Clark's "What if I Forget the Champagne" from *If this Bass Could Only Talk*. This is a terrific album and more than adequately recorded. The soundstage and imaging cast is supremely well focused and discrete. The beginning of the song has some shimmering cymbals and quick little transient percussion effects. The final visit from the trumpet hits and holds what has got to be the highest possible note on the trumpet for a good 8-10 seconds. This has sent many drivers into some kind of modulation or break up. Through the Aura, the passage passed through unscathed.

The upper mids and lower treble are particularly clean and resolved. If there is one way to describe the Aura that would be the way. That accolade is not at the expense of the bass (both low and mid) or the very top of the treble. The overall performance is very linear and very cohesive. Character, what little there is, is very consistent throughout. But it is hard to ignore how wonderful and prominent the midrange/treble is. The Aura has a point of view, it knows what it's about; reproducing the heart of the music. Whether vocal or instrumental, the Aura is blessed with ability to draw in the listener's attention, keeping it rapt. Case in point. I hosted the 90s band the Posies at my loft for the last stop on their world tour four years ago. So when Ken Stringfellow (founding member and touring member for REM) reached out to host his new album release here this past December, I jumped at the chance. With the Aura in place, driven by the Krell K300i integrated/streamer/amplifier, the 50 attendees sat through the entire 12 song collection applauding enthusiastically at the end of each song. This album is a deeply intimate view into Ken's emotional growth as a father, husband, and artist. I was emotionally drained by album's

end. Now keep in mind, my loft is enormous and the Aura is by design and intention for a smallish room. Aside from not reaching concert levels of volume, the Aura wowed the crowd and delivered the goods. Facing a stiff headwind, the diminutive Aura's abilities shined where it really mattered. Ken's vocals were dead on, and with Ken being there in person, it was not difficult or subjective to make that observation.

We use our system for movies as well. With the Aura in 2-channel mode, its lack of coloration and excellent dynamics make cinema extremely enjoyable. My wife, who watches movies and streaming series often, lamented the reality of the Aura being returned. We have since picked out an XB Diamond in metallic blue as our aspirational next speaker.

The thought 25 years ago of a speaker as sophisticated in both design and performance was merely a daydream. In 1995 dollars the Aura would have cost a whopping \$36,000. And even at that price the Aura's abilities today were barely touched upon at any price then. While Estelon offers value at each tier they offer, I proffer the Aura is THE value among them.

It's a wonderful time to be an audiophile. For under 30K one can put together a system that was bank account draining ultra-reference level a couple of decades ago. Estelon is uniquely positioned as a groundbreaking cutting edge manufacturer to continue leading the way while redefining what great sound reproduction is. Rarely does a manufacturer, especially a speaker manufacturer, hit home runs from the get-go. With the Aura, we have a bases loaded, game 7, two outs in the ninth inning, down by 3, 3-2 pitch crushing grand slam.

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