



Finite Elemente Cerabase Footers

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"It disturbs me that footers make such a difference." Ain't that the truth, Abe. But then you shouldn't have been so surprised. Remember when you gave me an assist installing the Finite Elemente Pagode APS Amp Stands? Talk about a grand disturbance!

Such are the pitfalls of the empiricist grappling with the logic of the matter. Theory fails us and is trumped by reality. At this level, everything makes a difference. Playback varies from day to day due to factors seen and unseen, like temperature, humidity, and the electrical grid. Then there's your neighbor running the washing machine. The system is temperamental like a finicky, domestic pet.



Cerabase Classic in box

It's Saturday afternoon and the panel has gathered for a session. The mood is upbeat and the system is cranking just fine, so midway, after digital and before the switch to vinyl (sessions always proceed in that order), we have a party: chocolate espresso biscotti from Eataly; red velvet cupcakes and sweet potato pie from The Brooklyn Sweet Spot. Yum!

My set agenda for the day is to roll footers—specifically, the Cerabase Compact model from Finite Elemente—under the two phono stages I have on the rack.



Classic and Compact

Cerabase Classic and Compact models

Back in 2012, when the all-tube Allnic H-3000V Phono Stage arrived, I put it through its paces and discovered it responded well to tweaking. To tailor its sound I rolled the rectifier tube in the outboard power supply and played with third-party footers. The venerable tube-hybrid Nagra VPS Phono Preamplifier also responded well to footers. Coincidentally both of these units have outboard power supplies and you could place footers under one or both chassis. I had a clear preference for under the power supply alone. This makes sense since it was pointed out to me that power supplies have transformers that continually hum and vibrate.

Under the Allnic Power Supply

OK, let's get down to business starting with the Allnic. Reverting to the built-in, rubber utility footers that come shipped under the power supply, I'm reminded in a pleasant way why I bought the component. With good body and sweet, even beguiling, timbres, its strong suit is how natural it sounds. It has a lovely acoustic presentation—less Hifi; more like the real thing. However, I'm also reminded why I wanted to tweak it. Dynamics are too laid back. It's not the micros, which are fine and provide excellent insight into the action on the stage. The macros are the issue. They don't have enough oomph; they don't project into the room.

Secondly, the soundstage, while holistic, is warm and images have blurry borders, resulting in excessive blending to the point where it becomes homogenized.



TAOC under PS

TAOC TITE-35S Footers under Allnic PS

Would you believe a set of TAOC TITE-35S footers under the Allnic power supply addressed all of these complaints? Dynamic force pumped up; image borders sharpened. Now we have a 3-D stage with depth layering. The set of three TAOC footers yielded across-the-board improvements. That's why I have them permanently in place. TAOC is a small division of Toyota Motor Industries from Japan. It has access to their production facilities and considerable engineering know-how. The two-piece TITE-35S is a composite of graded cast iron powder and high-carbon iron granules. I came across these back when I was reviewing TAOC audio racks and subsequently acquired many of their products.



Compact under PS2

Cerabase Compact Footers

"Wow! This is nice!" When we swapped in a set of three Finite Element Cerabase Compact Footers, it was like doubling up on the improvements provided by the TAOC TITE-35S. From the perspective afforded by the Cerabase Compact, I saw how the TAOC cast a grey coloring over everything. The shipped rubber footers had their own color, too, which veered toward warm beige. The Cerabase Compact is like a compromise between the two. The TAOCs greyness disappeared and the sound took on warmth and liquidity, with decidedly richer timbral shadings and lots of colors. They made the TAOC seem both dry and analytical. The Cerabase Compact footers tightened things up and opened things up. Dynamics got juiced, even the micros improved. Images retained size and body, about equal to the TAOC, while their borders firmed up. Textures and edge detail came into view and transients sharpened. The net effect of all this was to expose the articulation of the instruments; in turn, communication of musical purpose is enhanced. Now there was beauty along with the resolution. Finite Element Cerabase is voiced to avoid over-damping and, I hasten to add, sidesteps sounding like a coloration. They just sound natural.

With the Nagra VPS Phono Preamplifier

I got much the same results with a single Cerabase Compact footer under the Nagra VPS power supply. (Because of the power supply's diminutive size, I could only use one.) The Nagra's good body and tone remained, while frequency response became more linear, less midrangy. The major benefit with the Nagra was increased transparency and the stage opened up. To put it in perspective, I would guesstimate a single footer under the Nagra afforded an improvement on the magnitude of a \$1000 upgrade for this \$7,650 component.

With the CH Precision Components

When I reviewed the Finite Element Resonators, I found they had minimal impact on my CH Precision gear, even though they were effective on Audionet and other brands of electronics. CH Precision products seem impervious to third-party accessories. They are remarkably tweak resistant.

This suggested the Cerabase Compact footers had little chance of improving the performance of these components. Indeed, the Finite Element footers made the sound cleaner and more powerful, but it lost some bloom and liquidity. On balance, I judged it not a step forward.

This is probably because every CH chassis has a built-in Vibration Suppression System. Beautifully designed and implemented, this isolation system is wholly effective and is hard to improve on.



CH Precision M1 Monoblock on Pagode Amp Stand

Mainly for this reason, I did not audition the larger Cerabase Classic footers I was sent. These are designed to go under heavy gear like amps, but mine are the CH M1 monoblocks. These weigh 160 lbs. each. The task of disabling the Vibration Suppression System and replacing it with the Classics seemed both daunting and unlikely to be an improvement.

Construction and Design

The Cera footers exhibit the high-quality manufacturing Germany is known for. They are constructed from precision-machined stainless steel and employ extremely hard, high-tech ceramic balls for fast transfer of sound-interfering resonance away from the component. They are available in sets of three or four and are height adjustable.

Conclusion

For the hard-core audiophile, the journey is hardly a steady progression. If your experience is similar to mine, we suffer many fits and starts and maybe end up in a better place. One of the lessons from the journey is, as you acquire better gear, fewer and fewer audio Band-Aids are needed. Accordingly, my tweakster instincts have been in remission for quite some time. It must be years since I messed around with footers. Why begin again now? It goes back to those Finite Elemente amp stands. They made such an impression I wanted to sample what else the company offered and they are known for their footers. Under those components where accessory footers were already being used, I revisited the rubber ones that come standard, then I moved to TAOC steel particulate ones, and finally on to the Cerabase compound design. Each iteration resulted in a more interesting and engaging performance. The Cerabase under the Allnic H-3000V might even be called a dramatic improvement. The \$7,650 Nagra VPS exhibited what I would guesstimate is a \$1000 upgrade with a single Cerabase Compact under its power supply.

The Finite Elemente Cerabase Footers are definitely value added.