

## **TEST** Finite Elemente Pagode Signature MK II by Carsten Bussler



With the Pagode Signature MK II, the German specialist for hi-fi racks, Finite Elemente GmbH, located in the North Rhine-Westphalian city of Paderborn, is offering a new line with a particularly attractive price-performance ratio for all those who don't want to compromise, but still want to keep their feet firmly on the ground in terms of price point. We took a close look at the E14 model.

Finite Elemente has made a name for themselves in the hi-fi scene thanks to its extremely sophisticated hi-fi rack solutions, which have been successfully established on the market for many years. For me personally, these products are a prime example of "Made in Germany" transported into the present day. So to say from the good old days, when this term still had a meaningful value in contrast to today. But hi-fi racks, hi-fi furniture or equipment bases, what is actually the right designation for these, well, "solutions" from Finite Elemente? As soon as you browse or scroll through the product pages, it becomes clear that these are not simply mundane "racks". Personally, I would even be inclined to speak affectionately of a "harbourage" for hi-fi components.

Following the Pagode Carbon Edition, Pagode Edition MK II and Pagode Master Reference MK II lines, Finite Elemente has now introduced the new Pagode Signature MK II range, which comprises also our review sample E14 at a price of 5,490 euros. This can certainly be understood as a friendly entry-level offer, because anyone reaching out for the Paderborn company's top lines mentioned at the beginning is prone to invest the equivalent of a well-equipped small car. Let's then look at the keyword "Pagode": Each product line is preceded by this name. Wikipedia defines the English spelled "Pagoda" as follows (quote): "A pagoda is a distinctive, multi-storey, tower-like structure whose individual storeys are usually separated by projecting cornices or eaves." How appropriate!



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*The logo bar set into the front edge of the bottom level of our test model is made of silver-grey matt anodized aluminum and matches the natural Canadian maple veneer perfectly. As an option, the front decor insert and the side pillars are available in a high-gloss polished finish at an additional charge*

But even those who are prepared to spend "only" five and a half thousand euros on four levels in order to position their hi-fi components on them will, on the one hand, put this amount in a reasonable relation to the price of their system and, on the other hand, expect decisive added value in terms of sonic performance. So, what does the buyer get? For such a price, you would actually have to grant a rack component status, but I wouldn't go quite that far yet. Or, should I actually have to? I'll defer this question for a while. Nevertheless, the purpose is to keep high-quality and sensitive hi-fi equipment, especially turntables and tube amplifiers, from being affected by impact noise and other annoying vibrations, so that the equipment can tap its full sonic potential. And this is precisely where Finite Elemente reaches deep into their bag of tricks, but first of all, the formalities.

The E14 model presented here in natural Canadian maple veneer has four levels and a height of 85 centimetres, whereby the bottom level can hold up to 75 kilograms and the upper levels up to 25 kilograms each. The upper levels can be positioned in three-centimetre increments using a grid of micro-holes in the side pillars for the side spikes. In terms of the overall height, I found the 85 centimetres to be ergonomically perfect for me; however, heights of 45, 60, 70 or 110 centimetres and a minimum of two to a maximum of five levels are also possible. So, everyone should find the right model or combination for their components.



*The Finite Elemente E14 model from the Pagode Signature MK II range is perfectly finished and is very easy to assemble and align thanks to the excellent assembly instructions and the tools supplied.*

Thanks to what I consider to be a very convincing, simple and timeless design in combination with the various finish options, the E14 model blends easily into any existing living environment. All well and good so far, but in the past I've had my fair share of experience with hi-fi racks from a wide range of manufacturers and price ranges when it comes to proper horizontal alignment and I've occasionally wondered why it has to be so fiddly. Not so with Finite Elemente! Here, height-adjustable conical feet with an integrated protective plate are used, which are easily accessible and have sufficient height clearance. Thanks to the high-quality tool supplied, which is worthy of the name, this challenge is also child's play: instead of having to screw the thread by hand, the floor cones are turned using a small steel rod that is inserted into a hole in the cone. So it's all sunshine and roses here!

After the compulsory part now comes the optional part: the technology. In principle, the design of the Signature line is based on that of the Edition series ranging above it in the hierarchy, but dispenses with the "Resonator Technology" used there, which was developed in collaboration with Prof. Dr Borchert from Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts. The elaborate frame construction with shelves resting on ceramic ball bearings has also been cancelled. Instead, resonance-optimized HCCT component shelves are used, which are not only lightweight but also very torsion-resistant thanks to honeycomb core technology. A multi-layer wood panel forms the core of each bottom level, with a honeycomb core matrix of hexagonal elements made of polymer plastic on the top and bottom. This construction is encased by an HDF layer, on which the veneer or lacquer is then applied. For the upper levels, only a honeycomb core matrix is used instead of the multiplex board with a double honeycomb core structure as in the bottom level element.



*It looks delicate, but in practice this connection is bombproof: Finite Elemente's tried-and-tested sidespike technology. It gives the rack a certain visual lightness*

Incidentally, Finite Elemente uses Canadian maple wood because it has particularly important properties in terms of resonance behaviour. Because this type of tree grows particularly slowly, the structure of the wood is demonstrably homogeneous and even and, for example, harder than European maple woods or the even softer cherry woods. It is therefore no coincidence that Canadian maple is also used as tonewood or instrument wood. Each of the upper levels has two recessed stainless steel spikes with counter discs on both sides. These fit exactly into the micro holes arranged in a grid in the side aluminum pillars. The very detailed and well-made assembly instructions recommend masking the aluminum surfaces with masking tape during assembly to prevent the spikes from scratching them incidently during assembly.



*Thanks to the three-centimetre hole pattern in the side aluminum pillars, the height position of the levels can be adjusted to suit individual requirements. The T-profile is extremely rigid so that the side spikes that engage in the micro-hole grid can be tightened firmly. Despite the small distance between the two spikes, the levels are very stable against tilting.*

To be honest, I was initially a little sceptical about the stability of the upper levels if I were to position my devices too far off-centre in relation to their respective centre of gravity - i.e. too far forwards or backwards on the level - because the spikes are relatively close together on each side. But the spikes can really be tightened and locked very firmly, nothing wobbles. And of course, no typical tube amplifier with signal and mains transformers positioned far back on the chassis belongs at the rear edge on one of the upper levels. No, heavy whopping amplifiers belong on the higher load-bearing bottom level anyway. As a reminder: The top levels can bear up to 25 kilograms of weight (in fact, they still have a calculated reserve of around 20 per cent) and it goes without saying that devices positioned on them should be positioned as centrally as possible.

However, the real secret of this rack lies in the resonance tuning of the individual assemblies. Thanks to this "balancing", there are no identical natural resonances that could potentially overlap and thus amplify each other. Which ultimately brings me back to the question raised at the beginning, whether a hi-fi rack, in other words a piece of furniture, can be granted component status, or not. In a very invigorating telephone conversation with Luis Fernandes, the founder, owner and developer of Finite Elemente, I learnt a lot more detailed information, some of it confidential, and was given an explanation of the design context. When I consider the engineering effort that has gone into this, together with the fact that an environment that is as free of interference as possible is an absolute prerequisite for sensitive hi-fi components to be able to realize their full sonic potential, I come to the conclusion that a hi-fi rack like this really is a hi-fi component in its own right. I was all the more curious to see if I could notice a significant difference to my own rack made by the British company Hi-Fi Racks Ltd.



*The height of the stainless-steel conical feet with integrated protective plates can be adjusted very sensitively. Thanks to the comparatively large diameter of the fine thread, counter-locking is not necessary or even possible due to the lack of lock nuts. And that's a good thing!*

I quickly realized that sensitive tube amplifiers in particular gained significantly as soon as I placed them on the Pagode Signature rack. Sensitive tubes in particular tend to exhibit intense behaviour of their own when they are over-excited by impact or ambient sound. Even buzzing, chirping or chirring antique tubes, which I had previously believed to have a defect in their internal construction, became at least partially usable again. This is absolutely amazing! Noise artefacts were generally reduced, making the sound clearer and cleaner overall. Luis Fernandes described this phenomenon as "the noise floor gets reduced", which I found very apt. It all happened on a very subtle level that is difficult to pinpoint. Rather, it seemed like a curtain was being pulled aside, like a veil being torn away to reveal a slightly clearer view. Or like a clearing shroud of fog. The same applied to turntables, which benefit even more from the resonance-free - or rather: resonance-optimized - environment. Due to a lack of suitable equipment and, above all, a lack of experience with such devices, I am unable to answer the question of whether digital components would also benefit in a similar way from being placed on this rack.



*Decent tools are a must for such a high-quality product. Fortunately, the quality goes well beyond that of the tools supplied by a well-known Swedish furniture store chain and they are actually a pleasure to use*

I was able to experience the described tonal improvements particularly well with classical music, such as Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" (Yehudi Menuhin, His Master's Voice, 1985). Individual instruments always seemed to maintain their position as if cemented in place and subtle ramifications and nuances of individual notes seemed to be reproduced even more cleanly than I was used to. If I wanted to, I could follow them even more easily than before. The room also seemed to me to be more "stable" in all dimensions and the background seemed blacker in pauses or quieter passages, which meant that instruments and notes rich in higher frequencies in particular seemed to gain in radiance. However, all these descriptions are merely my pitiful attempt to somehow verbally convey what I experienced and they can in no way replace one's own impressions. So, if you want to squeeze every last bit of sound out of your high-quality music system and realize its full potential, simply try out a rack like the Pagode

Signature MK II model E14 from Finite Elemente presented here with your own setup. It could be worth it.

**STATEMENT**

If you are looking for your final piece of hi-fi furniture, you will find it at Finite Elemente. Craftsmanship and sonic accuracy are firmly anchored in Finite Elemente's DNA and if you want to keep your feet firmly on the ground in terms of price, take a closer look at the hi-fi racks in the entry-level Pagode Signature MK II series. There is certainly always room for improvement, but the models in this line, such as the E14 presented here, are already an ideal harbourage for expensive hi-fi components and guarantee that they can unfold their full sonic potential.

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Listened with

Pre amp: KECES S4 stereo pre amp with phono stage

Power amp: EternalArts OTL Mk III stereo tube power amp

Turntable: Pro-Ject Debut PRO + record clamp PRO

Cartridges: Pro-Ject Pick it PRO, Ortofon Quintet Red

Loudspeakers various DIY full-range drivers: Open baffle (Ciare CH250), Transmission line (Seas FA22RCZ & Seas Exotic F8), Tapered Quarter Wave Tube (Tang Band W8-1772), Backloaded horn (Fostex FE206En)

Accessories: Dynamikks! Speakerlink I, Phono interconnect Pro-Ject Connect-it RCA-E