



Music Hall's rdr-1 radio



phono preamp (\$7300) and Snapper monoblocks (\$4250/pair)—fed by VPI's HRX turntable and a Helikon cartridge, as well as an Audio Aero Prestige CD/SACD player—were driving Israel Bloom's Coincident Technology Total Victory II speakers (\$13k). The sound was lively, quite coherent, tonally warm, and musically inviting.

Alon Wolf and his **MAGICO** line are generating a great deal of positive buzz (see last issue's feature on this exciting young company), and over at the St. Tropez Alon's near-field setup with an Esoteric digital player, Edge Signature One lineage, and Convergent Audio Technology JC-1 monoblocks sent chills down my spine. Whether it was the Barber Violin Concerto [Stern on Sony CD] or Wilco's "Jesus, Don't Cry" the sound was incredibly open, detailed, and lively, with beautiful textures and lots of air. JV is slated to get the Mini, so expect more on this little sweetheart in a future issue.

Also at the St. Tropez was Peter Clark of **Redpoint**—another of my recent favorites—who was showing his newest turntable, the Model D (\$16,000) with a Tri-Planar MK VII arm and Transfiguration Temper cartridge (\$4k each) with a comparatively modest system made up of the **Naim** NAP 112 preamp

(\$1350) and NAP 200 amp (\$3495), and a new, yet-to-be-priced-or-named **Harbeth** floorstanding speaker. Though the sound was not as airy, detailed, or dynamic as I'm used to hearing from the Redpoint Model B and Tri-Planar at home, it still exemplified what a great front-end can do by creating sounds so inherently beautiful, inviting, and musically pleasurable from very good but modestly-priced speakers and electronics.

Back at the AP, **Hovland** was playing a particularly lovely sounding system using its \$9500 HP-200 tube preamplifier (which I'm in the process of reviewing), the newly introduced \$34,000 Stratos solid-state mono amps, a modified Kenwood LO-7D turntable/Grado Statement cartridge, a Mac Mini-based digital source feeding a prototype USB DAC, and Avalon Eidolon Diamond speakers. The sound here was consistently elegant, detailed, and natural, with

## WAYNE GARCIA'S Best of Show

### Most Significant New Products

Too many to choose just one: I would cite two newly revised horn-cone-hybrid speakers as raising the bar for their type—the new **Avantgarde** Duo Omega and the **Acapella Arts** High Violin MkIII. Both are from Germany, both hover just above \$25k the pair, and both are exceptionally low in horn coloration, unusually coherent, and possess the immediacy and lifelike dynamics horns excel at. I'd also have to mention the new **ARC** Ref 3 preamp, and the new affordable analog goodies from **Pro-Ject**.

### Coollest New Product

**Kharma's** Mini-Exquisite speaker...cooler than cool.

### Coollest Accessory

The **Hanni** record cleaners distributed by Elite Audio Video.

### Most Frequently Heard Demo Music

Since JV and I walked most of the show together—does that make us Brokeback audiophiles?—I heard everything on his list plus Nine Inch Nails' *With Teeth* [Innerscope], David Bowie's *Earthling* [Sony], and my own pop and jazz discs: Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* [Nonesuch], Tom Brosseau's *What I Mean To Say Is Goodbye* [Loveless], Bright Eyes' *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* [Saddle Creek], and James Carter's *Chasin' the Gypsy* [Atlantic].

### Greatest Value

**Music Hall** rdr-1 radio.

### Biggest Surprises at CES

Stratospheric prices, fewer exhibitors, so many (really good sounding) horns, and so much more analog stuff than even last year.

### Best Sound at CES

Being a sucker for a great two-way, I'm going to give a close runner's up nod to the **MAGICO** Mini, with my best sound at the show reserved for the **Kharma** Mini Exquisite. And exquisite is the right word for this speaker's sound, look, and build-quality.



Valin and Garcia relaxing with Roy Hall