



TICKETS TO PARADISE

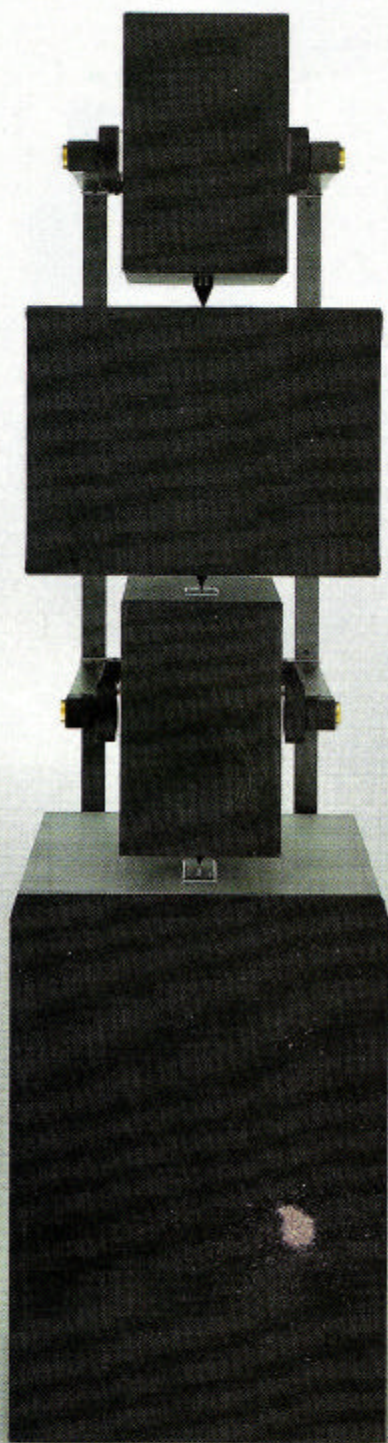
PLATINUM STANDARD

How high can high-end audio/video reach? Whatever your answer, **Goldmund USA** surely exceeds it.

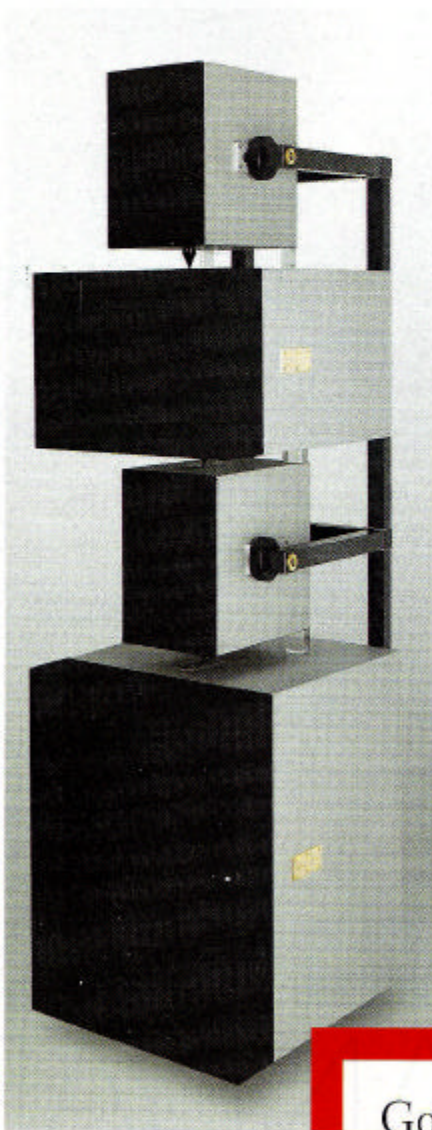
AFICIONADOS OFTEN REFER TO THE MOST ESTEEMED PRODUCT IN their field as "the gold standard." Audio enthusiasts use the term to describe such prized goods as Wilson Audio loudspeakers, Krell amplifiers and Theta CD players. But what term does one apply to a company that produces a \$110,000-per-pair, 600-watt amplifier that incorporates its own touchscreen control center and an Internet connection for remote maintenance? Or a \$38,000 surround-sound processor that produces 32 channels of sound? Or a \$75,000 DVD player made in a limited edition of 50? It seems a new term is necessary. "Platinum standard" seems to fit.

Goldmund USA, the company that created these products, does indeed take a different approach to high-end audio. Visit the headquarters of most audio companies in the United States, and you will see production lines and workaday offices. Visit Goldmund USA, though, and you will find yourself in a luxury home in Southern California's Santa Monica Mountains. The U.S.

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Goldmund built the function of a center speaker into the 700-pound, aluminum-paneled Epilogue (above), which is powered by three 500-watt amplifiers. When surround sound is activated, the third module from the top serves as a center speaker, the top module as a left or right speaker. In stereo mode, both of these modules play. The second module from the top holds the small woofers; the bottom module contains the large woofers.



Director of Operations, Bettina Rog, may start you in the home theater, where a 12-foot video screen descends from the ceiling and you can enjoy the compa-

ny's Epilogue speakers, each built from half-inch-thick aluminum panels and powered by three 500-watt amplifiers.

From there, she may take you to the casual family room, where you take in the sound of the company's Logos speakers, sized to suit the room's plasma TV. Or you may wander to the dining room, where you can enjoy music from the sweetest-sounding "office system" you have ever heard: two Mini Logos powered speakers and a Chiasma 10 wireless music receiver.

And no matter where you roam, the Goldmund wireless touchscreen instantly calls forth any music you choose.

Video projectors and home automation may seem a stretch for a high-end audio company, but Goldmund is no ordinary high-end audio company. "In 2003, we invested more than 30 percent of our income in research and development," says Michel Reverchon, Goldmund's charming president, who is visiting from the company's world headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. "We are the only high-end company that can take you from a basic two-channel stereo system up through home theater and home audio/video networking."

One of Goldmund's qualities that particularly stands out is the company's refusal to outsource—it manufactures everything in Switzerland. "The company that machines our metal parts has three clients: Goldmund, Rolex and Patek Philippe," Reverchon says. "It makes a difference. On our CD and DVD players, manufacturing tolerances on the metal components are within a micron [a millionth of a meter]."

"Our aim is to make our products so rich in the customer's perception that there is no doubt the price is justified," he

Goldmund's metal parts manufacturer also serves Rolex and Patek Philippe.

continues. "For example, in our Eidos Reference DVD player, our cost for the metal parts alone is more than \$10,000. The base is a piece of rigid brass originally made for precision scales. It measures half an inch thick and about 2 feet by 2 feet, and the blank piece itself costs us \$800. This machine also has a proprietary optical digital interface we developed to connect it to our video processor."

Why develop your own video technology when so much already exists?

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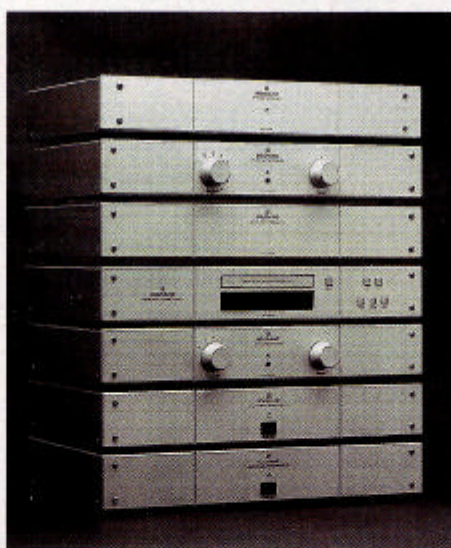
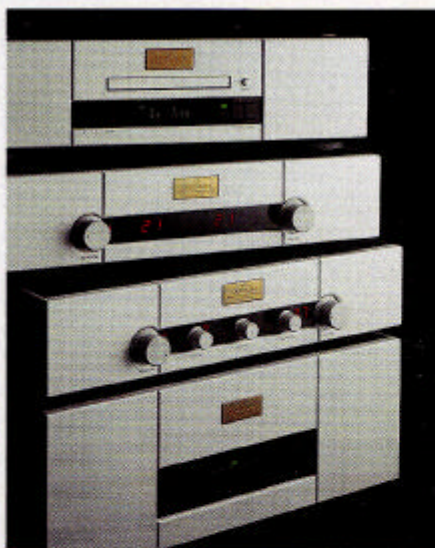
"Each time we enter a new field, we reject the established ideas," Reverchon explains. I cringe, remembering failed products that have scoffed at proven industry standards, but Reverchon proves his point by playing a DVD. The company's Eidos 720 video projector is not yet available, so Reverchon relies for the moment on a rather generic DLP projector. Yet even on the huge 12-foot screen, with a projector that would look more at home in a meeting room, the picture amazes me. Even from an ordinary

surround-sound processor produces up to 32 channels of sound, when most consider 7.1 channels adequate. Reverchon plays a track by 1960s jazz trumpeter Lee Morgan, and the system sounds fantastic, even in an otherwise ordinary living room.

As it turns out, we're listening not to a CD, but to music sourced from the Chiasma 1 music server—through

a wireless transmission, no less. I am shocked that he is demonstrating a \$1 million system using compressed digital audio files. "It's a proprietary technology called AKC," he says, "and it is the best available."

Each time Goldmund enters a new field, it rejects the established concepts.



DVD, the image is nearly perfect—I see none of the distracting digital artifacts that plague practically every projector made today. "How do you do that?" I ask. "It's all in the video processing," he replies.

The sound system in the room also runs afoul of home theater's established rules. For one thing, it does not have a center speaker—or at least, nothing recognizable as a center speaker. And its Mimesis 24

Goldmund's product line is deep for a high-end audio manufacturer, as evidenced by the Eidos 720 video projector (top) and its accompanying video processor. The company's Mimesis product line (above left) includes an impressive surround-sound processor that produces up to 32 channels of sound; the SR products (above right) form the company's "starter" line of electronics.

But why no center speaker? "There really is no place in a home theater to put a center speaker," Reverchon replies. "If you put it behind the screen, it doesn't sound good. If you put it above or below the screen, it doesn't sound good." Thus, in each of the Epilogue speakers, one of the small speaker enclosures serves as the center channel. Goldmund uses the same configuration in the Logos speaker.

And why 32 channels? "Many clients start with two-channel systems," he continues, "and don't want to reposition their speakers when they upgrade to a home theater. That's why our surround-sound processor has 32 channels. We blend and delay channels from Dolby Digital or DTS any way we want, so we can place speakers anywhere in the room and they work."

Although Goldmund began in the United States in 1977 and has succeeded elsewhere, the company only has a few U.S. dealers—a situation it plans to change, albeit slowly and cautiously. "We will not sell our products to a dealer unless we are sure the dealer can install them properly," Reverchon insists. "A Goldmund system is like a Ferrari. If you don't tune it right, it will run, but not to its full potential."

Even with an expanded dealer network, though, Reverchon intends to preserve the company's exclusivity. "In a way, it is crazy to buy these products," he concludes, "but it is awfully enjoyable." ■

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