



Swiss Invasion

With exclusive boutiques, innovative technologies, and amazing audio and video products, Goldmund enters the United States.

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

FEW INDULGENCES ARE not readily available in the United States, but until recently, those rarities included electronics from Goldmund, the 27-year-old Swiss company that produces one of the preeminent audio/video lines. After marketing most of its products in only Europe and Asia, Goldmund this year opened boutiques in two U.S. cities, New York and Chicago, and will open a third next year in Los Angeles.

Americans now have easier access to items such as a surround-sound processor (the Mimesis 24) that produces as many as 32 channels of sound (compared with the eight channels most systems offer), an \$89,000 DVD player

(the Eidos Reference) that may be the most beautiful and extravagant audio/video component ever created, and a towering speaker (the Epilogue) crafted from half-inch-thick sheets of rigid aluminum to eliminate the distortions caused by vibrations of the speaker cabinet.

Perhaps no other high-end electronics manufacturer offers such a broad selection of technologies. In addition to speakers and DVD players, Goldmund's wares include video projectors and processors, multiroom systems, and touchscreen audio/video controllers. "We work like a large company," says Goldmund president Michel Reverchon. "We do strategy planning for technology, where most of our competitors

Boutiques in Chicago (above) and New York are offering many Americans their first glimpses at Goldmund's wares.

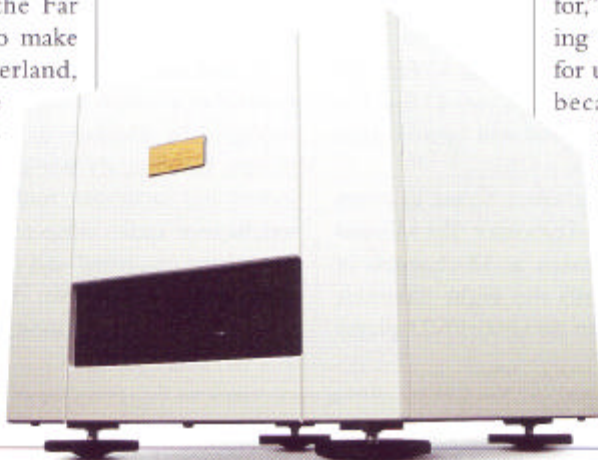


At the Goldmund House (top), a Los Angeles residence that the company has fitted with its products, audiophiles can experience the Telos 600 amplifier (bottom) and other wares.

tend to follow the market. We consider what the customer will need in five to 10 years, then we do it. And we do it better." Reverchon also notes that his company allots 30 percent of its annual budget to research and development, which, he says, is at least twice as much as most companies spend on R&D.

While many competing brands now outsource a significant portion of their manufacturing to the Far East, Goldmund continues to make all of its products in Switzerland, where, Reverchon feels, the craftsmanship remains superior. "The metal parts for Goldmund components are machined at a facility that also makes parts for Patek Philippe and Rolex," he says. "For the parts that go into our CD and DVD players, they maintain manufacturing tolerances

within a micron [a millionth of a meter]. It's expensive—the cost for just the metal parts in our Eidos Reference DVD player is more than \$10,000—but the quality of the finished products is so rich, so elevated, that our customers have no doubt that our prices are justified." Indeed, the manufacturing is so precise that you can barely feel any seams on the metal parts.



Some American audiophiles may recognize the Goldmund name, because the company's original product line—tonearms for record players—has been available here for decades. But as Goldmund's offerings expanded from record-player accessories to a full line of audio products, the company narrowed its focus to include only the European and Asian markets, where high-end stereo systems are most popular. Recently, though, the company began expanding into technologies that it deemed better suited for an American audience, including surround sound, video, and multiroom systems. Reverchon is demonstrating the company's home entertainment capabilities not through traditional relationships with audio/video dealers, but through the Goldmund boutiques.

"The customer for luxury goods wants a rich relationship with the people who created those goods," Reverchon explains. "A dealer cannot convey the story of a product because he's just selling it. By having our own boutiques, we can train the staff so they understand the products fully. The person you are dealing with knows all about the company, where we are going, and why our products are better."

This is especially important for Goldmund, because the company offers 65 different products, many of which employ unusual and exclusive technologies. "Explaining what all of these products do requires a level of training no dealer would have time for," Reverchon continues. "But having our own stores is more practical for us than for other high-end brands, because we make everything you need in home entertainment except for plasma TVs. We even have our own wiring. A Goldmund store doesn't need to carry any other lines."

In addition to opening the boutiques, Goldmund has joined forces with a well-regarded custom installation company,

Seattle Home Theater, and transferred its principals to Goldmund's Los Angeles office. From there, they travel the country supervising the installation of Goldmund products. "We will eventually train installers who will work out of the Goldmund boutiques," Reverchon says, "but for now the best way to ensure the quality of service our customers demand is to have a national installation team."

Although the first two U.S. boutiques are up and running, the best way to experience the company's offerings is to visit the Goldmund House, a Los Angeles residence that the company has fitted with an extensive array of its products. The installations range from \$10,000-per-pair bookshelf speakers with internal amplification to a medium-size system centered on a plasma TV to a state-of-the-art system that includes the towering Epilogue speakers, the Eidos 720 video projector, and the 32-channel Mimesis 24 surround-sound processor. This massive system also features two stacks of \$23,000 Telos 600s, the most recent addition to the Goldmund line and possibly the most advanced audio amplifiers ever created.

The Telos 600's distinguishing characteristic is its ability to offer far greater bandwidth than other amplifiers: approximately 3 MHz, compared with a little more than 20 kHz for most audio amplifiers. Thus, the Telos 600 not only exceeds the bandwidth of almost all other audio equipment, it actually approaches the bandwidth of video gear, although even humans with excellent hearing can detect audio frequencies only as high as 20 kHz. According to Reverchon, the purpose for producing such a high-bandwidth amplifier was a matter of timing.

"When you limit an amplifier's bandwidth, it delays certain audio frequencies relative to others," he explains. "Nothing in nature produces a similar effect. For example, no matter what frequencies of sound



my mouth produces, they all leave at the same time, and they all reach your ears at the same time. Delaying certain frequencies produces a completely unnatural effect. It's the reason why you always know when you are hearing reproduced sound rather than natural sound.

"Your brain can detect a delay of as little as 10 microseconds," he continues. "To completely eliminate perceptible delay, you have to expand the amplifier's bandwidth to at least 100 times normal, or 2 MHz."

Reverchon says that Goldmund began working on expanding the

bandwidth of its amplifiers in 1984 and only recently succeeded. "I could have a nice house in Beverly Hills for what we spent developing this," he says.

In the Goldmund House, each of the two Epilogue speakers is powered by a stack of three Telos 600s, with each amplifier capable of generating 600 watts of power. Although it is difficult to imagine an amplifier producing a dramatic improvement in such an extraordinary system, the Telos 600 does just that. The system sounds far more lifelike than it did with the previous generation of amplifiers.

"Our goal is to make the sound easier to accept," says Reverchon. "Many systems color the sound to make everything sound nicer, much as a musical instrument manufacturer does, but you have that coloration on everything you listen to. It's repetitive, and it masks the subtleties. You get bored with it after a few months and go buy something else. We do the opposite; we make the audio and video reproduction more true." ■

Goldmund USA, 888.465.3001,
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Even Goldmund's mid-level gear, such as its Mimesis and Eidos components (above), exhibits astounding craftsmanship. Below: The \$89,000 Eidos Reference DVD player.

