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10 BEST: OUR TIPS FOR WHAT TO DO WITH THAT OLD





Extravagance Extreme

What it's like to have three quarters of a million dollars in audio equipment in your living room.

Automotive journalists have an easy time at parties. I've seen it. They drop a line about driving the latest Lamborghini, and people gather around like Central Park pigeons surrounding a sloppy eater. But when a technology journalist mentions a great new video projector or surround-sound processor he just tested, people start scanning the room looking for a conversation about Lamborghinis.

For a brief time, though—when my home played host to a Goldmund Epilogue audio system—my anecdotes fascinated everyone I spoke to. After all, not everyone can say they have a three-quarter-million-dollar audio rig in their living room. Most people aren't even aware such a thing exists.

But it does, and I delighted in describing it. I lifted my hands up to the top of my head to show how the speakers tower over most people. I described

Goldmund's impeccable Swiss craftsmanship, and how the company's metalwork originates in a shop that also sources parts for Patek Philippe and Rolex. And I told the tale of how it took two technicians four hours merely to assemble the speakers.

Each of the \$536,600-per-pair Full Epilogue speakers that anchor the system comprises four separate speaker enclosures. Every enclosure is built from heavy slabs of solid aluminum and braced inside with steel rods and more slabs of aluminum. The largest enclosure, dubbed the Epilogue 3, handles the deep bass with eight 8.25-inch woofers. The next largest enclosure, the Epilogue 2, reproduces upper bass with four more 8.25-inch woofers. And the smallest, the Epilogue 1, is devoted to midrange and treble; it packs a 6.7-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter.

One Epilogue 3, one Epilogue 2, and two Epilogue 1s fit into a framework made from square metal tubing. But the frame merely positions the enclosures. The weight of each

► By Brent Butterworth



HEAVY METAL All of Goldmund's speakers are crafted from slabs of solid aluminum and braced inside with steel rods and more aluminum slabs—a construction technique that practically eliminates speaker-cabinet vibrations that can mar the sound. The company's electronic components employ aluminum chassis that match the look of the speakers. Precise Swiss metalwork ensures that every seam is smooth and that every piece fits perfectly with the next.

enclosure actually rests on a steel bar. The pointed tip of each bar fits into the top of a matching bar in the enclosure below. The bar at the very bottom of the assembly rests directly on the floor. Goldmund calls this structure “mechanical grounding” and says it helps convey vibrations away from the speaker components and into the floor. I feel sorry for the lowest rod in the chain—it must support the entire 705 pounds of the assembled speaker. Imagine half the Top 12 on *American Idol* balanced on a single dime and you get the idea.

An interesting twist in the Full Epilogue configuration is that a center speaker is built in. Play a 5.1-channel soundtrack, and the two lower Epilogue 1s convey the center channel while the top Epilogue 1s repro-

duce the front left and right channels. Play a two-channel stereo recording and the two Epilogue 1 modules in each stack work together, both playing either the left or right channel. Add two or four more \$65,800-per-pair Epilogue 1s in the rear, and you have a full surround-sound system.

One does not simply plug a pair of Full Epilogues into an amplifier and fire them up. Each module demands a different audio signal. Goldmund addresses this through the use of a 32-channel surround-sound processor, the \$52,250 Mimesis 24. Every output channel can contain a different mix of any of the channels in a surround-sound mix (left, right, center, left side and back surrounds, right side and back surrounds, and low-frequency effects), and it can be filtered

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precisely to remove treble, midrange, or bass as necessitated by each speaker's design.

In the case of a Full Epilogue system, Goldmund assigns each of the four modules in each speaker its own channel. The Epilogue 3 gets the deepest bass, the Epilogue 2 the less-deep bass, and the Epilogue 1 the midrange and treble—from either the center channel or the left/right channels, depending on what kind of material is being played. Two more channels deliver sound to my surround speakers. That means the Mimesis 24 Goldmund has loaned me is loafing along—I have 22 channels left over, but those could be used to add additional surround speakers or feed sound (stereo, 5.1 or 7.1) to other rooms.

Filling out the system are six \$25,190-each Telos 600 amplifiers to drive the Epilogue 1 and 2 modules in the Full Epilogue speakers; the \$89,000 Eidos Reference

DVD player, an ultra-exclusive model of which Goldmund made only 50; and various Goldmund accessories, including digital audio cable and speaker cables.

The resulting assemblage looks like a collaboration between Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Frank Gehry. It's an imposing system; its presence tells you that the space you're in is for listening, and everything else comes second. I assume that my wife will think this system a gross over-indulgence, and that her first comment will be to ask, "How long is that staying here?" She is certainly startled when she walks in the door, but to my astonishment, she pauses to take in the new additions, then says, "Those look really cool."

Anyone who sees the Epilogue system might well expect to be dazzled—I certainly did—but I am shocked to find the sound doesn't dazzle me. Never does the

COMMANDING ATTENTION Goldmund's current line of audio/video components is designed primarily for audiophiles who want to put their acquisitions on display; most Goldmund installations place amplifiers on the floor and source components in an open rack. However, the company is also developing a line of speakers that can be concealed easily and that will be well-suited for American-style custom home theaters.

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WAY BEYOND 10.2 Although 10.2-channel surround-sound systems have been discussed, most current audio gear is limited to 7.1 channels of sound. The Goldmund Mimesis 24 surround processor (shown above from back, top, and front) quadruples this number by producing as many as 32 channels of sound. The extra channels can be used to drive extra speakers in a surround-sound system, to feed sound to other rooms, and to create active crossovers for speakers. The Telos 600 (bottom right) is Goldmund's current top-of-the-line amplifier.

system call attention to itself. Never do I start to pick the sound apart, trying to figure out what the crossover slopes and frequencies are. Never am I distracted by some audible characteristic or performance quirk. I just listen and enjoy.

Movies sound especially gratifying through the Epilogues. It seems to me that imperfect speakers amplify the many flaws that inevitably occur in the complicated production of movie soundtracks; my mind is often distracted by these unnatural sounds. But the Epilogues are close enough to perfect that movies—and even some of the better-produced TV shows—engage me completely.

There's a perfection to the stereo sound, too. It seems as if my brain is connected directly to the cables of the microphones that were used for the recordings. It's hard to describe because there's so little character to the sound. Surely the elite electronics help, but I think much of the result is due to the incredibly stiff, massive speaker cabinets, which contribute no stray vibrations of their own to the sound.

I expected that having two Epilogue 1s reproducing each stereo channel would result in some weird filtering effects as the speakers interfere with each other. In

fact, a visiting legend of the audio business—whom I won't name but whose name you would recognize—stated firmly that the Full Epilogue system can't work correctly in stereo. After an hour of chatting about his own products, he asked to hear the system. He sat in silence for several minutes as I played a few CDs of his choice, and then turned to me and said humbly, "These sound lovely." (He did agree with me, though, that if Goldmund made the Epilogue 1s in mirror-imaged pairs instead of making them all with the tweeter in the upper right corner, the speaker might image even better than it already does.)

Actually, from my standpoint there is one tremendous flaw with the Epilogue system: The company has only one in North America that it can transport around for trade shows and demos. Thus, only one week after Goldmund's Brett Lee and Ty Wiedrich came to set it up, they return to tear it down. At least I got to enjoy for a week what most people never get a chance to hear. And I got a great story to tell for my next party. ^[HE]

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