

sound advice

by Noah Herschman

Hot Metal Cool new audio products from Consumer Electronics Show 2000.

Every year in the first week in January, almost 100,000 consumer electronics industry mavens gather to display and view what products loom on the horizon, near and far. This year definitely had the most innovative and exciting products ever. This is mostly the result of the vast proliferation of digital technology. It is also due to the fact that right now, because of the strong economy, people not only want the best but they also can afford it. And with price being less of an object, manufacturers—especially higher-end ones—are delivering products that audio enthusiasts are lusting over.

Infinity Prelude MTS Home Theater Speaker System

One of the most impressive speaker systems at the show this year was the Prelude MTS system by Infinity. A division of Harman International, Infinity is one of the most respected brand names in the industry, due in part to

its vast presence in factory-installed car stereo systems, as well as its flagship \$50,000 IRS speaker system. The IRS system—considered by audiophiles to be perhaps the best speaker system in existence—is no longer being manufactured. Instead, their new top-of-the-line system is dubbed the Prelude, and even though it is substantial in cost, it comes in at much less than the IRS system.

The system is based on detachable powered tower loudspeakers: the tower sections can be removed from the subwoofer bases and mounted on a wall or on their own sleek stands. Additional tower sections are used for the rear surround sound speakers. The center speaker is matched perfectly with the towers, employing the same driver technology. The MTS subwoofers each feature a built-in 850-watt power amplifier, and 12-inch woofer.

Instead of being made of wood, the tower and center channel speaker cabinets are made from anodized brushed aluminum. These cabinets are substantial: they are heavy to the touch, yet are also made from a material that prevents sound coloration and distortion. The subwoofers are a sort of very cool aluminum/wood hybrid look, and come in a choice of veneers: natural maple, cherry and onyx-stained anigre.

There are two major bits of technology that go into the Prelude MTS speakers. The first is dubbed the Room Adaptive Bass Optimization System or R.A.B.O.S. Developed by venerable speaker engineer Floyd Toole,

this system is built upon the theory that the behavior of a room's reflective acoustics is different for high frequencies than it is for low ones. R.A.B.O.S. consists of a single, adjustable parametric filter built into the subwoofer electronics that addresses acoustical problems inherent in the low frequencies (up to 100Hz). When setting up the speakers initially, the user can adjust this subwoofer using the supplied tools and SPL meter to optimize the sound for the individual listening room.

The other noteworthy technology employed in the Prelude MTS system, is the Ceramic Metal Matrix Diaphragms (C.M.M.D.) used in the drivers. Also developed by Toole, this proprietary driver material offers superior stiffness and damping, eliminating the coloration and distortion typically found in other driver materials.

The Prelude MTS speaker system is sold à la carte, making it easy for the user to design his or her own system. The subwoofers cost around \$2,400 each, the towers are \$1,600 each and the center channel is \$1,000. Therefore, a complete surround sound speaker system with front and rear towers, a pair of front subs and a center channel would come in around \$12,000.



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