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# 2014 Consumer Electronics Show Highlights

## Hottest Trends and Products

### Jeremy Phan

The 2014 International Consumer Electronics Show has wrapped up once again and while last year's show saw the effects of the economic downturn, this year's show saw a return to grander times both in products showcased and announcements made. So what were some of the hottest trends and products at the 2014 CES?

Last year saw the push by television manufacturers towards Ultra HD (4K) and with the finalization of HDMI 2.0 in late Q3 last year, 2014 will see a raft of new, more economically accessible 4K TVs. Specifically of note is Vizio's abandonment of 3D technology altogether in its 2014 lineup, instead pushing for cheaper 4K televisions. Vizio's entry-level P-Series starts with a 50" set with an MSRP of only \$999 USD and is slated to ship in the second half of this year. Going up

from there, Vizio will offer 5" increments up to its 70" 4K set that is still very accessible at \$2,599 USD. They also showed off a 'Reference' 120" 4K TV but didn't provide pricing or availability. Previously a second tier manufacturer, all of Vizio's 2014 TVs now feature full-array LED backlights with 64-zone local dimming and advanced colour management which should give the likes of Samsung, LG, Sony, Panasonic, and Toshiba a run for their money. Vizio's smart TVs also support the new HEVC codec for 4K



video streaming and come with the latest 802.11ac WiFi standard built-in to handle the increase in bandwidth required. For those that wish to create their own 4K content, Sony announced the FDR-AX100 compact 4K Handycam which carries an MSRP of \$1,999 USD, bringing 4K,

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Rating: 5/5 Globes  


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STEREO 09/2011

HI-FI WORLD 01/2012  
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## quadral Aurum Montan VIII Loudspeakers

George de Sa

My first exposure to quadral and their flagship Aurum line of products came as an unexpected benefit of attending the Montreal Salon Son & Image show, in March 2013. There within a massive room occupied by Mok & Martensen, the Canadian distributor for quadral, I was enthralled by the vivid and expressive sound of the top speaker in the Aurum line – the Titan VIII (\$24,000). The Titan VIII, driven by Vincent premiumLine components, caught my attention as I walked by the room and reeled me in, all the way to the back of the room where the pair of Titan's sat orating. More recently, at the suggestion of Mok & Martensen, I had the pleasure of auditioning a more demure pair of Aurum Altan VIII standmount loudspeakers (\$3,000), with a Vincent SV-237 integrated amplifier (see the October/November 2013 issue of CANADA HiFi for this review). Along with providing me wonderful insight into the SV-237, I enjoyed my time with the Aurum Altan VIII. So when Mok & Martensen approached me with a suggestion to try out the third-from-the-top loudspeaker in the Aurum line, namely the Aurum Montan VIII (\$7,800), I knew I couldn't let the opportunity pass. It's now been a few months since the Aurum Montan VIII loudspeakers first arrived and I have to say that I've found the listening time well spent.

quadral (yes - in lower case), is a German electronics and loudspeaker company that goes back to the early 70's. Aurum, quadral's flagship electronics and loudspeaker brand hosts eleven different loudspeaker models including: three centre speakers, two standmount speakers, one subwoofer and five floorstanding/tower speakers. The Aurum Montan VIII is the third largest and third most expensive tower loudspeaker model within the flagship Aurum line.

### design features

The Aurum Montan VIII loudspeaker is a full-size and virtually full-range 3-way, 3-driver, pressure/bass reflex loudspeaker,

weighing in at 40 kg. The loudspeaker stands 44.1" high, 10.6" wide and 17.6" deep and therefore, is not a speaker to be overlooked. The driver complement consists of a 10.2" woofer, 6.7" midrange and most interesting to me, a 4.72" magnetostat ribbon tweeter. Nominal/music power is 200 Watts/300 Watts, with a frequency response of 25 Hz – 65 kHz, impedance of 4 to 8 Ohms and a sensitivity of 89 dB/ 1 Watt / 1 meter.

The term magnetostat was new to me when I reviewed the Montan's little brother – the Altan, so I decided to do a little research and thought I'd share what I gleaned from my reading. In simple terms, a magnetostat tweeter might be referred to as a ribbon tweeter, which is how Aurum refers to it on their website; however, magnetostats are actually a different breed, if perhaps within the same species as ribbon tweeters. A magnetostat uses a diaphragm made of a very thin non-conductive plastic (Aurum tweeters use a diaphragm made of Kapton, which is a polyimide film developed by DuPont) onto which conductive (metal) tracks are affixed. This diaphragm sits sandwiched, between parallel rows of very strong magnets. On the other hand a true ribbon tweeter uses a very thin diaphragm that is made of metal or a metalized plastic film that itself conducts current, as opposed to using conductive tracks. Ribbon tweeters typically require a transformer, whereas, magnetostats do not.

Moving to the midrange and woofer in the Montan VIII, we find what look like typical cone drivers; however, the diaphragm cones are made of a proprietary material called ALTIMA. This name provides a hint to the composition. ALTIMA in fact is a very light metal alloy comprised of ALuminum, TITanium and MAGnesium, hence its name. This special alloy had been developed to greatly control resonances and ensure the accuracy of the drivers in the production of sound. Along with the ALTIMA diaphragm, the midrange and woofer drivers have a rubber suspension and concave dustcap that



follows the curve of cone diaphragm.

Looking at the enclosure of the speaker there are a couple things worth noting. First, as was the case with the much smaller Aurum Altan VIII, the Aurum Montan VIII is built with an integrated base that raises the speaker's bottom panel up on four barely visible cylindrical metal pedestals that are approximately ¼" high and which sit in-turn on a 1" solid MDF base. I've seen similar designs from a few other loudspeaker companies but all those that I'm familiar with use this design to provide clearance for air movement in conjunction with a bottom exhausting bass-reflex port. This though, is not the case with the Montan VIII, which uses two large rear bass-reflex ports but no bottom port, in its design. If I had to guess, I'd say that along with the integrated base being a unique and attractive element to the Montan's visual form, the quadral design-team most likely has utilized the base to reduce / optimize cabinet resonances as well as provide a level of isolation of the speaker enclosure from the floor. The second noteworthy design feature of the Montan is its woofer placement. Here, Aurum has not mounted the Montan's ALTIMA 10.2" woofer in traditional manner, i.e. on the front baffle. Nor has it been placed on the top, bottom or side. Rather, Aurum has done something quite unique with their woofer in the Montan; something I haven't experienced with any home audio loudspeaker. Aurum has placed the Montan's woofer on a diagonal slant, within an alcove that is open to the front of the speaker via a rectangular breach in the front baffle. This opening is tastefully screened with rubberized removable cords, which run top-to-bottom. Somewhat concealed in the shadow behind these cords and surrounded by the black finished walls of the alcove, the woofer's bright ALTIMA face can be found. This woofer sits only about an inch behind the baffle on one side but just short of 8" deep on the other. The added complexity of this design is not for aesthetic purposes but actually for engineering reasons. It turns out that by mounting the woofer in this manner, the space to the back of the woofer diaphragm can operate in a bass reflex manner, while the space within the alcove in front of the face of the woofer, can serve as a pressure chamber. This hybrid, bass reflex /

## sidebar

### Kimber Kable 12VS Speaker Cable

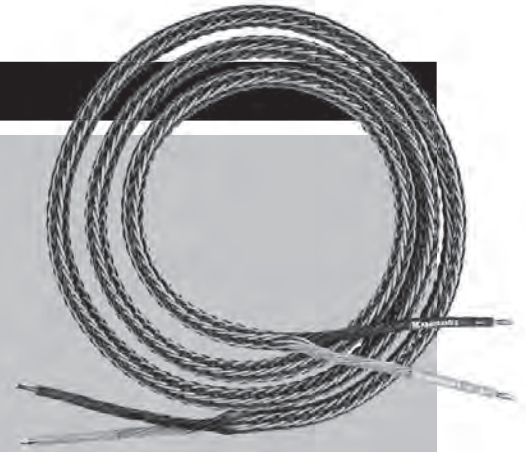
Though I've had a set of Kimber Kable 12VS loudspeaker cables on loan to me from Kimbercan, the Canadian distributor, for the past six months, it was in reviewing the Aurum Montan VIII loudspeakers that I gained insight into the 12VS cable's character.

The 12VS cables are constructed of 12 gray and 12 black conductors that result in two 8 awg conductors. The set I had was 8 feet long and terminated with Postmaster 33 spades (amp-end) and SBAN bananas (speaker-end). I found the construction and terminations to be of high quality and their girth and braiding was impressive.

In use, the 12VS loudspeaker cables demonstrated proficiency in delivering a smooth and natural sound across the midrange and treble. Vocals were delivered with good focus and detail, while avoiding an overly analytical presentation. There was a measure of kindness that the cables offered to lesser recordings, while providing a good measure of transparency – enough to reveal changes in the upstream playback chain, as well as differences in the loudspeakers. The overall tonal balance was even, with a slight attenuation of the upper-treble. I found the 12VS to be most impres-

pressure chamber arrangement is meant to provide greater bass extension, while ensuring higher-control and precision in bass production. Without spoiling this review, I will venture to say that I'm now a believer in this design approach.

The review pair of Montan VIII loudspeakers was finished in an oak choco real-wood veneer, which I found to be handsomely attractive. The finish was without flaw and had a lovely authentic wood grain tactile feel. Styling of the speaker is for the most part utilitarian



sive in its bass performance; offering a textured and full sound with stalwart dynamics. Given recordings that call for impact on the low-end the 12VS is a very capable performer, while remaining overall neutral in character.

I believe the 12VS, given its neutrality, will work well with most systems having a neutral tone and even better with those that lean slightly to the brighter side of neutral. If you seek a smooth, balanced cable with outstanding bass and dynamic strengths, the Kimber 12VS should be one of the cables you audition.

#### MSRP:

6' / pair 12VS with Sban: \$405 or 8': \$475

6' / pair 12VS with PM25 or PM33: \$425 or 8' for \$495

Add \$30 for Bi-Wire with Sban or \$50 for Bi-Wire with PM25 / 33

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with overall build demonstrating high-level of quality control. The substantial aluminum surround of the magnetostat tweeter and midrange driver provided a modern / industrial aesthetic relief to the slightly curved but traditional cabinet. The magnetic grills looked and worked very well, while the front baffles revealed nothing of the mounting points. I should mention that the Montan is also available in a couple other genuine wood veneers (natural oak and cherry wood) as well as high-gloss black and white. Additionally,



it can be requested in over 180 custom colours. Connections are by way of a dual pair of rear-mounted binding posts with cable jumpers. The Aurum Montan VIII is handmade in Germany and has a 10-year warranty.

### performance

This brings me to the core of this review – my listening sessions. All my listening was done using my reference gear that includes: a Windows PC, Squeezebox Touch, ADL Esprit DAC, Bryston BP6 preamplifier and 4B-SST2 amplifier. For an analog source, I used my Goldring GR1.2 / Electra cartridge and Pro-Ject Phonobox II SE stage. Interconnects were Kimber PBJ / Hero and for speaker cables, a set of Kimber 12VS that I've had for a number of months, courtesy of Kimbercan (Canadian distributor for Kimber Kable products). I found the Kimber Kable 12VS to pair very well with the Aurum Montan VIII's in my system.

Out of the box the Montan VIII loudspeakers sounded a bit reserved and simplistic in their rendering of music but with a decent break-in (400+ hours), things changed and before I knew it the Montan's began to seduce me with their aural

magic. It was in the bass frequencies that these speakers were capable of performing like no other speaker that I've heard in my room to date. Here the Montan's could provide exceptionally extended bass that I not only heard but also felt. It's funny how one can become accustomed to speakers that are incapable of providing a complete or at least a near complete picture on the lowest octave, i.e. 20Hz to 40Hz. Though in this bottom octave you don't typically find much in terms of musical information, mainly because most instruments, other than a pipe organ, are unable to reach that low – for example a bass can only reach down to 40 Hz. However, there are some recordings that do contain low frequencies within this range. And, when you do listen to such recordings or more-so feel them, via a speaker such as the Montan, you finally become aware of just what you've been missing. Take for example the Cowboy Junkies Trinity Session album. Listening to the first couple tracks provided me with great insight on the Montan VIII loudspeakers. Playing the first track, Mining for Gold, there are no instruments, just Margo Timmins' solemn solo vocals; however, in the background, this recording captures

the subterranean low frequencies of the subway resonating through the foundations of the church, where this track was recorded. On my own Audio Physic Sitara 25 speakers, some of this you can make out; however, on the Aurum Montan's you get a much fuller appreciation of this recording. By fuller, I don't just mean hearing but also a much rarer physical experience. Through the Montan VIII's, the low frequencies became more perceivable, palpable and realistic. This difference I might like to sniffing versus tasting a fresh cup of coffee – both can be pleasurable but the first provides only a sense of anticipation and wetting of appetite, whereas the second, the tasting, is what gives fulfillment. In the bass department, I can say that the Aurum Montan VIII's are fulfilling. In fact, listening to the rumble of the subway on Mining for Gold, through the Montan's allowed me to feel as though the subway was travelling under my own listening room. Keeping with the same album and moving to the next track Misguided Angel, the light tapping of the kick-drum had me mesmerized. It's not that I haven't heard the taps of the kick drum before but now I was hearing tuneful bass with weight, weight that im-

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parted feeling. The impression went beyond being lifelike in tonal expression and actually had my eardrums pulsing gently in synch with the kick of the drum – similar to what you might expect in a live and intimate setting. This sense of tactile bass continued on the track, I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry. Here, again the kick drum imparted a pulse-like feel but it went beyond my ears and was now imparting the real sense that my entire room was pulsing with the rhythmic pulses of the drum hits. At no time did I ever get the feeling that this bass was overdone or unnatural. In fact, at all times bass notes produced by the Aurum Montan's came across as very tight, controlled, articulate and textured; having no added thickness or smearing. And, though I was unable to measure the frequency response of the Montan, I'm convinced by my experience with them that they are not only solid down to their rated 25 Hz limit but also very flat, without the typical 60 to 80 Hz bass emphasis that speakers of lesser size are engineered with to provide the illusion of bass weight and extension.

I went back to the album "4" by Fourplay and the track Sexual Healing, which I had listened to a number of times with the Montan's little brother – the Aurum Altan VIII's, some months back. This track is grounded by a very tight sounding electric bass line, snapping strings and all. There are also some synth effects that float almost overhead, together with the soft tinkling of bell-like chimes. Going back to my notes, I found that the Montan was able to deliver the sparkle and generous upper-extension as well as treble lightness that I'd heard in the Altan's but I perceived just a little more mid-treble fullness with the Montan's – a little more tonal shading with the treble detail that provided some additional realism. Comparing the Montan's with my Sitara's provided more insight. Unlike the Altan's, the Montan's were able to keep up with my Sitara 25's in their apparent transparency. The presentation of these treble frequencies was different though. Whereas the Sitara's ceramic coated aluminum cone tweeters tend to provide a sense of ease and fullness to the treble notes, the magnetostat tweeters in the Montan's put more emphasis on the leading edge of notes, resulting in a cleaner, crisper and more forward presentation.

In terms of soundstage size on this track, the Montan's proved to be very capable, delivering a stage just beyond the bounds of their outer edges and going fairly deep just past my front wall. With the synthesizer effects, the Montan's seemed to have no trouble in providing the sense of an overhead presence that I'm accustomed to hearing on this recording. Vocals were clear and realistic and in comparison with my Sitara's were just a little more forward, a little lighter, a little more focused and I would say a little more transparent to the underlying recording.

Moving to the album Private Investigations: The Best of Dire Straits & Mark Knopfler and the first track Sultans of Swing, the Montan's were able to provide a sense of nimbleness and speed tracking the upbeat rhythm like a marksman. It was quite apparent from the opening drum hit that the Aurum Montan's were no slouches in terms of their ability to deliver quick transient response. Mark's voice was very clear and detailed and instruments in the mix remained distinct and intelligible, allowing me to easily zero-in on any of them individually. While the drum and bass are clearly evident in this track, the Montan's did not corrupt the rendition by overemphasizing or plumping up the bass. Drums had impact and detail; resolute, with their skins coming through on the impacts of the sticks. The cymbals on this track had a lovely clarity to them – pristine in fact, sounding very lifelike with their metallic timbre intact. The Montan's were also able to bring out a sense of air around the electric guitar strings, and ensured that each and every pluck was easily heard on the swift guitar play that is heard at the tail-end of the track. I got the sense that the Montan's were being straight up with me, telling me just what was coming from the source, rather than embellishing the recording and playback chain by imposing some specific flavor to the sound. Imaging was done well, and was very stable; however, the Montan's are large speakers and with large speakers, sounds tend to have a hard time breaking free. By that I mean that given the limits of a larger speaker, the imaging was good; however, they were never able to defy their dimension and provide that spooky realism that can be achieved with speakers of considerably smaller dimensions.

My time with the Aurum Montan VIII's has been revelatory. They have provided me with a reminder of what a well-engineered large stature speaker can actually deliver. If it's not yet evident from this review, I'll say it clearly now - the Aurum Montan's are capable of delivering marvelous bass performance – extended, flat, tuneful, articulate and dynamic. They are also impressively coherent, even at a distance of just 8ft, despite their tri-driver complement of disparate sizes and construction. I would say that if you desire uncompromising detail, accuracy, speed and transparency, coupled with essentially full-range performance, the Aurum Montan's are a speaker to be heard. At nearly \$8,000 – sure, the Aurum Montan VIII loudspeakers have a lot of competition but I believe that they offer a unique combination of qualities that once heard won't easily be forgotten.



### quickinfo

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