

**NEW
LOOK!**

ALNER HAMBLIN AMPS • Q&A • DENON DL-103

www.hifinews.co.uk

Hi-Fi News TM

PURE AUDIO EXCELLENCE

January 2006 £3.90

▶ HOT FOR 2006!

THE BEST NEW HI-FI

AMPS • SPEAKERS • CABLES
CD PLAYERS • TURNTABLES



**TOP
TIPS**

To make your
CD player
sound great



**Hi-Fi News
GROUP
TEST**

DAB TUNER BATTLE

Arcam v Denon v Sony v AVI

12 PAGE HOME
ENTERTAINMENT
SECTION P77

**THE WORLD'S
BEST DVD
PLAYER**

▶ PLUS

- AV receivers
- Plasma TVs
- Projectors
- Digital cinema

STAR STYLE

Do the new Chario Ursa Majors deliver?



**Hi-Fi News
FIRST
TEST**

Surreal sound?
Dali's Euphonia speakers

AOL Keyword: Hi-Fi News

US \$ 9.25 Aus \$ 9.95



French accent

French with a twist of Swiss, *Mimetism* is being marketed in the UK by Absolute Sounds as part of its 'Studio' concept for system building. Ken Kessler almost forgets his deep-seated prejudice against France...

Aaah, with this name, *Mimetism* could only be from the land of Marcel Marceau! 'Mimétisme' (with an 'e' and an accent) is a uniquely French word that describes something in-between chameleon-like behaviour and pure imitation. Of course, in the case of the *Mimetism* 20.1 CD player, this refers to replicating the signal off the disc. The change in spelling? A mere frisson of Gallic condescension: they thought English speakers would have trouble with pronunciation if the spelling were kept pure. Fortunately,

that's the only part of the design that reeks of the haughtiness of la Belle France.

As for me, I have no problem with the company because the French half is balanced

It's nice to find a single-word description of a product, and no matter how much I try to escape it, the *Mimetism* merits the term 'suave': charming, seductive, smooth

by the Swiss component, thus tempering my detestation of the world's most perfidious nation. Which is a good thing, or I'd be missing out on what is actually a mighty fine disc spinner. It even looks sensational, like

a Copland that's been forced through a goose's gullet to create *audio fois gras*: minimalist yet comprehensively equipped, with only two rotary controls, a display and a tray occupying the front panel.

Naturally, there's a comprehensive remote control (and a positively luxurious optional control that also works the matching integrated amp) for all minor functions, but the designers have managed to squeeze in all of the basic on/off

outputs, coaxial singled-ended and XLR balanced digital outputs and an RS232 socket for linking it to the matching integrated amplifier or custom installations.

IMMEDIATELY REASSURING

This no-nonsense layout reaffirms a first impression: there's something immediately reassuring about the 20.1, not least its mass and girth: 430 x 118 x 450mm (whd) and 18kg. To say nothing of its heritage.

and transport functions into the two rotaries by using them in push mode as well as for short arcs in the left-and-right planes.

Around the back, it's equally barren, yet complete: single-ended and XLR balanced

Mimetism was founded by William Andrea and Yvan Coderev in 2004. Andrea worked with a number of companies in both audio and broadcasting, beginning building active speakers for SupraVox, for



use by the French television organisation ORTF. Andrea also designed and assembled the Nuance and Plenitude amps and pre-amps for FAMCO (French American Company), and the P-UN pre-amp and the P.P-UN pre-pre-amp for Yves Cochet. Then he joined Phlox Electronique, where he helped develop certain YBA products. Later, at Vecteur, he designed the CLUB 12, then the i 6.2, P6, A6 and the L 4.2 CD player, still regarded as reference components in Chiracland.

Yvan Coderev lives in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he owns high-end retailer L'Audiophile SA. His long-standing passion for sound and design led him to build his own specific supports and furniture for audio gear, distributed in France under the Vecteur brand name, which is how he met William Andrea, whom he introduced to the

digital processing experts from Anagram Technologies. Mimetism is the collaboration between the two, marrying

digital signal exits via a Crystal CS8416, to the Texas Instruments SRC4190 asynchronous sample

There's an eerie, airy legitimacy to vocals that's bereft of artifice, a sound so utterly charismatic that you're sucked into listening even to bizarre music not of your own tastes

French *savoir faire* and Swiss quality. The Mimetism components are hand-made by ASM (Audio System Manufacturing) in Brittany.

TEXT-BOOK LAYOUT

Remove the lid, and what you see is a text-book example of clean layout and faultless construction, with immaculate motherboards and top-grade components. Using a high-grade ATAPI disc transport, the

rate converter, a circuit that allows you to upsample from 44.1kHz to 192kHz 'without any concern for jitter.' The signals then feed the Wolfson Delta-Sigma WM8740 hybrid converter.

Mimetism feels that the advantage of this type of converter is the significant reduction in high-frequency noise in the output of the D/A stage. Another advantage is that 'power conversion is extremely well done' resulting ►►

DETAILS



Mimetism 20.1 CD player



£3995



www.absolutesounds.com



020 8971 3909



Fast, yet sophisticated



Nothing

DETAILS



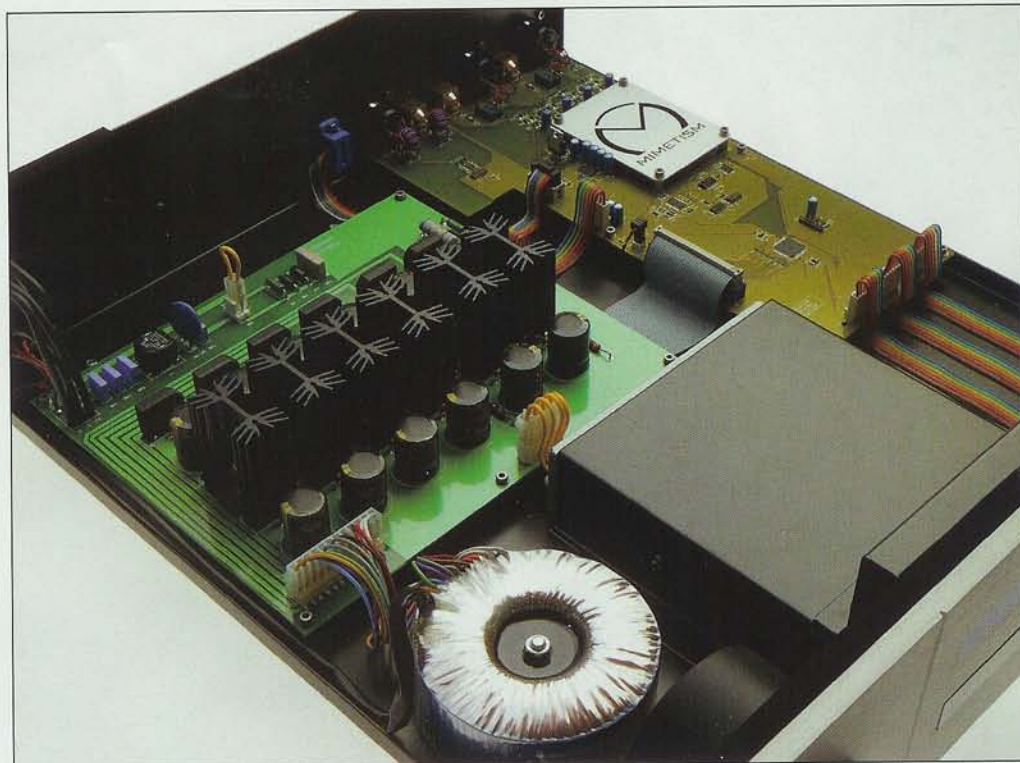
Player offers both single-ended and XLR balanced outputs to the rear



Metal plate covers upsampling and digital-to-analogue converter



S/PDIF output on a sturdy RCA, and isolated from the digital power supply



Huge power supply section with heatsinked voltage regulators fills most of the largest PCB. This sits behind toroidal transformer, to the right of which a shrouded CD-ROM drive can be seen, fixed to the chassis with a damped U-frame using different densities of rubber

in an 'easing effect' on the analogue output stages. The output stages deliver a cross-differential balanced signal and an unbalanced signal, and you will find immediately that the former is preferable to the latter; you can A/B this easily as the output levels are the same at 2V – no 6dB difference to throw you. The output circuits employ low-noise FETs, and the balanced output operates with the help of in-house designed transformers. The balanced S/PDIF output is 'perfectly isolated from the digital power supply.'

REVIEW SYSTEM

- Quad CDP99/II, Musical Fidelity X-RAY v3 and Marantz CD-12/DA12 CD players
- McIntosh C2200 pre-amp
- McIntosh MC2102 power amp
- Rogers LS3/5a and Wilson WATT Puppy System 7 speakers
- Transparent Ultra balanced and single-ended cable
- Transparent Reference loudspeaker cables



Think classic valves, but without any smearing around the edges. Think electrostatics, but with mass and bass... sphincter-clenching, foot-to-the-sternum bass

For its power supply, the 20.1 uses a low-induction toroidal transformer which feeds six separate, regulated power supplies to the individual analogue and digital stages, and the unit boasts its own mains filtering network. There's also an internal strap that can be removed to separate the earthing circuit if required.

It took, oh, all of two seconds – via the McIntosh C2200 – to realise that this baby sounds best using the balanced

outputs. You know the drill: silent backgrounds, lower noise, greater speed, more impact. I also used the Mimetism strictly single-ended, into the PrimaLuna Prologue Two, but my main concerns were how it worked in a high-end system.

SUAVE PRODUCT

It's nice to find a single-word description of a product, and no matter how much I try to escape it, the Mimetism merits the term 'suave' in all of its

many forms, from charming to seductive to smooth. It starts with vocals – there's an eerie, airy legitimacy to vocals that's bereft of artifice, a sound so utterly charismatic that you're sucked into listening even to bizarre music not of your own tastes. A major part of it is the palpable three-dimensionality, exploited best by recordings from companies such as Chesky or Telarc, who have a grip on the concept. This particular quality endows the singer with

a sense of mass and space, right down to authentic image height, and it's uncanny. Better still, Mimetism preserves this in choruses and groups, blessing the Persuasions with stage-filling presence, while the Anita Kerr Singers have never filled my room so convincingly

Add to this a seamlessness that somehow avoids robbing the forms of individuality, and you have from the outset a player that belies the cardboard cut-out effect symptomatic of digital vs analogue.

But the Mimetism has other strengths too. The player is fast, so hot with transients that you detect a hint of schizophrenia if you equate suavely with being laidback. This player most certainly is not sluggish, louche nor casual, yet neither is it deliberate. While it's fast enough to convey ultra-crisp transients – the new Rory Gallagher 'best of' provided plenty of incisive guitarwork – it does not achieve this at the expense of its come-hither sound.

Intriguingly, its importer commented on its abilities to retrieve detail as a primary virtue. For me, this is not a quality on a par with, say, tonal authenticity, because occasionally, it can mean fatiguing, hyper-clinical sound bereft of warmth. No way does the Mimetism give up on the details; conversely, neither does it lose its sense of perspective.

THE REAL MAGIC

OK, OK, so we have a machine that seduces on the right side of speed-dating, while at the same time avoiding lethargy. Where the real magic enters is in its cohesiveness. If one of the secrets of reproducing music with realism is to re-assemble the digits so as never to divulge the slice-and-dice nature of the format, the 20.1 has its processing well under control. I chose the silkiest recordings I could muster – vintage Dino or Frank on Capitol, some Ella, a slew of soundtracks – and the Mimetism filled the room with glorious, glowing sound.

Think classic valves, but without any smearing around

ALSO CONSIDER

- Marantz SACD SA-11S1: only £2000 and it plays SACDs, too! A sonic and visual knock-out.
- Musical Fidelity kW25: Two chassis, valve or solid-state output – a gift at £3996 the pair.
- Oracle CD1500 CD player: If it were any prettier, it would be illegal; within reach at £4649.

the edges. Think electrostatics, but with mass and bass. Real, bass, solid bass, sphincter-clenching, foot-to-the-sternum bass. Think Ortofon SPU in a modern arm via a modern phono stage.

I don't know how the hell they did it, but the snail-munchers have come up with a CD player that ranks alongside the best. And they're not even that sensitive to cables. Just balanced vs single-ended.

HAND-PICKED

There's something else you should know about the Mimetism: it's been hand-picked as the digital source for a package that represents a departure from conventional methods of system building. Absolute Sounds has created a new division called 'the Studio', which will offer only one system. While each element can be purchased separately, the brands they represent will only provide a single product.

They chose the Mimetism 20.1 for three reasons. The first is that it sounds simply fantastic, especially with the other Studio components (to be announced...). Secondly, the 20.1 embodies all of the Studio values: high perceived value, exclusivity, elegance, and the sense of 'boutique' presentation. Thirdly, the Mimetism sells for £3995, elevated enough to be thought truly selective and 'of the high-end', without being so absurdly expensive as to alienate sane individuals of means.

My advice? You must consider this product whether you're buying into the Studio concept, or merely 'system' with a small 's' – it's that good. □

THE REPORT

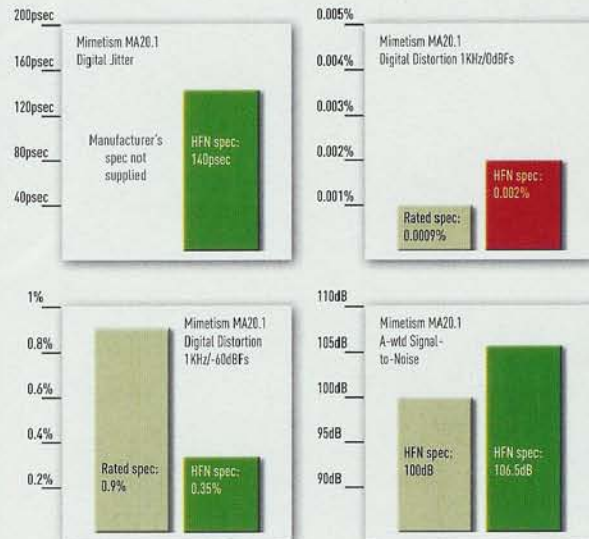
LAB REPORT

Upsampling technology is becoming de rigeur in high-end CD players, if only because modern DAC hardware is optimised for 96kHz and 192kHz data rather than the 44.1kHz rates of old. The process of converting 44.1kHz LPCM to 192kHz is necessarily asynchronous and more complex than the route from, say, 48kHz to 192kHz. Computational errors may explain the high distortion measured at low signals (–50% at 1kHz/–90dBfs) and equally high 5dB shift in low-level linearity. Other parameters, including the wide 106dB A-wtd S/N ratio and the low 0.002% peak level distortion (falling to 0.00095% at –10dBfs) point to a robust analogue output stage. The balanced outputs are boosted to a high 3.1V, incidentally.

Proving the lie that low jitter can only be achieved with a high tolerance crystal clock, the

MA20.1's frequency accuracy is a full 670ppm adrift (about 10x worse than expected) although jitter remains insignificant at –140psec. Any clock error is probably associated with the internal S/PDIF link from Mimetism's transport (why else use a digital input receiver in a CD player?) but the significant, by modern standards, ±0.3dB ripple in its response is not. Its subjective impact is unlikely to go unnoticed.

Download the full QC Suite Report from www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech



VERDICT

Gorgeous styling, faultless ergonomics, superb construction, a defensible price and thoroughbred performance mark Mimetism's UK debut as noteworthy.

Absolute Sounds is positioning the Studio system in-between conventional mid-fi and utter esoterica. By removing any margin

for error in the complete 'Studio' system, Absolute Sounds has made a decisive move toward restoring audio's credibility amongst non-hobbyists.

With the 20.1, I must say that the concept is off to a perfect start, for this is an exceptional player regardless of context.