

# Sonus faber Amati Homage Tradition floorstanding loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom



**T**he long-running Homage series from Sonus faber pays tribute to the finest violin makers of the past with loudspeakers that look and sound fantastic. The Amati has long been the conventional top tower of the range, and with

the wide-baffle Stradivari out of the latest range, the new Amati Homage Tradition represents the top of that range. It replaces the Amati Futura (tested in *Hi-Fi+* Issue 79); a chrome-topped floorstander with a unique damped suspension system. ▶



- ▶ Both the chrome top and the squidgy baseplate are gone in the Amati Homage Tradition, and while that gives the latest Amati a more conventional look, it doesn't hold back from looking fantastic in the flesh. Sonus faber was always a hit in terms of looking good, but the new Homage Tradition range – in either a traditional red with chrome contrasts, or wenge with black – takes that to a clever combination of refined elegance and timeless chic that is reminiscent of Riva yachts. Unlike the Futura – which never quite shied away from a spot of 'bling' – this is almost understated luxury for the elegant home-owner.

It remains a tall tower that needs to project into the room by about a metre, but it speaks to a home of taste and charm rather than shiny excess.

The changes in each iteration of Amati seem larger than the last, and the Amati Homage Tradition holds to that ideal. Practically no parts from the Futura cross over to the tradition, and although both models are boat-tailed three-and-a-half way designs, culminating in a pair of 220mm bass drivers, exactly *none* of those drivers are shared between the two models. OK, so there are probably some screws, spikes, terminals, and wires shared between the two, and looking at them side by side, you can see they are related, but this is a long way from a few cosmetic changes.

But those cosmetic changes are pretty lovely. Alongside the Riva Yacht styling, as the name suggests, the Homage Tradition line have an instrumental look and feel to them. No, they are not directly channeling the father of the modern violin Andrea Amati (1505-77), but the range in the flesh looks less like audio components and more like the construction of master craftsmen.

Nevertheless, it's the engineering that counts, and the intervening years have been fascinating for Sonus faber. The company has introduced some of its most iconic and best loved top-end models since the Futura hit the streets. Models like the Il Cremonese, Liliium, and Aida, from which the Amati Homage Tradition inherits many technical solutions and patents.

Even that Sonus faber mainstay, the violin shaped speaker cabinet underwent major change, and is the product of careful research and major restyling. The curves blend the lines of previous Homage models with those inherited from Liliium, giving the Amati Homage Tradition speakers larger volume into the rear chambers.

This change allows the cabinet to better control internal resonances. And while there are many ways to control internal resonance, few of them look as good. For example, the top plate wood is not only the same finish as the sides, and not only does it have aluminium inlays that match those of that 'colourway' (brushed aluminum in the wenge finish, anodised black in the red) but there's an 'Sf' logo in silk-screened glass placed right at the centre of the surface. This is also echoed in the dustcap of the midrange driver. OK, so little touches like these do not materially improve the sound quality, but when you make a true high-end purchase, you might want a true high-end product in terms of fit and finish, as well as sonic performance. The Amati scores on the fit and finish front and has done so for decades. As Michelangelo said "trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle."

► The speaker system is mechanically decoupled from the floor by Sonus faber's patented Z.V.T. system (Zero Vibration Transmission), optimised suspension system with alternating surfaces metal/elastomer/metal overlapped inside the bracket-spike group. This system substantially reduces transmission of spurious vibrations to the listening room; also, acoustic feedback phenomena are inhibited. It also represents something of a miniaturisation on the predecessor's suspension system.

At this level, it's almost pointless to discuss installation because it's probably going to be down to a team of professional installers and piano movers to move the Amati Homage Tradition into optimal position. As purchaser, your input is more oversight than 'hands on', although from experience the Amati Homage Tradition requires a very high-performance upstream system. To be perfectly frank, that likely comes from fellow McIntosh Group brand, Audio Research. In the review, we used the new Reference 160M mono amplifiers (with matching Reference CD player and preamp from the brand) and the only thing that stopped this from being a match made in heaven was that it arrived in the midst of a heatwave. Realistically, there is no reason to break-up this combination, and every reason to keep it entirely intact. Cables were that high-end industry standard... Transparent.

What is truly surprising about the Amati Homage Tradition, is just how big the change to the sound. In fairness, I liked the sound of the Amati Futura, although I know many who thought the older model – in trying to sound like a classic Sonus faber of old – sounded a little slow, and bloated in the bass, and the backswept design did make it difficult to adjust in some spaces; those who wanted to project into a big room for example sometimes struggled with the lower section, as if you raised the back too far, the squidgy block between speaker and baseplate wasn't in its best position. But overall, I liked it as a loudspeaker design and hoped I wouldn't be disappointed by the replacement.

The replacement (the Amati Homage Tradition) is, quite simply, leagues ahead of its predecessor. It addresses all the things the Futura was trying to address, in making the intellectual jump from old Sonus faber to new but does so with such an impressive performance in its own right; it's like the brand shifted up a gear or three. In the process, it makes the loudspeaker more 'now' than ever.

There's a sense of clarity of purpose and musical focus that has permeated the sound of Sonus faber since the beginning, and this is no different, but now that clarity of purpose is also a clarity of signal. From top to bottom, the

loudspeaker has a remarkably ability to disappear, leaving the listener with just the musical sound itself. I played 'Memphis Soul Stew' [*King Curtis Live at Fillmore West*, ATCO] and found the instruments each delineated in its own three-dimensional space on the stage, but more than that the ability to hear the slightly squeaky drum pedal, the little chops and tricks played by the bass and guitar to keep the music flowing without it sounding repetitive, and then the outstanding sense of an organic 'whole' – these were musicians at the top of their game, used to playing together, working an audience perfectly, and every single part was portrayed brilliantly. Most importantly, Bernard Purdie's drumming takes on an intensity, like he's half-man, half-train, chugging unstoppably through that rhythm. The rest of the rhythm section is more than capable of keeping up, but he's at the tiller. I've listened to this disc hundreds of times through different components in so many systems, and that sense of an organic, human drummer as opposed to an underpinning of rhythm has only happened a handful of times.

Again, what Sonus faber has always done well and continues to do well here is an ability to tease out the beauty in a piece of music. It's what sets the brand apart, but in 2018, that beauty can be seen as veiling and a deviation from the truth. On the Amati Homage Tradition, you get both truth and beauty. It's accurate, and great sounding, and that's special.

There is a lot of headroom now, too. It's not an unbreakable loudspeaker, but it can dish out the decibels with the best of them, and unlike previous Amati models, you'll probably want to do just that because it does sound great loud. Playing *The Race For Space* by Public Service Broadcasting [Test Card] might not be the first choice for audiophile approval (there are lots of treated samples from the 1960s set to music) but in fact it's truly captivating, and especially so here. You get the added reverb tail placed on JFK's voice during the 'We Go To The Moon' speech, and you can hear the distortion in the original microphone, and the heavy handed end-of-the-sentence reverb whizzing off into a hard pan left or right. But not only does it all seem and sound right, it makes you want to listen to more of the album and more intensely, and intensely satisfying in the process.

We could list albums played on this for days. The sound of Duke Ellington playing at Newport, the Rolling Stones playing 'Love in Vain' in a warm-up to a tour, Dylan singing 'Masters of War' or Roy Orbison singing 'Crying'... this is the sort of loudspeaker that shows why audio is still so important, so enjoyable, and so almost atavistic: when you hear those recordings you carry with you for all-time (for me that's 'Masters of War', and Satchmo playing 'West End Blues')

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they leave you speechless and humbled when played on a system like this.

I spent a great deal of time enjoying the sound of these speakers too much to find fault, but no product is completely perfect, and the Amati is no exception. Bass is tauter and more ordered now (it passes the Trentemøller test), but still has some frequencies that are heavier than others. Also, this is not a loudspeaker that suffers fools gladly; it makes music sound good where it can, but some tracks are clearly beyond saving. This doesn't mean the Amati Homage Tradition is making editorial decisions for you on your musical taste, but just that some recordings can end up sounding almost 'syrupy' through this loudspeaker. But that's about it.

Is this the Sonus faber to take on Wilson or Magico and win? No, but that's not the point of high-end audio, in that it's not quite so cut-throat at times. Instead, this is the Sonus faber that high-end audiophiles can use to enjoy really good sound, and really good-looking audio components.

Don't underestimate the Amati Homage Tradition. It is not the Sonus faber of even 10 years ago. This is a Sonus faber that combines the best of the past with the clarity and energy of the present. And yet, it's not a forward sound... it's just a 'right' sound. If you are the kind of person who thinks Sonus faber is all about the looks and not so much about the sound, then the Amati Homage Tradition will be something of a wake-up call. Don't be surprised if you end up thinking it's one of the best speakers on sale right now! +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### 3.5 way reflex ported loudspeaker

**System:** 3.5 way, full para-aperiodic vented box "Stealth Ultraflex System" and "Zero Vibration Transmission" technology, vibration transmission- decoupled from the floor, staggered low frequency floorstanding loudspeaker system.

**Tweeter:** H28 XTR-04. Sonus faber silk dome 28 mm "Arrow Point" DAD, implemented with a natural wood acoustic labyrinth rear chamber.

**Midrange:** M15 XTR-04. Sonus faber designed 150 mm neodymium magnet system ultra dynamic linearity midrange.

**Woofer:** 2 x W22XTR-08. Sonus faber designed 220 mm lightweight "sandwich" cone structure (high-tech syntactic foam core and two external surface skins of cellulose pulp) woofers.

**Cross-over points:** 80Hz - 250 Hz - 2.5kHz

**Frequency Response:** 28 Hz - 35kHz, Stealth reflex included.

**Sensitivity:** 90 db SPL (2.83V/1 m).

**Nominal Impedance:** 4 ohm.

**Suggested Amplifier Power Output:** 100W - 500W, without clipping.

**Long-term Max Input Voltage (IEC 268-5):** 25 V rms

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 1176 x 411 x 512 mm

**Weight:** 61 Kg

**Finishes:** Red or Wenge

**Price:** £23,500 per pair

**Manufactured by:** Sonus faber

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