

Audio Note

Ask Peter Qvortrup, Audio Note's founder, why he's dedicated nearly 40 years to perfecting sound equipment and his answer is unequivocal. "This is my life's project," he says. "I want to do justice to the best music humanity has created. I'm 66 now, and the legacy I intend to leave is that I've created the finest audio devices with no improvements possible. Period."

It's an ambition that started in 1978, when the Danish music-nut, then aged just 28, opened his first hi-fi shop in Copenhagen. Today his company, based in West Sussex, employs 36 craftsmen in the UK and 42 worldwide, and specialises in producing -- and often revolutionising -- almost every component of music reproduction, from valve amplifiers to output transformers and capacitors all the way to finished speakers. Together, they ensure records sound as good, if not better, than if they were performed live: cymbals sparkle, voices trill and guitar strings squeak and cackle and hum. With Audio Note equipment, music doesn't blare out at you, but immerses itself around you.

And it really is about a love of music. Peter has 100,000 LPs, and it would be even more had a cruel fire at his parents' house not destroyed much of his teenage collection. While his bespoke systems can sell for millions, his love is meeting potential customers and audio fans and developing new products. "We're a research and development operation that also sells products to people," he says. "It's an inversion on how we should run commercially!"

Developing new equipment, therefore, is a painstaking process that can take years, with each product built and rebuilt in a new, 1,100sq m lab, using the finest materials (pure silver is the current favourite) and custom-made components. Yet the final checks take place at Peter's home in Brighton, where he personally tests each invention with his own ears in his listening room. "You can't measure sound quality with an instrument -- it's not possible. We're on the border between art and science. You don't know where one finishes and the other begins."

As for the future of the company? Well, with his daughter, Emily, now the CEO, she's set to continue her father's legacy for years to come. Though maybe not quite yet. "I promised my wife I would finally retire at 75," he says. "Though I'm not so sure that will happen."