



**Von Schweikert Audio
VR-55 Aktive Loudspeaker**
\$60,000

When updating the original VR-5 platform, VSA took advantage of lessons learned building its Ultra series of products, which includes the \$550,000 VR-101XS. The VR-55 Aktive makes use of VSA's proprietary Triple-Wall Laminate Construction in a compact, substantial, and striking package. Its driver configuration includes custom-built Accuton ceramic-on-Nomex honeycomb drivers (two 8.5" woofers, and one 6.5" midrange), a specially treated Scan-Speak beryllium 1" dome, and a RAAL-designed 3" aluminum-foil ribbon tweeter (rear-mounted for ambience), with a dedicated 525-watt Class D amp powering the woofers. The resultant resolution, transparency, and transient capability, conflated with the subsequent unmasking of extremely fine transient detail and subtleties of instrumental tone color and texture set a new benchmark for the below-\$100,000 category. Factor in their remarkable adjustability (they play chameleon and seamlessly integrate into virtually any space), and they have successfully conspired to become my new reference. (256)

Kronos Sparta Turntable/Helena Tonearm
\$21,500/\$6500

The Kronos approach is unique. Using two inspired sets of identical platters, motors, bearings, and plinths, one mounted immediately above the other, rotating at precisely matched speeds in *opposite* directions, the typical torsional forces that a single platter 'table must store (with a much more highly energized state of equilibrium) in the suspension are completely nullified. Combined with its double-wall carbon-fiber composite, proprietary ball, and spherical mirror uni-pivot Helena tonearm, the Kronos Sparta is capable of recreating inner detail, fine resolution, timbre, staging, and imaging cues, unavailable from other tables I've heard at anything like its price, and considerably above it. (259)



The Absolute Sound's 2016 Golden Ear Awards

Greg Weaver



**Pass Labs XA160.8
Monoblock Amplifier**
\$26,000/pr.

This latest iteration of the remarkably successful marriage of both Pass Labs' Aleph and SuperSymmetric circuit topologies, the XA "Point-8" series represents a new level of achievement from Pass Labs. The Point 8 is noticeably more transparent and presents swifter transients than the antecedent Point 5 series. Where the Point 5 was lush in overall tonal character, the Point 8 sounds more accurate, in part due to its enhanced transparency. The Point 8 offers more control, augmented bass (both in definition and in character), and enriched microdynamic involvement, yet it delivers a captivating degree of the liquidity and organic-ness that so many found to be romantic, if less accurate, in the Point 5 series. With the XA160.8's sublime amalgam of control, neutrality, and vibrancy, these monoblocks are able to sing with one of the most musical souls I've encountered, regardless of price. They embody that all-too-elusive ability to satisfy both the intellect and the heart; they make you want to dance! (259) tas