



PHONO CARTRIDGE OF THE YEAR

Hana Umami Red

\$3950

On the outside, the Hana Umami Red has a gorgeous-looking, glossy-red, Japanese Urushi-lacquer finish with a front inlay of ebony wood. Inside, the Umami Red gets the premium treatment with a duralumin-alloy body, nude-diamond microline stylus, boron cantilever, and high-purity copper coils. Furthermore, the front yoke, rear yoke, pole piece, and 24-karat gold-plated terminal pins are all cryogenically treated. From a sound perspective, this cartridge has exceptional overall balance, such that it allows the musical timbre of instruments and vocals to present themselves truthfully no matter what genre of music is being reproduced. Couple these attributes with excellent micro/macro-dynamics, the ability to easily unravel harmonic complexities, an ever-so-slight tilt towards overall warmth, and buttery smooth yet extended high frequencies, and you

have a superb combination. Consistently producing deliciously enjoyable class-leading performance, the Hana Umami Red (designed by Excel Sound Corporation's Masao Okada-san) instantly moved towards the front of the pack when compared with cartridges in the same price range. The Hana Umami Red is the best-sounding cartridge reviewer (and analog maven) Andre Jennings has experienced from the Excel factory, and he's heard a number of them, including some posh OEM models. (319)



INTEGRATED SYSTEM OF THE YEAR

Cabasse Pearl Akoya

\$3800/pr. (stands, \$800)

Cabasse's "go anywhere, go anytime" speaker is a marvel of packaging and sophistication. This three-way, tri-axial sphere is loaded with built-in Class D amplifiers and a DAC with DSP control and room-correction calibration. It's Wi-Fi-equipped, too. Just add a high-resolution streaming service or a thumb drive, and it becomes a fully self-contained, high-performance system—all in an impossibly small enclosure the size of a honeydew. Sonically, it conveys an engaging, forward, midrange-freighted personality. Imaging is stable and well focused; tonal balance is articulate but not overly assertive or strident. Overall, response was fairly linear with dollops of air and buoyancy. Ultimately, there's some roll-off in the treble, but not enough to set off alarm bells. Bass extension dips into the 50-60Hz range with conviction and surprising impact and amplitude. Whether you're burning the midnight oil in the office (or bedroom) or kicking back at a BBQ, Cabasse has redefined high-end portability. (322)