

Analog Sources of the Year

Pro-Ject RM 9.1 Turntable System
\$1499
sumikoaudio.net

Designed in Vienna and built at Pro-Ject's factory in the Czech Republic, this revised edition of the original RM9 turntable takes an already good design and improves on it, without raising the cost. The single-piece arm tube is now molded from carbon fiber and not only dissipates energy better than the older version but is also lighter and stiffer. The older model's rubber-plastic-felt feet have been replaced by massive machined aluminum cones that use a Sorbothane layer between the plinth and the foot. Though the plinth's size and shape haven't changed, a steel plate has been added to its underside to significantly increase mass and focus the dissipation of energy around a single point. Even the fit and finish of this new version makes it look like a more expensive turntable. The 9.1's sound is smooth yet detailed, the soundstage is wide, and the low end has authority. Images are stable, and transparency, transient quickness, and inner detail are all good. The RM-9.1 also has a surprising lack of groove and surface noise, and it's easy to listen to for hours without any aural fatigue, making its performance much closer to that of a costly rig than to an entry-level one. (Reviewed by Jim Hannon, Issue 164)



Walker Proscenium Black Diamond turntable and tonearm
\$40,000
walkeraudio.com

The best source component that JV has heard just got a good deal better with the addition of an entirely new arm made from a "mystery" material that is claimed to be almost as hard as diamond and twenty-two times stiffer than Walker's previous (carbon-fiber) arm. Whether its arm is twenty-two-times stiffer or twenty-one, Lloyd Walker's new air-bearing-tonearm'd, air-bearing-platter'd, air-suspended record player—redubbed the Proscenium Black Diamond (because of the color and rigidity of its new arm)—sounds more like the real thing on first-rate sources than any hi-fi component, analog or digital, JV has heard, with huge staging, life-sized imaging, terrific front-to-back and side-to-side clarity, extraordinarily natural timbres, realistic top-to-bottom dynamic authority, and the kind of bloom that makes for in-the-room-with-you presence. The Walker doesn't just run on air; it adds air to everything, moving stage walls back and to the sides, separating instruments and layering them in space, and filling instrumental images out with three-dimensional body and bloom. Although scarcely cheap at \$40k, for that money it comes (as well it should) with a home visit from its designer Lloyd Walker and his partner Fred Law, who will set up the massive table and tweak it to perfection in your listening room. (Reviewed by Jonathan Valin, Issue 167)