# AUDIOQUEST COLORADO, NIAGARA, AND K2; AND STEALTH NANOFIBER, INDRA, AND DREAM CABLES

The "odyssey" I went through to get the Hansen Princes set up under the right conditions led me to experiment with two outstanding and very different sets of interconnects and speaker cables: A mix from Audioquest and another mix from a small Maryland manufacturer called Stealth. Both showed me that I have tended to take my "wires" too much for granted in recent years, and that interconnect and speaker cables play a steadily more critical role as every nuance in a system becomes more and more audible.

The sets of cables I had from each manufacturer were not directly comparable. The Audioquests came with long K2 speaker cables at my request and the Stealth with short one-meter Dream speaker cables. They required different setups, and this may be just as well. I do not believe in cable surveys or that there is a "right" or "best" interconnect or speaker cable any more than there is a "right" or "best" front end, preamp, amplifier, or speaker. Personal taste, room, overall system nuances, and room interactions are simply too different.

At the same time, it would be a shame to ignore just how good the latest generation of cables from Audioquest has gotten to be, and how superbly transparent they have become. The Audioquests have always had life and energy, and residual hardness has steadily declined over time. The Colorado (solid "Perfect-Surface Copper+" and Teflon) and Niagara (solid silver and Teflon) interconnects, and K2 speaker cables (Perfect-Surface Silver) now offer substantially greater low-level definition and clarity. They have gone from the "very good" cables in the earlier iteration I used as a reference several years ago to truly excellent.

The core of this improvement lies in added detail at all levels, revealing very-low-level musical sounds. I can't easily describe this latter improvement as one in noise floor since Audioquest cables have long been as silent to the ear as the associated components permit. The new generation of Audioquest cables does, however, provide a level of musically natural detail that is truly exceptional. The Colorado and Niagara interconnects and K2 speaker cables make a perfect match without introducing any characteristic coloration. They also break in relatively quickly and painlessly and do not change in basic sound character in the process. I'm using them as one of my key references, along with the Kimber Selects.

I suggest that if you want interconnects and speaker cables that have a minimum of coloration, you audition them. I also suggest you log onto the Audioquest Web site (www.audioquest.com) for a tutorial on cable theory from Bill Low. These are not cheap cables but they also offer a host of unusual features, including high immunity from RF and outside interference. They work exceptionally well in very long runs. Audioquest has the advantage as a manufacturer of being carried by many dealers (so its products are easy to audition); it also offers a wide range of choices based on the same design philosophy at much lower prices.

Stealth Audio Cables' interconnects and speaker cables are very different. These are not mass-manufactured products. They are highly personal designs by Serguei Timachev, and they are virtually hand-made using methods and materials that are truly unique. I'm not about to plunge into cable physics, or the validity of various engineering concepts, but the Stealth interconnects and speaker cables are truly esoteric products that offer superb performance. If you have the time, the money, and the demanding system necessary to explore the limits of what "wires" can do to reveal recordings, and the nuances of the active components in your system, these products push the limits of sound quality as far as any I have heard.

I should warn you, however, that they are anything but cheap. For example, the somewhat softer and sweeter Nanofiber (carbon fiber) interconnects that I auditioned cost $2600 for a one-meter pair of RCA-terminated cables ($1500 per extra meter) and $3400 for a one meter pair of XLR-terminated cables ($2000 per extra meter). The reference-level Indras (silver, Teflon) cost $6500 for a one meter pair of RCA-terminated cables ($5400 per extra meter) and $8500 for a one meter pair of XLR-terminated cables ($7000 per extra meter). The most expensive Stealth speaker cable, the Dream (four sets of separate copper and silver wire bundles surrounding a core of helium-filled dielectric tubes), costs $8800 for a two-meter pair and $4000 per extra meter. Bi-wiring adds $1000, regardless of length.

I should also stress that the Stealth cables will not necessarily sound "better" than the top-of-the-line products from Audioquest or Kimber. The impact of cables is very system- and taste-dependent, and there will never be a single set of "right" choices. The Stealths did, however, reveal the nuances of every system configuration I tried them in, particularly in microdynamics, and the range of Stealth products differ enough in sound by type to help blend the nuances of components in ways that produce an intensely musical result. In fact, it's fun simply to log on to the Stealth Web site at www.stealthcables.com, examine the range of materials and techniques involved, and get a different tutorial on cable design than the one you get from Bill Low at the Audioquest site. There aren't many small "craft" manufacturers left in the high end, and Stealth Audio exemplifies all the best of what such manufacturers can do. **AHC**