

# “High-end audio done well, at any price, is a time machine to the time and place the recording happened”

## How and when did your interest in audio begin?

I fell in love with The Doors at age 10. I hacked my parents' console stereo with a small pair of box speakers and laid on my back, listening with my head between them, like a cheap 1968 version of planar headphones.

## What inspired you to get into tubes?

At 16, I compared an old 1960s Sansui 1000A tube receiver using 7591s to the new solid-state Sansui 9090DB “Super Receiver.” The 1000A is so musical! I still have three of them...somewhere. That comparison sold me on tubes.

## When did audio develop from a hobby to a career?

At 18, I started working at a store named Mission Electronics, then Cal Stereo, Federated, and finally RogerSound Labs. In the 1970s, it wasn't a career but a party I could write a book about. It's hard to spend much money on your system when you need it for partying. But I did anyway.

## When did you get into high-end audio?

I stopped partying at 26 and suddenly had money to upgrade my gear. It was



a constant turnover. I went from a Rotel stack and Dahlquist DQM9s, ADS L810s, etc, to an Oracle Delphi turntable w/SME V tonearm, Audio Research SP9 MKI preamp (better than the MKII IMHO), an ARC Classic 60 triode-connected amplifier, and MartinLogan CLSes. And numerous subs. That's when I went down the vintage-tube rabbit hole, spending night after night comparing 6922s and figuring out which factories really made what and how they sounded in my system. I quickly realized there is no “best” tube ... just different flavors, like ice cream.

## What's a dream system for you today?

I have a Pathos Synapse preamp running two pairs of Adrenaline power amps bi-amping Focal Grande Utopia, etc., etc., and love it. It's a privilege. But I'd be happy for the rest of my life if I had a PrimaLuna integrated and a good pair of speakers. It's all fun.

## Did anyone in particular inspire you in this direction?

Too many to list, but Roger Cox, retired VP at Fender Musical Instruments, is an incredible mentor and an even better friend. Howard Rogers, founder of RogerSound Labs. He created a fantastic company with technically adept salespeople who didn't work on commission. I use that formula at Upscale Audio. Eliminating commission changes the relationship between the salesperson and the customer. It's about the customer and not the salesperson's bank account.

## Are there any interesting trends you see on the audio horizon?

Old dudes love to talk about “back then,” but there is more free-flowing creativity today than ever. Carly Simon sang it best: “These are the good old days.”

## What are the greatest challenges facing the high-end industry?

Dealers are tempted to flock to the extreme high-end because it's a more profitable and protected market. This can mean budding audiophiles aren't exposed to high-end gear when they want to hear a pair of \$4000 speakers. They just go to Best Buy. Opportunity missed.

## What do you believe were the keys to your success?

It was work almost 24/7 in the early years of Upscale Audio. I remember Dennis Had [*founder of Cary Audio*] and I helping a guy who didn't speak English bias his new amp on Christmas Eve. We laughed our asses off, but we did it! I hire people better than me. I tell it like it is. We offer services like testing tubes, as if I'm using them myself, and turntable QC, even on entry-level tables. Ask customers deep questions so they don't repeat mistakes. It does not matter what's best for us; it matters what's best for the customer.

## Outside of audio, what do you do for fun?

I used to ride motorcycles often, but I may be aging out...ugh. I'm a car guy with an Alfa Romeo Giulia QV and an old-school manual 2010 Porsche GT3. We go to concerts, musicals, and some dance since my wife Laura teaches ballet. We love walks with our Akita Sasha.

## What inspires you about your work?

When my first wife passed away in 2005, the people, the music, and the gear kept me going. We've tried to do so in kind if we can. The relationships can be very deep. It's incredibly satisfying. I've been in the industry for 47 years, I've owned Upscale for nearly 30 of those years, and it's still exciting. There is always a new box to open, new things to learn, and an ever-widening circle of friends in the audio community. **tas**

