

Mads Kilfoth, Audiovector

by Alan Sircom

Danish loudspeaker expert Audiovector is no stranger to the pages of *Hi-Fi+*. The company has picked up many awards for its loudspeaker designs (both in this magazine and elsewhere) and many of the reviewers have used or still use Audiovector loudspeakers, including the Editor, who uses a pair of R1 Arreté stand-mounts for both personal listening and as part of his audio assessment line-up.

We spoke to CEO of Audiovector, Mads Kilfoth, about the company, building the perfect loudspeaker, upgrading that speaker, and why Freedom Grounding is so vitally important in today's top loudspeaker systems.

When did Audiovector start, and why?

Audiovector was created in 1979 by my father, Ole Klifoth, who wanted to build the perfect loudspeaker for himself and other music lovers. He was (and, of course, remains to this day) a passionate fan of music and wanted to listen to it in the most enjoyable and realistic way possible. He couldn't find a speaker that recreated this to the level he envisaged, so he made his own! ▶



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► **When did you take over the company and what role does Ole have in the company today?**

I took over the reins as Managing Director and majority shareholder five years ago and have been running the company commercially since then. Ole's great desire was to focus solely on our high-quality products full time, so he remains an integral part of the company in his role as Head of R&D.

How big is the Audiovector team?

Do workers stay with you for months, years, or decades?

We have a total of 17 dedicated staff based in-house. The ideal is that each of them forms a fundamental part of the team. Some have been with us here for decades, which is an achievement to be proud of and testament to the company's spirit. A successful manufacturing company is not only about the products – it's also the people behind them.

Where did the upgrade path idea come from?

This innovative concept started in 1982 and was my father's idea of looking after our loyal customers in the best possible way. We could build brand loyalty that also benefitted our customers financially. The cost and procedure of upgrading is more affordable and flexible than selling and re-purchasing and it is also eco-friendly. In addition, it created a unique concept to the market which remains fundamentally the same to this day.

Do people actually upgrade?

We handle upgrades every week, mostly from our more mature markets. Lately we upgraded a pair of S6 Avantgarde speakers from 2001 to the new R6 Arreté which we launched in September 2020. This particular

pair came from a Swedish customer and shows perfectly how we can update something twenty years old to the very latest specification.

Why is Freedom Grounding so important, and why does it only apply to top line models?

Put very simply, Freedom Grounding is crucially important as it tangibly improves sound quality. We are first movers in our field to exploit the full potential of this technology, which essentially drains away distortion from drive units to create not only a cleaner but palpably more communicative sound.

Which is more important in speaker design... Listening or measuring (or both)?

A perfect set of measurements is mandatory and very important, but *only* in parallel to rigorous listening tests. The final test before a Audiovector product is signed off is completed by a skilled and experienced listening team, with Ole of course playing a leading role!

How long does an Audiovector speaker take to design?

Even though our designs are based on the R11 & R8 Arreté, which are our in-house 'reference' models, it takes an exhaustively long time to improve every minute aspect and detail of any new product. A loudspeaker is not ready to launch until Ole and myself are 110% satisfied. As every design and project has different challenges and goals, it's difficult to give an exact answer. However, suffice to say it is never just a matter of a few months, for example!

What is the hardest part of designing a loudspeaker?

Everything! As any designer and manufacturer at any level will tell you, there are numerous aspects to consider and hurdles to jump in any project. Every single aspect of any new product has to be fully considered in order to give our customers the best possible value and performance at each product's relative price point. Naturally, some technical aspects can be very demanding and time-consuming but then again so can consideration of materials – from cabinet construction to which type of screws will produce the best performance (hint: they can often make a big difference!)

How long does a speaker take to build?

It can be anywhere from two hours and going up to ten days for a flagship product such as the R11 Arreté.

What is your most popular design? Is it also your favourite?

Our most popular designs are the R3 and the R6-series where the Arreté spec is the most popular. The fact that we can design speakers which sounds ►



“Choose with your ears, heart and what makes the hairs stand up on your arm.”

We have a Tidal Playlist we constantly update for those who wish to follow our journey in music.

Link for Tidal: <https://tidal.com/playlist/9ec7dd15-0020-43a7-a91f-768c80582c0c>

- Bruce Springsteen – 57 Channels
- Diana Krall – A Case of You (Live in Paris)
- Nils Frahm – The Forest
- Colter Wall – Manitoba Man
- Infected Mushroom – Serve My Thirst
- Rage Against the Machine – Fistful of Steel

What mistakes do listeners make when buying a good pair of loudspeakers?

We recommend that our potential customers have a good and careful appraisal, with comparison between our different models. Choose with your ears, heart and what makes the hairs stand up on your arm. Nobody of course is the same and this is a personal choice, but personal emotional reaction is in many respects the ‘gold standard’ of decision making. It’s essential to listen carefully and compare various models and brands, and then to also compare between various Audiovector models in order to find your true preference.

Where do you expect Audiovector/the audio world to be in five years' time?

We will continue to focus on hi-end models, where we have strong reputation to uphold, and we will commit to serving handmade, high quality products to satisfy our demanding listeners. Our mantra is as always – “Improve, improve, improve...” +

► great and still have an exterior design which appeals to many different people on the global market is a winning formula. Adding that the speaker is easy to fit and place into any listening and living room makes these models even more desirable.

Your speakers make a big deal of isolation? Why?

Many years ago, we achieved the level of isolation we were looking for. Today's biggest challenge – and an often-forgotten parameter, is decoupling. Decoupling drivers from cabinet mass, decoupling speakers from floor mass. Why? Because you can reduce time smear efficiently, thereby reducing colouration and improving dynamics.

How important is system matching and room placement?

We believe everybody should spend valuable time setting up and fine tuning their hi-fi equipment. It's an investment in both monetary and mental wellbeing terms. The process can be very rewarding and effective. That being said, we deliberately design products that are easy to match with many different types and brands of electronics – both tubes and solid state – and cables. It's one factor of our designs that we are perhaps renowned for.

What are your ‘go to’ recordings to assess a pair of loudspeakers?

We have several test tracks, which we have used over and over again to great effect. These act as references for both development and demonstration. Some are our reference for distortion assessment, others are our reference for timing, musicality and tonality. Others again are references for linearity and neutrality. The tracks variate but there are core pieces of music that we have used for many years with all our models.