

Special Print Manger p1





DEVIALET

SOURCE

MUTE

TONE



Complete System Devialet, Manger, and Kimber Cable

Author: Heinz Gelking Photos: Rolf Winter

**Only one pair of loudspeakers
and one electronic component
– is less really more?**

Hear More With Less

It's fun to live and work in Munich's French Quarter. The district is famous for its neat bourgeois buildings in Wilhelminian style and its international restaurants, bars, and clubs. Over here it's almost as nice as at home in the Ruhr Region, only more expensive. HiFi Concept owns two opposite salesrooms on Wörthstraße. Local colleagues assure us that this high-end studio founded by Robert Heisig has always been there. In fact, it exists for almost 40 years.

Thomas Hüffer, the executive assistant, takes care of our request. When I ask him on the phone to recommend a complete system he doesn't think twice: "Devialet and Manger." I hesitate. He senses my sceptical reaction and responds: "Yes, they make a perfect match and the combination is a big success. Even demanding audiophiles are thrilled. And people switching from big, expensive equipment won't miss anything soundwise, but regain a lot of freedom – no cable clutter, no mishmash of devices any more. The flat Devialet can even be mounted on the wall. This frees up space and creates order at home."



The price level alone shows that this is none of the typical complete systems for novices. And it is not made for listeners who consider hifi rather as a hobby of constant component rotation than a means of delving into music. Thomas Hüffer's recommendation seemed even tidier, more downscaled and feature-rich than the more baroque looking complete system from Audiolounge in Innsbruck which consists of an Electrocompaniet ECI-6D and a pair of Chario Academy Sonnet (image hifi 3/2014). The Devialet represents a complete hifi system that only needs digital music data for playback. But wait a minute, that's why we still have doubts – where is the source? According to Thomas Hüffer, this is based on practical experience: "The Devialet offers more options than any other device. Its RCA inputs can be configured almost arbitrarily – for phono, line, or digital signals. Music data can be input via cable or streaming. The wishes and requirements of our customers vary to a great extent. Some store their music on a NAS while others simply connect available sources such as SACD players or record players. There are hardly any newbies among Devialet buyers. Normally they already have at least one serious source device at home – even if it's a Mac mini."

Team Players

Record Player: Transrotor Orfeo Doppio with TMD bearings **Tone Arms:** SME 3500, VPI JMW 12.5 **Cartridge:** Transrotor Merlo **Phono Preamplifier:** SAC Entrata Disco **CD Player/DAC:** Marantz SA-11 S3 **Preamplifier:** SAC La Finezza with dual power supply **Power Amp:** SAC II Piccolo **Loudspeaker:** Revel Performa F32 **Cables:** mainly HMS together with TMR, Harmonix, and High-Tune as well as Phonosophie **Accessories:** TMR power strip, Solid-Tech rack plus self-built rack, record player console and Helmholtz resonators, various tuning products by Harmonix, Artkustik and others

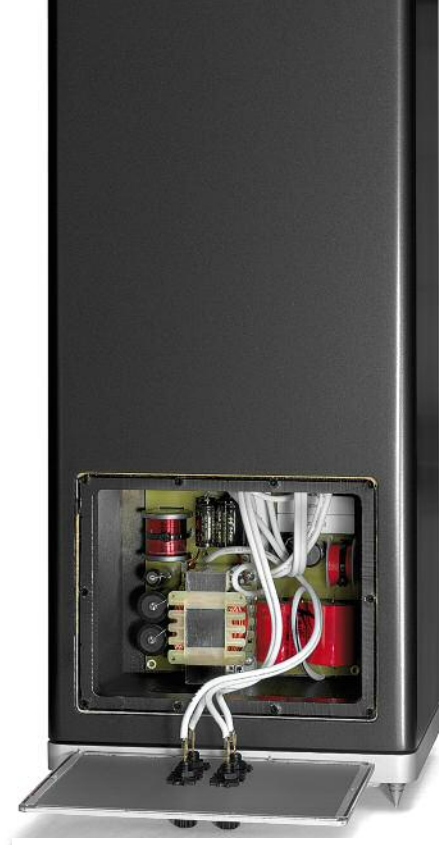
So I decide to act like all the other HiFi Concept customers and resort to existing sources. The styling of the Devialet, designed by Emmanuel Nardin, does not really match the rest of my home. Although I'm not a Feng-Shui follower, I know that reflective surfaces look best in harmonic environments and not in workshop chaos. The French beau would suit much better into any tidy living room than into my functional listening room. Is the design a bit over the top or simply ingenious? I'm still wondering. A matte black model would be cool. But reducing the Devialet to its chrome-plated aluminum chassis would not do justice to it. Design alone didn't make the French internationally famous within a few years. It's the technology developed by Pierre-Emmanuel Calmel which makes the difference. It manifests itself, for example, in a signal path of less than 4" between converters and speaker connectors. Another technical specialty and the very first Devialet patent is called ADH (= Analog/Digital Hybrid).

The voltage for controlling the loudspeakers is set by Class-A amplifiers, while fast and powerful digital amplifiers provide the bulk of electrical current. The trick here is that the loudspeaker "sees" and "follows" only



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Sealed enclosures are rare nowadays. The p1 cabinet has great looks too – without the maw of a bass reflex port

the analog amplifier which shapes the sound correspondingly. The second and possibly even more revolutionary feature is called SAM (= Speaker Active Matching). It affects the bass range up to 150 Hertz and adapts the amp behavior to the connected loudspeaker. For this purpose a DSP is fed a vast amount of information about the acoustical, electrical and mechanical behavior of the connected loudspeaker. (Devialet keeps a constantly growing data base of common loudspeaker parameters in store.) During the operation the input signal is analyzed “in realtime” and the voltage at the amp

output is adapted in such a way that loudspeaker faults (such as lagging of the woofer during step response) are corrected in advance. It's surprising how significant the advantages are when you consider that the Manger p1 is such an excellent 2-way loudspeaker and that it plays more coherent than more ramified designs. With "Chokr" by Renaud Garcia-Fons (Navigatore, CD ENJ-94182) the merits of SAM are obvious. As soon as you activate it, the rapidly plucked notes of the virtuosic upright bass performance become more distinct and concise. During normal operation the 5-string already exhibited a three-dimensional image while dynamics and tone colors left nothing to be desired – apparently. But in direct comparison, I noticed that my perception had compensated a few things: The impression of crispness and authenticity had mainly been a result of the reproduction of fundamental and midrange frequencies. Without SAM, the bass range had sounded somehow nebulous indeed. With SAM, the low range connects itself better with the rest. Now, the bass, fundamental, and midrange frequencies all sound crisp and transparent. And the timing is better, too. Such a precise and agile bass reproduction can normally be found only with real active designs, where each bass speaker is driven by its own amp module. I have never deactivated SAM again.

It's impossible to fully esteem the Devialet – there are simply too many configuration options. They can probably only be used to full extent, if you explore the product as intensely as Thomas Hüffer. But let me pick one single aspect nonetheless: The quality of the internal converter, because it is essential to this concept – nobody would want to connect an external DAC. And it's not necessary, anyway. I compared the 24/192-enabled converter section as precisely as possible with the DAC of my Marantz. When I play the familiar recording of Alfred Schnittke's elegiac piano quintett with Ewa Kupiec and the Petersen Quartett (CD Crystal N67083) and leave the conversion to the SA-11 S3, the strings and the piano sound slightly warmer and dynamically restrained, but also subtler. When I connect the SACD player via a good-quality digital coaxial cable such as the Il Primo from HMS directly with Devialet's DAC, the reproduction exhibits a bit more bite, brilliance, and vibrancy. The word "ostensible" doesn't describe it correctly, but the depiction of the Devialet is definitely more forthright. The difference could

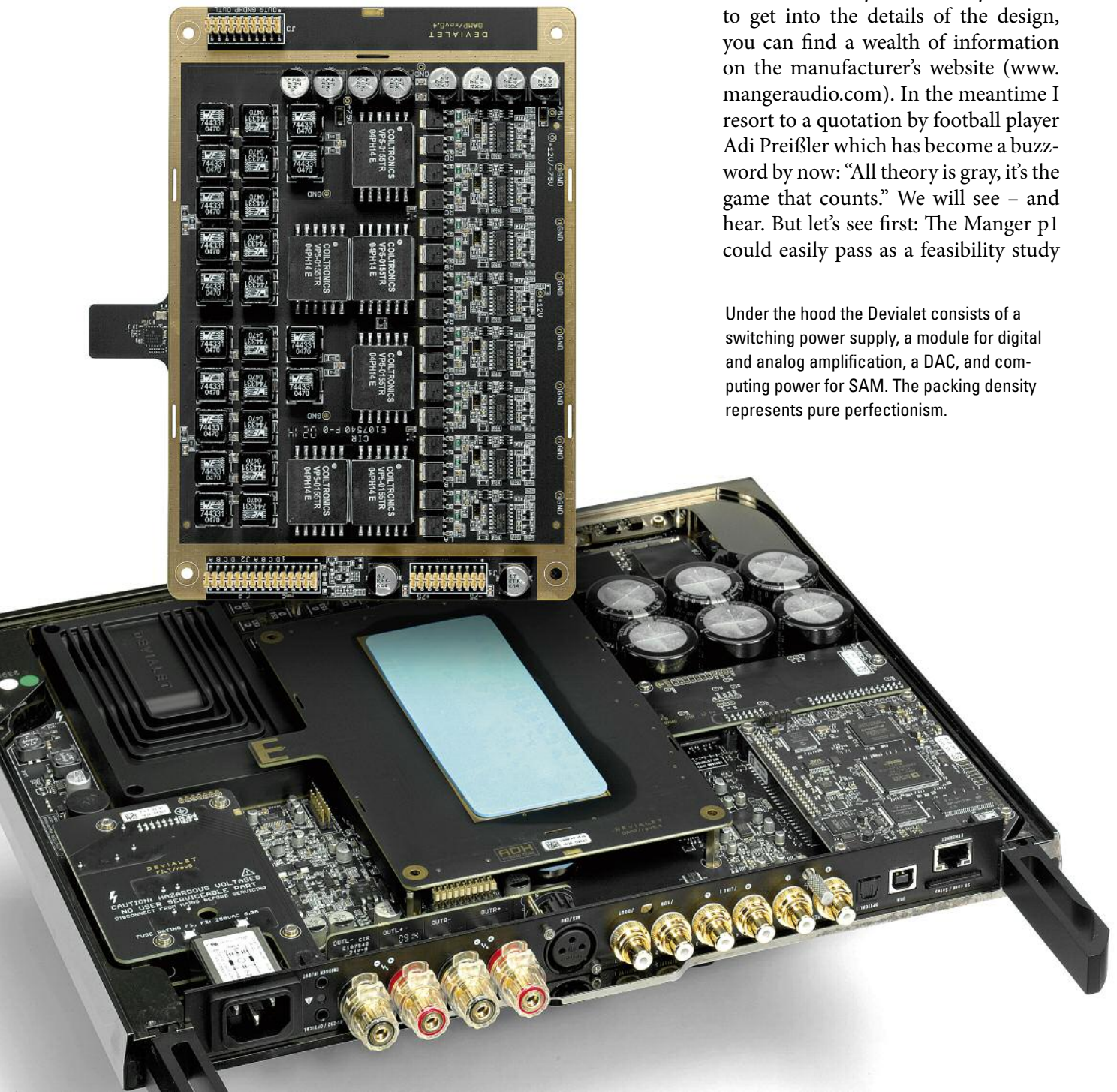
be due to the much longer signal path of the Marantz. Its analog output stage and the Devialet's input stage are also involved. The ultra-short signal path is a basic principle of the Devialet – and its direct, open, and rapid sound prove that this is the right concept.

I used a Devialet with power level "200" which is the stronger version of two available stereo models. Above that there's only dual mono systems. The manufacturer promises 2 x 200 watts at 6 ohms as well as excellent specifications. I used the recommended Kimber 12TC speaker cables to connect the French all-rounder to the Manger p1 – a loudspeaker beyond mainstream featuring an "airy, time-correct, and homogenous sound," according to Thomas Hüffer, who succinctly backs up his choice with the slogan: "Unique electronics deserve unique loudspeakers." The floorstanding speaker appreciates power, as its completely sealed enclosure provides no supporting bass reflex port. For good reason Manger offers an active model by the name of s1 as well. In my opinion the greatest challenge for bass reproduction, however, is to keep pace with a pretty ingenious solution for the rest of the frequency spectrum: the typical bending wave transducer developed by Josef W. Manger. The Manger transducer is still the most important technical feature of the loudspeakers from Mellrichstadt. According to Daniela Manger, the star-shaped membrane is able to cover the tremendously wide frequency range of 80 Hz to 40 kHz, exhibits



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an almost perfect impulse behavior and decay, avoids the storage effects of conventional piston designs and comes closest to our hearing for physiological and evolutionary reasons. If you want to get into the details of the design, you can find a wealth of information on the manufacturer's website (www.mangeraudio.com). In the meantime I resort to a quotation by football player Adi Preißler which has become a buzzword by now: "All theory is gray, it's the game that counts." We will see – and hear. But let's see first: The Manger p1 could easily pass as a feasibility study

Under the hood the Devialet consists of a switching power supply, a module for digital and analog amplification, a DAC, and computing power for SAM. The packing density represents pure perfectionism.

for an architectural theory. In view of the plainness and perfection of form you'd be inclined to grant it a beauty award before you heard a sound. Not even the greater width in relation to its depth looks disproportional. And the restrained color combination of our demo model – black with a light gray accent – is a perfect match.

Manger loudspeakers have a reputation to lose. Their reproduction fidelity is regarded as phenomenal. Now I understand why. But in the beginning I wasn't overwhelmed. Like every other loudspeaker the p1 had been set up without exact alignment to the listening position. This step is indispensable, however. The speakers should be angled inwards so that their axes intersect about 20° in front of the listening position. That's what Daniela Manger, CEO of Manger Audio, also recommends. And lo and behold the initially flat soundstage achieves an enormous spacial depth, especially when you are dealing with excellent recording techniques such as Peter Maags stereo recording of Mendelssohn's "Scottish Symphony" (FLAC in 16/44, CD No. 29 from the 50-CD box The Decca Sound), for which Decca-Tree-Miking has been used as early as 1957. The p1 honestly and precisely reproduces the material at hand and doesn't rely on any effects. This benefits the adorable spaciality and the beautiful panorama of the historical recording, but also discloses the technological problems at that time. Modern orchestra recordings sound definitely more trans-

parent, especially with sound agglomerations during forte passages. On the same evening a recording of the Pini di Roma by Ottorino Respighi, conducted by Lorin Maazel in 1976 (FLAC in 16/44, CD No. 30 from the box The Decca Sound) underlines this conclusion. By nature the p1 is not a low bass giant, but it still outplays ambitious compact speakers, with whom it has a lot in common soundwise. Not only the striking three-dimensionality, but the fine homogeneity as well (which I came to appreciate even more after I had reconnected my own sound system with the Revel F32 later – suddenly a touch of that quality was missing). At this point I must praise the Devialet again: Its consequent control of the bass in SAM mode makes for a perfect interplay of the two drivers which are designed so differently. However, my SAC Mono had the p1 under control as well. You definitely need an amplifier that constantly exercises control.

The p1 completely dispenses with (artificial) highlights for its mid and treble reproduction. You might even think the sound is a little feeble. But that's not true. The different characters of the recorders played by Dorothee Oberlinger on her CD with 12 fantasias by Georg Philipp Telemann have been brilliantly depicted (16/44.1 wave file by Sony/DHM 88765445162). The instruments differ with respect to their tonal strength, color and purity. The p1's presentation of these characteristics is very candid and draws me as a listener close to the recording – an almost irritatingly intimate situation, because I hear things that I wouldn't be able to hear in a concert environment. (This does not argue against the p1, but against the recording esthetics at the most, although this kind of closeness can be pretty fascinating as well). By the way, it is true what people say about Manger loudspeakers: Hardly any other system reproduces the transients – the noise part at the beginning of a sound, when an air column, string, or cymbal makes the transition from silence to vibration – as authentically. It facilitates the perception of tone colors as well as rhythms and the dynamic emphasis of single notes in a piano phrase. I'm already so enthused by the p1, that I wish I could review it alone and not as part of a complete system. I would have loved to test it much longer and more intensely.

With these exceptional loudspeakers you can improve your ability to listen and develop a different (one might say "less superficial") way of listening. This confession is not a dig at



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the Devialet. The Frenchman doesn't sound digital at all and moves nimble as a cat, elegantly, and powerful through the music. The components match very well and the higher price of the sound system from HiFi Concept – compared to all the other complete systems reviewed up to now – is justified, because it provides the most elaborated sound. It is not fun-oriented and doesn't refer to nostalgic ideals, it isn't adapted to small rooms or determine in any other way. It is shaped for the most part by the actual recordings. And that's how it's supposed to be. Why don't you straighten up your home? Less can really be more. □

Devialet 200

Inputs: depending on the configuration, up to 2 x analog RCA (1x phono MM or MC possible), up to 4 x digital RCA, 1 x digital XLR, 1 x TOSLINK, 1 x mini TOSLINK **Outputs:** 1 x loudspeaker, 1 x subwoofer, 1 x headphones, 1 x phono, 1 x digital coax (for digitizing vinyl) **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 15"/1.6"/15" **Weight:** 13.2 lbs **Warranty:** 2 years, 3 more years with online registration

Manger Reference Passive System p1

Design: 2-way, sealed, star-shaped bending-wave transducer **Finish:** various RAL colors and veneers **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 10.6"/44.9"/8.7" **Weight:** 62 lbs **Warranty:** 3 years

Loudspeaker Cable Kimber Cable 12TC All Clear

Ready-made: 6.6 x 6.6 ft, SBAN Bi-Wiring

Power Cable Kimber Cable PK-14-AG

Length: 3.3 ft

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