

Looks Like Love

by Christian Bayer | image hifi | www.image-hifi.com

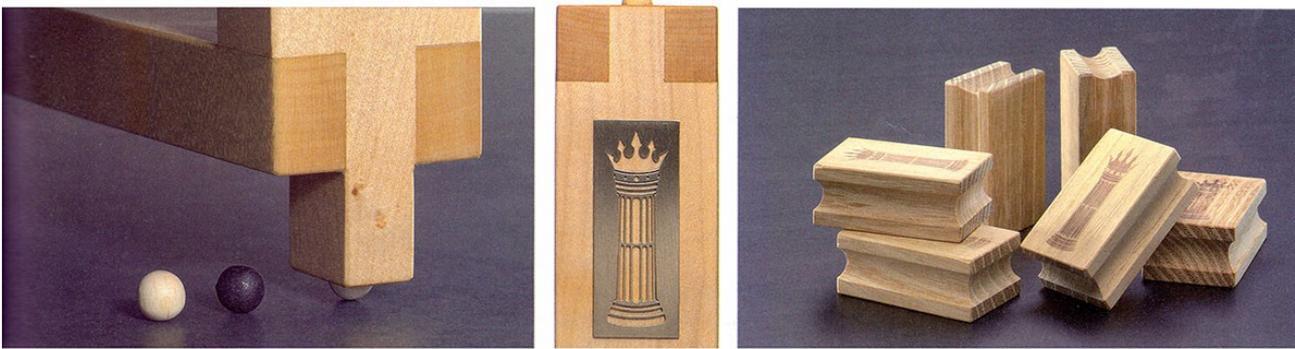


TonTräger.audio founder Eva-Maria Weichmann is certain of one thing: “What the world needs right now are products which have been made with love.” I like that. As a journalist, while we strive to remain objective when reporting, we are still influenced by our preferences and drawn to certain people and things more than others.

The story of *TonTräger.audio* started with a set of loudspeakers, a small pair of *Harbeth P3* monitors, that needed a stand. However, Eva-Maria wasn't happy with anything available on the market at the time. So, together with her partner, she began the process of developing, constructing (and discarding!) her own range of stand models based on *Harbeth's* own principles of decoupling and targeted deflection. They ranged from solid wood over Multiplex versions to the wonderfully beautiful and minimalist stands that visually and sonically impressed me so much in my report on the *Harbeth Super HL5plus* speakers, in the April 2015 edition of *Image Hifi*. The initial inspiration and encouragement came from *Hifi auf dem Bauernhof's* Dietmar Sutter.

To date there is an entire series of customised stands for the complete *Harbeth* product range. To take the concept even further, Eva-Maria developed a range of complimentary *Audio Boards* to supply source equipment, amplifiers and accessories with a consistently sonically-optimised base.

As Eva-Maria described her multifaceted process to me it became clear that we both go about our work similarly: from the abundance of original material we extract the distilled essence. The art is in reducing and refining without taking away too much. The frame construction for the audio boards is practically identical to the speaker stands.



However, while the loudspeakers rest on four so-called tenons – that’s what the protruding wooden edges are for – with the electronics, you need cover plates, called *TonDecks*. They are made from light birch multiplex boards that are covered with a single veneer sheet, an added detail which turned out to be acoustically superior. For decoupling are four waves, the so-called *TonHöcker*, which have been extruded from the frame construction, upon which the *TonDeck* rests on four small square plates. You can practically feel, see and hear the underlying love and effort that has gone into the making.

Which leads me to a little story. For the attachment of the individual struts in the metal-free *Tonträger* products, 10mm wooden dowels are used. The size of the drill hole is precisely 10.1mm so that the 10mm dowels with a thin coating of glue sit perfectly. The usual dowels one can buy normally only come in 0.5mm size variances, with the smallest available being 10.5mm in circumference, and consequently much too thick. Thus began a search which led to a small manufacturer in Würzburg, whose dowels were admittedly more expensive but therefore resulted in the perfect fit.

Happily, *Tonträger* production is 100% Eco-friendly and sustainable. Starting with FSC-certified wood, in this case solid Pollmeier Beech with its uniform characteristics, and ending with recyclable packaging and reusable packet tape. But this would all just be hollow prose if the boards didn’t serve their purpose: to assist electronic equipment in achieving its optimal working condition. Whoever thinks it doesn’t matter what the equipment stands on has never done a comparison. The difference can be so far-reaching that one might think they are listening to different devices.

I even tested out various *Accuphase* devices and the following became apparent to me: the heavier the individual components, the more important the fine-tuning becomes. That’s why, for example, in our *Image-Hifi* studio, which has a carpeted concrete floor, it’s crucial we have slate tiles upon which to rest our solid M-6200 amplifiers. On top of the slate tiles sits the wooden *TonDeck Audio Board*, which rests on four little wooden nubs that can be inserted into the round grooves of the tenons. Incidentally the tenons sit flush with the upper surface of the board and also feature these same circular nubs, making the boards stackable.

Finally, the amplifier is placed on the audio board, and bingo. CD players and D/A converters don't necessarily need a slate but definitely benefit from the use of so-called *Magic Cubes* – square wooden blocks, with a hollow groove or 'throat' running around the circumference, that are to be placed between the *TonDeck* and the piece of equipment. Optimise the set up as described and hear the difference when compared to solid heavy bases. The elevated option is the clear winner: the sound is airy, light and free, almost as though the device is floating and in turn, so is the music.

I was allowed to recreate the same experience at home with my *Accuphase E-260* power amplifier. Admittedly it sounds great either way, but placed on an *Audio Board* on top of a wooden floor with the *Magic Cubes* as well for good measure, the sound really lifts. The wonderful, newly-recorded *Mozart Sonatas Vol.XXVIII* by Evgeni Koroliov (Tacet 226, Germany, 2016) gain such an airiness, delicacy and subtle dynamic that is utterly enchanting, and it is not often that I am so moved by classical music. The *TonTräger Audio Boards* are, in the truest sense of the the words, a gift for friends of music.

I wouldn't ever want to do without them again.