

My new Reference—The Bergmann Audio Magne Turntable

MAY 23, 2019 ANTHONY KERSHAW



2019 has been a banner year for both Audiophilia and the improvement of my reference system. Audiophilia has added two fine writers and experienced significant growth in worldwide readership and advertising sponsors. I feel we have accomplished this through timely updates and excellence and honesty in audio reportage. There are no shortcuts at the magazine. And through the generosity and kindness of some audio legacy stakeholders we have known and highly respected for a long time, a couple of us here at the magazine have received a few long-term loan components to enhance our daily listening experience. For that, we are transparently grateful.

Reading previous reviews and articles will give you a better insight as to the whys and wherefores of our choices of these wonderful components. Try my 2014 review of the Bergmann Audio Magne Turntable (**\$14,000 incl. tone arm**) and review of Alta Audio's FRM2 Celesta Loudspeakers (\$15,000). A look at Contributing Editor Karl Sigman's latest VPI and Grado reviews will also offer context.



As you will read in my Magne rave, I fell in love with this Danish beauty. Its Bauhaus lines, the elegance of its overall design and the ingenious implementation of a once tricky technology, the air bearing linear tracking arm and platter.

Johnnie Bergmann, engineer, solved the clunky and oily, so-loud-we-place-it-in-the-adjoining-room air pump problem, replacing it with a silent air box feeding the platter and arm by a simple plastic tube. Sounds easy. I bet it wasn't. In any case, it works effortlessly and silently. Switch on the pump, press either the 33 or 45 button, lift the elegant record weight off the platter, place the record and return the weight, and you're ready to go.

Rotate the knob at the end of the armtube to raise and lower the cartridge; in my case the \$6000 Phasemation PP-2000 MC Phono Pickup Cartridge.

The backstory

I was offered the Magne back in 2014, but even at an accommodation price, my wife insists on groceries purchased and mortgage paid. So, rather than sulk, plot and connive, I thought for once in my audiophile life I would wait patiently.

The Magne and I intersected at various times—my passion for it had not diminished. Meanwhile, I purchased a Rega Research RP10 Turntable (\$5490) through the Rega distributor. Even with a professional accommodation, still a hefty chunk of change. File it under Capital

Expenditure. Same for the Rega Research Apheta Cartridge (\$1799) that came with the turntable as a package.

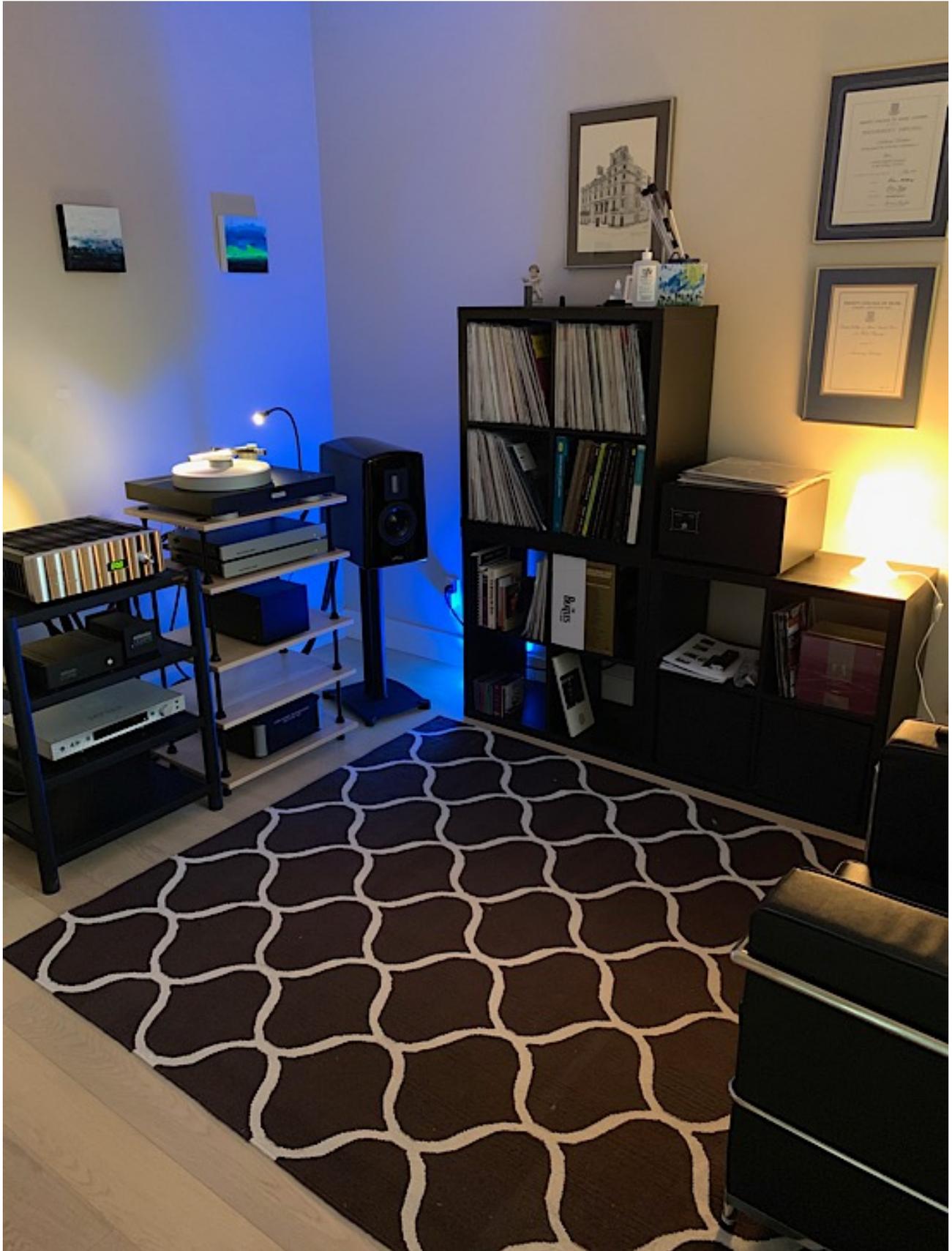
Up until last month, the RP10 served me brilliantly. It's a dynamic and refined turntable with a superb arm and even better platter, made from ground ceramic missile nose cone material. If it wasn't for a sexy Danish shadow always looming, the RP10 could have served this Rega fanboy for the rest of his days.

Jump five years, with a lot of water under the audiophile bridge, longtime advertiser American Sound Distribution offered me the Magne on very generous terms, incl. Rega trade in and advertising exchange. As our rates are so reasonable, with a million unique visits and seven million page views a year, an ad is a valuable commodity. So, we're both happy. And I have my dream 'table to go along with my dream speakers, both of which happened in 2018/19. To add to the newcomers, I purchased the Phasemation cartridge and the wonderful Sutherland Engineering DUO Phono Preamp (\$4000). It's a very happy system.

Delivery

I thought my wife, who looks after Audiophilia shipping, setup and admin, was the best at shipping and receiving. But even she is in awe of Arnold, shipper extraordinaire at Toronto's American Sound of Canada. As such, the pallet bearing the huge box arrived in a timely fashion, safe and sound. It took an hour or two to unpack, photograph how the packaging looked as we were unboxing in case of shipment, and get the Magne settled on the Salamander rack.





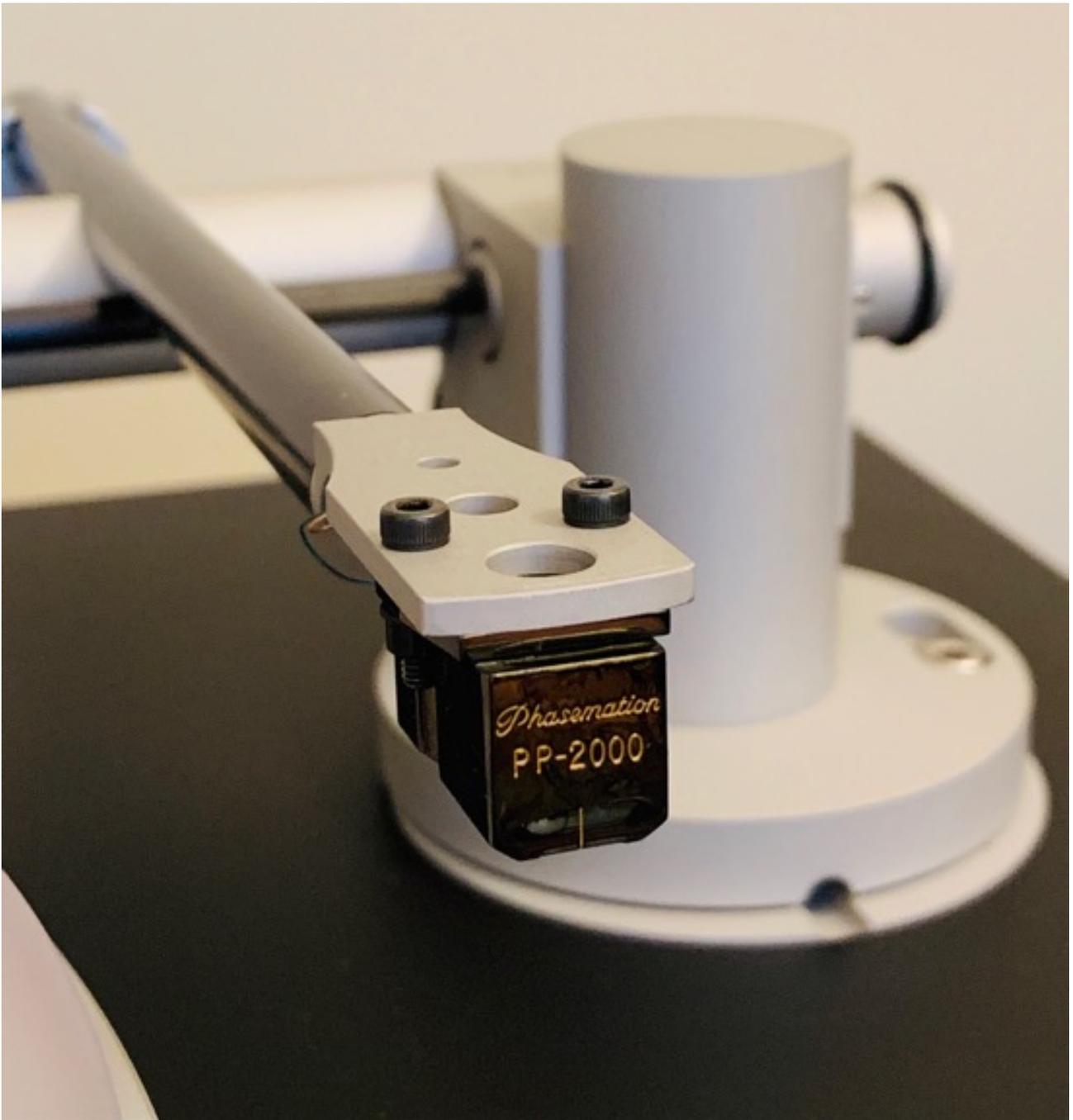
The Magne fitting right in to my music room.

Setup

To my surprise, the Magne was able to fit on the rack. The three feet are not adjustable, which is silly on a \$14,000 'table, which meant levelling with a couple of spots of BlueTac (some updated information about this in 'Brickbats'). American Sound of Canada owner, Angie Lisi (a wonderful friend and mentor) did not think I could do the setup. O ye, of little faith! She was ready to fly out from Toronto to the island and get the job done. We're talking incredibly dedicated dealer, here. However, since the 2014 review where I chickened out, my wife and I have become dab hands at turntable/cartridge set up. I'm quite fascinated by all the precision and geometry required. And my wife's delicate hands and touch can screw in a cartridge anytime. Plus, we have all the tools. Well, except one—the dedicated protractor that comes with the 'table. That, and the bearing oil were not in the shipping box. The oil must have been used up (it's a demo unit) and the protractor was lost in the shuffle. A quick stop at a sewing store and we had sewing machine oil, a perfectly acceptable turntable bearing oil. Then, I substituted my Ortofon protractor for the Bergmann and it seemed to work fine. We'll wait for the dedicated protractor and double check our overhang math when it arrives. *We touched base with the Bergmanns at the Munich show this month. My Ortofon protractor was perfectly fine.*

First, we ensured the 'table and arm were level. The slightest imbalance and it's game over with this technology. Following the manual (be careful of the English translation: 'off' is often written as 'of', and at the most inopportune times), we took our time to get the basic parameters correct, going in for fine tuning later.

There was some tension in the house as we fit the \$6,000 Phasemation cart to the arm. We had difficulty getting the thing to gauge tracking weight (between 1.7 grams and 2 grams). When the arm skipped merrily across a test record, we knew something was drastically wrong. We felt retreat the better part of valour and decided to tackle the problem after a night's sleep.



Before retiring, I found a couple of Magne videos on YouTube. As we were watching, my wife said, 'damn, we have the counterweight inverted'. As it was a demo, I figured the counterweight set and paid no attention. Boy, did I feel dumb! Way to go, Jan! A quick reversal, VTF reset, and it was complete. Ready to play.



Fine tuning

The airflow pressure to both arm and platter is adjustable via screws on the rear. All was good. Like we say with instrument intonation, 'it was set at the factory'. I used Allnic Audio's \$2300 Mu-7R RCA Cable as phono wire (review forthcoming). No ground was needed.



When we first attempted to level the arm, we grossly over rotated the Allen wrench and it made the arm wobble. Somewhere on the internet, I read the arm level adjustment is achieved with microscopic turns. No more than a 16th of a turn on both screws set the level perfectly. I have a bi monthly reminder on my iPhone to check level of plinth, platter and arm with a bullseye level.

Super fine tuning

Magne makes the super fine tuning of the arm's level very easy by providing the owner with a simple plastic cylinder that fits over the arm tube. The tube floats elegantly over the 18 minute air holes in the top of the arm. The slightest imbalance and the tube floats and rolls almost imperceptibly to the left or right of the arm. When level, no movement. Ingenious. And super accurate.



The VTA seemed perfect by eye and sound, so we left it as is. The VTA is adjustable by a screw on the rear of the tone arm.

I placed the air pump two shelves down from the turntable. The air tube is plenty long enough for a good distance between the two. As it is ultra quiet, close proximity is no problem. Protocol: switch on the air pump—a rocker switch on rear panel, then I wait a few seconds, switch on the motor (two impossibly simple and elegant buttons (33 or 45) with smaller fine tuning speed buttons above and LED blue lights), remove record weight (it's very important that you play records with it in place—you'll forget on one LP and things will get a little loosey goosey with coherence), place LP then record weight, do your cleaning regimen, and you're ready to go.



Sound

What I said five years ago, goes. But it was very instructive listening to the Magne directly after a long relationship with the Rega RP10. Using the same ancillary components, cables and cartridge, any changes heard were a direct result of the Magne.

The leading edge transients had a snap that were foreign to the Rega. Dynamics, especially the explosive type, literally slammed me back in my Le Corbusier LC2. The turntable is fast with a capital F. Detail was even more microscopic yet always with the most refined tone. Treble, midrange and bass coherence matched that of the Rega, for which, it is justly famous. Yet, within that coherence, the listener could hear deeper into the wide and deep recesses of the soundstage. Little musical cues like the horns' fanfare-like vamp at the beginning of Reiner's *Kije*—now, I could hear separate horns, their articulation more clearly and the incredible accompanying bass drum even deeper, all at very quiet dynamics. This favourite track was already mind blowing on the Rega (you'll never hear me slag off my Rega RP10, ever), but the Magne was more revealing of musical nuance.

With the Magne you get more of everything that the RP10 brought to the listening room. The refined timbre of both voices and instruments was a thing to behold. And this was purely the turntable and its superior design bringing the sound to you—all its grateful accompanists were the same as the Rega.

Which brings me to my other choices for my next chapter turntable. I recently reviewed the Pure Fidelity Harmony Turntable, a Vancouver gem with great sound and the best finish on a turntable I've seen. Designer John Stratton was very pleased with the review; he offered me very generous terms to acquire one for the new Audiophilia reference before the review was published. What was it Oscar Wilde wrote? 'I can resist anything except temptation'. The \$8290 Harmony certainly bested the Rega in some respects, but even with generous terms, not quite enough to give up my Rega. The fanboy within me is strong! However, if I had reviewed the Harmony with my Phasemation cartridge, we may be singing a different song.

Brickbats

I had to think long and hard for any negatives relating to such a brilliant turntable. So, digging deep, they are:

1. The aforementioned non adjustable feet.

Update—Eva Bergmann offered some follow up information re the feet:

I scrolled to the Happy Ending and Brickbats, and can see it is mentioned “not adjustable” feet. Actually there are adjustable feet on Magne, but we recommend to level the shelf or rack instead, and only use the Magne feet if further adjustment is needed.

We did try. Maybe a stripped thread, as it would not adjust. We’ll try again at the next level check.

2. I wish the arm cue was damped.

3. Bergmann had mentioned that some early platters had aluminum that clouded a little under the anodization layer. Mine has the clouding. It’s subtle, but there. I thought it was dirt after a few years of demo life, so we cleaned it with the appropriate mild products. No, still there. Cleaner, for sure, but the slightly dirty strip is under the anodized material. No biggie, but if you’re are a analogue crazy person, it may bug you. Me? Never. What gave you that idea?



Johnnie and Eva Bergmann. My fabulous Danish friends at this month’s High End 2019 in Munich.

Happy endings

While this agonizing and audiophile naval gazing was going on, Audiophilia Contributing Editor Karl Sigman was quietly writing his review of VPI's new 40th Anniversary Turntable, the HW-40 (\$15,000 incl. 'Fatboy' tonearm) and loving it. It was a big jump up from his VPI Prime. For the review, Grado Labs kindly provided the Aeon cartridge (\$6,000), which Karl also reviewed. Before the reviews were published, both VPI and Grado offered Karl a long term loan of the equipment, for which he was thankful and took them both up on the offer (he returned the Prime to VPI and the Statement v2 to Grado). Since Karl was already using VPI as his reference and he hinted to me that the new turntable wasn't going anywhere, and the Harmony, though very fine, was not quite in the Magne's league (the Magne is a full \$6,000 above the Harmony's MSRP), my decision was made. And though it was a researched decision, as always, the final trigger was pulled through passion.

Oscar Wilde is also quoted as saying 'I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best.' I could not agree more. Bergmann Audio designs and manufactures world class turntables. And now, through patience, passion and kindness, their Magne is the new Audiophilia reference.

Further information: [American Sound of Canada Distribution](#);
[Bergmann Audio](#)

