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TRUTH AND SOUL

BURMESTER'S 032 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER AND B25 TOWER SPEAKERS ARE ULTRA HIGH-END DESIGNS. AS IF YOU COULDN'T TELL.

> BY STEVE GUTTENBERG



PHOTOS: IMAGES COURTESY OF BURMESTER AND STEVE WITTEKAMP

I'll never forget the very first time I heard a Burmester amplifier. It was 20-something years ago, and the rather svelte Burmester Model 878 was being compared with a muscle bound, high-end American amp. The American amp sounded like a really good hi-fi, and it was more powerful, but the Burmester sounded more musical. It had more soul; the music was simply more alive and realistic sounding over the Burmester. I've heard other Burmesters

over the years at various shows and high-end stores, but I never had one at home, until now.

Burmester is based in Berlin, Germany. For this review, the U.S. importer, Audiophile Systems, sent Burmester's latest generation B25 speakers, teamed up with the 032 stereo integrated amplifier. The duo's wondrous design detailing is, even by the most exalted high-end standards, beautiful.

While most top-tier audio manufacturers compete in one or two product categories,

Burmester offers complete systems: CD players, digital-to-analog converters, surround processors, preamplifiers, power amplifiers, powerline conditioners, speakers and equipment racks. So I imagine most Burmester 032 and B25 owners will probably add a Burmester CD player, such as the 061 (\$13,995) and maybe even a 931 FM tuner (\$9,995).

All of the 032 amplifier's controls and input selector buttons are mounted on its centrally located, chrome-plated, solid-brass front panel. The amplifier's front and sides are covered by gorgeously machined heat sinks. They provide optimal cooling for the stereo 240 watt per channel amplifier's output transistors, eliminating the need for noisy fans. My 032 sample was shipped with a clear acrylic cover, so I could more easily admire the amplifier's interior build quality. The standard top cover is a more discreet metal plate, but the optional fully chromed top elevates the 032's good looks to the stratosphere. Burmester components fully decked out in chrome are a startling sight to behold,

The 032's mirrored surfaces will reflect your room's color and lighting, so the electronics disappear more than the average high-end component. The chrome finish dates back to Burmester's earliest models, which makes it easy to mix and match different vintages of gear. The look is at once modern and timeless.

Each assembled 032 is run through a 300-point computer test regime. The amplifier is then played for a solid week and put through the complete 300-point testing process again. The first and second test results must be identical before the amp moves on to final testing. Each Burmester component must also pass a rigorous listening test before it can leave the factory.

The 032 features set includes bass and treble tone controls, fully balanced circuitry and minimal overall feedback to ensure the purest possible sound quality. One curious omission, the 032 doesn't come with a remote control—it's an extra-cost option.

The amp's posterior hosts a small bevy of single-ended (RCA) and balanced (XLR) input and output jacks. There's



The 032's chrome-plated chassis is also its heat sink.



an RS-232 port, optional USB input and a throughput for home theater applications. I have no idea why, but the 032's headphone jack is tucked away on the rear panel. Convenient it's not.

The B25 tower speaker's 42-inch-tall cabinet is fabricated from high-density fiberboard and birch plywood. Standard finishes include Aluminum Laminate, Makassar or Elsberry veneers. My samples were finished in Elsberry, beautifully crafted and detailed. Burmester can custom finish speakers to your exact specification. I've seen Burmester speakers decked out in gloss white with chrome baffles,

and it's truly a stunning combination.

Burmester refers to the B25's tweeter as an "Air Motion Transformer," which is a fancy name for a folded ribbon driver. To increase its efficiency, the tweeter is recessed mounted in the B25's die-cast aluminum upper baffle. The advanced technology driver produces more extended upper treble response than conventional dome tweeters.

The 5.25-inch Kevlar midrange driver was developed in-house. Its lightweight but rigid diaphragm is said to produce ultra-low distortion. The 6-by-9-inch oval paper woofer on the B25's side flank


is stealthily mounted behind distinctive lateral slots. The woofer is housed in a separate enclosure within the B25 cabinet. Burmester tweeter, midrange and woofer drivers are pre-tested over a 14 day "run-in" period. Pairs of drivers are computer matched to exceedingly tight tolerances (0.5 dB over 6 points of their rated frequency response). Measurements for each completed speaker are maintained at the factory, so if a driver ever needs to be replaced, Burmester can supply an exact duplicate.

From the get-go the Burmester duo's wide-open imaging and transient purity were hard to miss. Feed the Burmester system high-quality recordings and it will reward your ears with dazzling resolution of fine detail. The downside of that glorious resolution is less-stellar recordings' faults are all too obvious.

That wasn't a problem with John Mellencamp's latest CD, *Life Death Love and Freedom*. It lit up the Burmesters, big time! I babied the B25s a little at first,

and I must say they sounded terrific at hushed, late-night listening levels. Once I leaned on the volume control, the sound really came alive and the detail was incredible. The drums and floor toms sounded very present, the cymbals' sheen and sparkle were breathtakingly realistic. Mellencamp sounds like his younger self and he was clearly having a great time at these sessions.

The same could be said about Frank Sinatra's *Live in Paris* CD. Old Blue Eyes' 1961 club date with a six-piece band is a swinging affair. Sinatra's voice never sounded better; his ease and phrasing are so perfect and so natural, it's the sort of recording you can't get enough of. The B25s produced such a deep and spacious soundstage I almost didn't notice that the CD is a mono recording.

I couldn't resist listening to the 032 amplifier with my reference Magnepan 3.6/R panel speakers, and I was thrilled by the Burmester's vivid, see-through transparency. I've rhapsodized at length about the 032's chrome finish, but if you have a hankering for a 24-karat-gold-plated 032, just say the word. The U.S. distributor tells me gold is popular with Burmester owners who've installed their gear on yachts. I loved the Burmesters sound, but I have to admit I was head-over-heels in love with the way they look and feel. Does that make me a shallow person? 

■ PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: B25, \$11,995/pair; 032, \$22,495
CONTACT: 317.841.4100
audophilesystems.com