



Raising a Glass to Class A Sound

Shindo Labs Audio System

BY JAY FISHER

WHEN DESCRIBING ULTRAHIGH-FIDELITY AUDIO, it is tempting to employ the gustatory argot of the wine connoisseur, and such descriptions are particularly appropriate when considering the Shindo Labs audio components. Like the winemaker of a respected Grand Cru, who carefully blends his varietals and vigilantly monitors the wine's maturation, Tokyo-based audio designer Ken Shindo has spent 30 years carefully refining some of the world's most extraordinary audio components.

Just as a great appellation's wines exhibit a character reflecting the philosophy of the winemaker, Shindo's components express the exceptional and distinctive "house sound" of Shindo Labs. It is no wonder that Shindo—a

wine lover in his own right—has named his family of premier electronics after the French wines he reveres, such as Petrus, Richebourg, Giscours, and Montrachet. Each Shindo component is a hand-built work of audio art, meticulously constructed with the singular intent, according to Shindo, "to create the finest possible musical experience in the home." In Europe and Asia, Shindo Labs enjoys a mystique and a following that are rare even for so-called cult gear, attributable to the musicality of the circuits, superb build quality, and rarity of the parts employed in construction. Few, if any, other manufacturers build an entire line of audio components with such a careful selection of vintage and state-of-the-art parts.

Hand built to the highest standards of fit and finish, the Giscours Preamplifier is the glowing centerpiece of the Shindo Labs system.



The flagship Western Electric 300B Limited Single-Ended Amplifier offers serious listeners a slice of class A heaven.

Vintage parts include new old-stock vacuum tubes, which Shindo considers rare jewels unparalleled in sound quality. In addition to such tubes, the top-level Shindo amplifiers and Latour speakers incorporate Western Electric paper-in-oil capacitors, Allen Bradley resistors, and Sprague Vitamin Q capacitors. This blend of vintage and modern parts and technology gives Shindo gear its signature voice. After years of hunting down and collecting caches of rare tubes and parts, Shindo has a well-stocked warehouse that is the stuff of legend. As a result, customers likely will never have to worry about parts availability. Moreover, these are heirloom-quality components that can be enjoyed for a lifetime. Each Shindo Labs component is a standout designed to perform brilliantly in a multimarque high-end rig. But the true musical synergy created in an all-Shindo Labs system elevates reproduced sound into the realm of the sublime. Such a system can alter an experienced listener's notion of what is possible in music reproduction.

Like the best wines, the Shindo sound has a balance of highly refined

qualities: musicality, effortless dynamics, true-to-life tone, nuance of detail, expansive sound staging, and overall coherence. But to these ears, it is the *balance* of these sonic virtues that sets Shindo high on the short list of the world's most musically

compelling gear, inviting the listener to forget that he or she is listening through stereo equipment at all.

Shindo Labs electronics have an appealing retro look, with chassis finished in the distinctive Shindo bottle green with gold accents.

The **Giscours Preamplifier** features old-stock Western Electric 349A tubes in the line stage, amorphous core moving-coil step-up transformers, dual-mono design, twin-tube rectification, and output transformers. This full-featured preamplifier (\$24,000) is a vinyl-lover's dream, and when combined with moving-coil cartridges like the Shindo SPU, it delivers amazing dynamics and all the musical flesh and bones to be found in an analog recording.

The **Western Electric 300B Limited Single-Ended Amplifier** (\$28,000 per pair) is the flagship Shindo Labs amplifier. It employs old-stock 300B tubes from the



The Latour 15 Reference Field Coil Loudspeaker redefines dynamic range.



original production run, producing 8 watts of class A output. The 300B Limited will easily drive speakers of 90 dB sensitivity to volume levels that belie its rated output. When coupled with Shindo's 98 dB sensitive Latour Reference loudspeakers, it drives them with thundering authority, even on the most demanding orchestral or rock programming.

The **Garrard 301 Player System** is a heavily retrofitted version of the legendary Garrard 301 turntable, with new spindle/bearing, platter, and massive bronze tonearm base, mounted in an exquisitely crafted plinth. The plinth is constructed with many constrained laminations of cherrywood under a gorgeous lacquer finish. The carefully chosen wood filters undesirable resonances and is a key to the turntable's hallmark sound and high performance. The **Mersault RF-773 Tonearm** is a high-precision version of the classic Ortofon/EMT RF-297, employing the same design but using modern, precision ball bearings for superior tracking ability. Meanwhile, the **Shindo SPU** cartridge is a modified Ortofon SPU cartridge. Shindo's modifications give the classic SPU cartridge greater frequency extension, resolution, and refinement. (The Garrard 301 system, which

includes the turntable, tonearm, and SPU, is \$19,995.)

The **Latour 15 Reference Field Coil Loudspeaker** is Shindo's statement speaker and a stunning expression of high-efficiency (100 dB/16-ohm) speaker design. The proprietary "tuned" cabinet is entirely hand built in woods selected for their tone. It does not conform to conventional alignments and is

tuned entirely by ear. Highly modified, field-coil versions of the vintage Altec 515 woofer and 288C compression driver are employed. The compression driver is loaded into a horn and lens of Shindo's design for the mid and treble frequencies. This two-way speaker achieves the frequency response and dynamics usually associated with large three-way horn designs, however it performs with the coherency and imaging of a single-driver speaker. This exceptional coherency

allows the Latour to seemingly disappear, leaving the listener with nothing but the music. The Latour (\$48,000 per pair) is available by special order only and can be specified in virtually any finish. ☐

Tone Imports (distributor), 646.425.7800, www.toneimports.com



Sonic nirvana for vinyl aficionados: Shindo Labs' highly modified Garrard turntable with Shindo arm and cartridge.