

Industry NEWS

FEBRUARY 2008

Inside the Vienna Acoustics Loudspeaker Factory

NEIL GADER

The Haydn Grand is the first Vienna Acoustics loudspeaker I formally reviewed (Issue 176). Only fourteen inches tall this two-way reflex design was an aesthetic delight and impressed me with its musicality and astounding fit and finish. When my wife and I realized that during our coming vacation we would be a day's train ride from Vienna, we decided to extend the trip and arrange a factory visit to see just what makes this company tick.

Vienna Acoustics was founded by designer Peter Gansterer and another partner in 1989. Initially producing both loudspeakers and tube amplifiers, Vienna Acoustics made its first splash at CES in 1991. In 1998, Gansterer's original company was purchased by Vienna Acoustics GmbH, and today VA is shipping 20,000 units per year—a medium-sized enterprise in high-end terms. Production is spread over fourteen different models, dedicated first to the audiophile but appealing to the multichannel listener, as well. My tour was conducted by Maria Gansterer (Peter's sister), VA's managing director whose duties include marketing and quality control, and Helge Leinich, another VA managing director who operates the business side of Vienna Acoustics.

VA's main office is located a short drive south of downtown Vienna, while the actual assembly and shipping are done in a separate facility nearby. My first thought when I entered the factory was that I'd never seen so many pairs of white gloves in my life. It turns out for good reason—the factory operates as part of a sophisticated production chain of elite subcontractors and vendors. The facility I was standing in was like a rail terminal where all the finished elements converge, are modified and tested, sometimes rerouted for completion, installed, tested against the “reference,” given a final “end check,” and packaged for shipment. With so many impeccably finished high-gloss enclosures about, I immediately understood the gloves.

Specifically, raw cabinets are built and finished in Italy. Gansterer emphasized that he now specifies the stiffer formulation of HDF (high-density fiberboard) in his designs,



Finished cabinets waiting to be stuffed



White glove inspection of VA drivers

rather than the more common but less robust MDF (medium-density fiberboard). He opts for very thick baffles and back panels because their mass absorbs the energy of the drivers. “I don't want to have an instrument as a cabinet—it must be neutral.” While he uses some internal damping, he prefers that the rigidity of the enclosure and bracing does most of the work. He also noted that where possible the midrange is totally sealed off from the bass driver in its own internal cabinet, although it's not physically decoupled. In the soon-to-be-released Reference Line, an isolated head unit, fully decoupled from the bass cabinet, will contain an all-new midrange-tweeter coaxial transducer.