

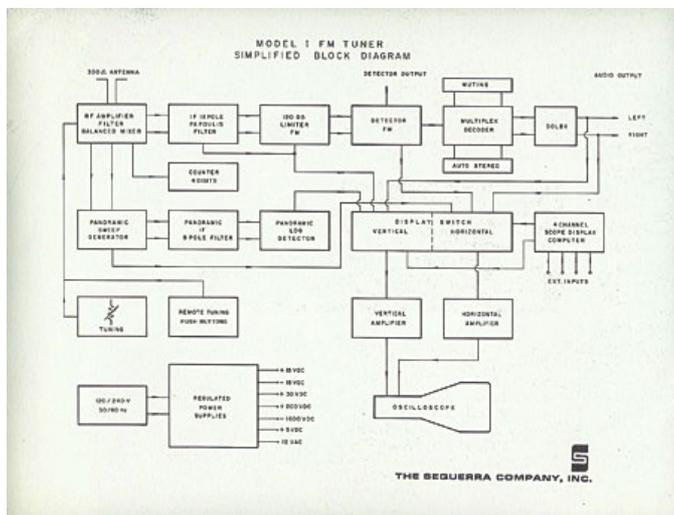
engineers at Hewlett-Packard, Barney Oliver, decided to make a power amplifier. This was maybe 30 years ago, and he got Dave Packard's approval—they would make a hundred, two hundred. It was a terrible amplifier, and Barney, who had the entire backing of Hewlett-Packard, was one of the smartest engineers going. The notion that audio is simple and easy to do is a big fantasy. There are very few people who have ever done it really well.

Lander: Bernard Oliver, known as Barney, was the founder and director of HP Labs. He won a National Medal of Science and is in the National Inventors Hall of Fame. If his amp was a failure, who could design a better one?

Sequerra: I think Frank McIntosh made a wonderful amplifier. [D.T.N] Williamson, in England, made a wonderful amplifier. Even the first Leaks were wonderful. The object of these people was not just money, but to reproduce music for the home. The problem today is that profit is the design objective. Music is incidental to it.

Lander: Certainly, many high-end audio designers would argue that their ultimate goal is music—and some would use that rationale to justify extremely high prices.

Sequerra: I'm known as one of the guys that started this high-priced nonsense. Believe me, I take responsibility for making things expensive. That goes all the way back to the 10B. Remember that when the 10B came out at \$750, you could buy good tuners for \$100. Sidney always chided me on this. He said—this was after Marantz—"You've got to make things that are affordable. You cannot make things only for the wealthy."



Lander: In retrospect, what's your reaction to his rebuke?

Sequerra: I apologize.

Lander: Seriously?

Sequerra: Seriously. I should have taken whatever skills I had and made things that were more affordable.

Lander: Could they possibly have sounded as good?

Sequerra: If I am that good a designer, I should be able to make things that are far more affordable and sound just as good. Some engineers say, "I'm going to take this out because it costs money," or "I'm going to buy the cheaper substitute part." But there's another approach that says, "I'm going to find a way out of this—a less expensive design that gives the best performance." Do you remember the Weathers turntable, which was very inexpensive? Paul Weathers always had that attitude: "I'm going to make the best thing I can make, with the best performance possible, at the lowest price."

Lander: Certainly, as the price rises past a certain point, you get diminishing returns.

Sequerra: Very diminishing returns. Since the beginning of high-end audio reproduction, there has been a notion promoted: It's going to sound like the real thing. That's a fantasy. It doesn't sound like the real thing, and it never can.

Lander: So what should the audiophile set as his goal?

Sequerra: An acceptable sound, which provides the maximum amount of information contained in the software within the limitations of the listening environment. What seems to have been lost is a valid objective assessment of where we are and where we're supposed to go. Ninety percent of the people in audio are gifted amateurs, and now they're up against the wall. Now, unless you work with the fundamentals of science, you can't make progress. Once, you could, because the starting point was a console radio. But the bar has been raised significantly.

Lander: After six decades in the high-fidelity industry, will you hazard a prediction about its future?

Sequerra: Audiophiles are a diminishing group, but I'm not going to say the time has passed for the audio business. It's trying to find a new way. And it may find a new way. There are a lot of smart people in the audio business, and I don't believe that something as emotionally and physically satisfying as music will vanish.

