

Hifi Pig visits the Roksan premises in London, UK to find out what this legendary British company, famous initially in the mid 80s for their Xerxes has in the pipeline.



ROKSAN

Roksan Audio was founded in 1985 in London almost thirty years ago by two young London University graduates who happened to both be committed audiophiles and shared the same aspirational vision.

The first Roksan product was the groundbreaking Xerxes turntable, which took sub-chassis turntable design to another level and became an instant worldwide success. It subsequently went on to design and produce electronics and radical design loudspeakers then furthered its design philosophy to include more products that still retained the Roksan signature of high quality sound reproduction.

Following the new formats trend the company is now also devoting research and development into streaming and digital wireless products with particular emphasis on stylish design to complement the existing range. Roksan's mandate is to take the latest technology and better it for home audio use. For example, they were the first hi-fi company to introduce aptX into home audio products and they are currently working on further groundbreaking methods of high quality wireless audio transmission and operation for near-future products.

The obvious first product of significance is the



original Xerxes turntable. At that time, in 1985, the hi-fi market was dominated by mainly two companies - Linn and Naim. Roksan burst onto the scene with the Xerxes and very quickly the world was aware of another serious contender in the audio market.

This was followed in the next year by the original Darius, a very unique and unusual speaker design that set the benchmark of what Roksan stood for and how they intended to do things their own way and without compromise.

The first electronics were the S1, M1 and DP1 high-end amplifiers and CD Player. Again, these became classics and are still collected now for their unique 'art deco' styling and aesthetic appeal. Next up was the matching Ojan 3 and 3X and the Hot Cake speakers.

1998 saw the introduction of the first Caspian products, which significantly furthered the Of course the Xerxes turntable launched in the mid 80s is the product that launched the company's success and brought the Roksan brand name to many more people.

The company launched the Kandy in the year 2000. This was Roksan's first ever entry-level range of products and it gained international recognition for the quality of performance at its affordable price point.

The Radius 5 and Nima tonearm were launched in 2003 to great acclaim and in 2005, for the company's 30th Anniversary, the Xerxes was updated and upgraded to the Xerxes.20.

Later significant products include Roksan's flagship design products in the form of the Oxygene series, a wonderfully styled range with impeccable build and



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designs quirks that maintain the Roksan audiophile sound combined with advanced stylistic elements – we loved the amp and CD player when we reviewed them.

The latest version of the Darius, the S1, again a loudspeaker we really enjoyed, was also launched to great reviews and praise and is widely regarded already as the greatest speaker design Roksan has conceived and built.

Future Developments

2014 sees the launch of the K3 Series of products, which will fit between the K2 and M2 ranges. This year is incredibly exciting for Roksan and everybody involved in the company. There are also many new projects in progress and a host of new products that by their nature are sure to be popular and successful.

As well as constantly developing their more traditional products such as CD players and amplifiers, there is product development in digital streaming and future wireless source formats as we

observed when touring the factory. “These products, as always, will promise to deliver the highest possible audiophile quality for their price, along with striking design elements and superior build quality” says Tufan Hashemi, Roksans head honcho.

Meanwhile, the company is still very much involved with new analogue vinyl replay products in the form of turntables and tonearms, being fully aware of its heritage and the format’s endearing and enduring attraction to customers.

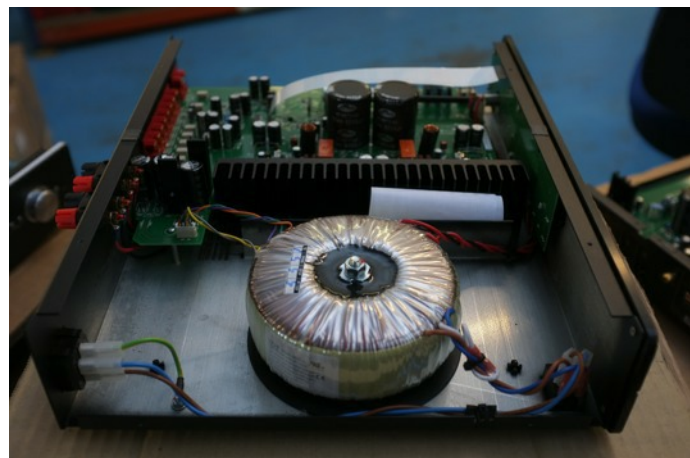


ROKSAN





As mentioned in the brief history of the company, Roksan Audio was founded in 1985 by two dedicated audiophiles with backgrounds in engineering, business and finance. It was a combination of passion, ideas and energy that resulted in extraordinarily quick success and recognition in the audio world and I for one remember reading the magazines of the day lusting after the original Xerxes turntable – my desire was sated around twenty five years later when I bought one in a lovely rosewood finish. Consistent progress and a steadfast desire to embrace new technologies has taken Roksan to where it is now: widely regarded as one of the world's more renowned and respected Hi-Fi manufacturers and so it was with immense delight that we greeted the invitation to visit the



company earlier this year.

Of course we know the company well as they have been the sponsor of Hifi Pig's online news pages for a good time now and are always most affable company when we get to meet them at any of the hifi shows we visit.

Perhaps Roksan's best-known product and an all-time audio classic is the aforementioned Xerxes turntable but even here they have not let the grass grow beneath their feet and have developed a series of gradual upgrades and modifications. The Xerxes exists today in its latest form, the Xerxes 20 Plus and the Roksan's commitment to vinyl replay continues with the Radius 5 turntable, cartridges and a range of





innovative upgrades and accessories.

Looking around the factory with Tufan and the company's PR person Simon Pope, there are clearly defined areas for production – a handmade area where turntables and the Oxygene kit were being made, a speaker area where, needless to say loudspeakers are assembled and an electronics area. There is also an area dedicated to soak testing every piece of kit before it leaves the factory for. At this point Tufan Hashemi mentions that all the products leaving the factory have an included five year warranty and if an in-house service has been carried out a twelve month warranty is added. There is even a club they call the Cognoscenti Club where for £100 a year a consumer can send in any kit they wish to be fixed/serviced and they are given free shipping and parts at just 50% of the usual cost.

There is a clear attention to detail in the workflow and we were shown several examples of plinths for the Radius turntable that had been rejected. One of

these had just a very slight bubble in the fabric of the acrylic which was barely visible to the naked eye.

This attention to detail is carried through every stage of the construction process. PCBs are tested before any components are mounted and every single item has a "Job card" where a series of tests are ticked off and signed. The Job Card has a serial number associated with it and so every part of the production process can be traced back should there ever be an issue with a specific unit. Once a specific stage is signed off it can then move onto the next part of the process.

We were shown a number of machined knobs (made by a specialist company just around the corner) where again one example was rejected for a flaw that I simply would not have picked up on had it been attached to the finished product. Likewise, the new front panels for the K3 series were rigorously "gone over" resulting in a third of them being rejected. "One thing I'm proud of is the finishing on the panels on the K3. The finish is bespoke and available

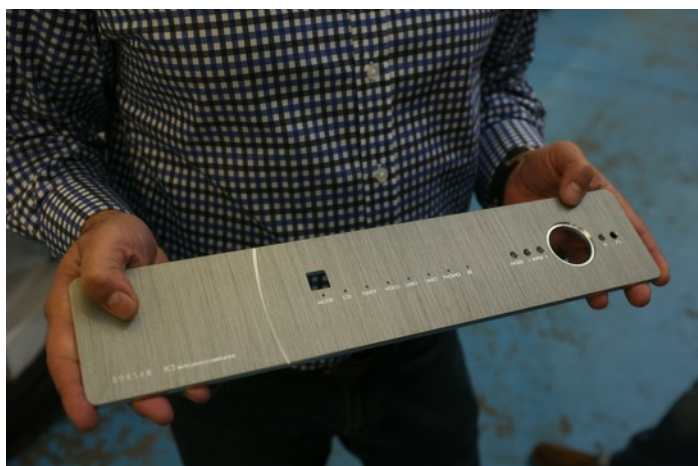
There's clearly a lot of investment in R&D at Roksan with 21 new projects being active when we visited...

in Opium and Black Charcoal” commented Tufan. These panels are produced in Germany, but Roksan are fully committed to sourcing as much as possible from, and of course building in, the UK. Once a unit is finished it is tested on an electrical test bench and then given a sound test...carried out by a person...before its soak-test! Of course every part of this too is signed off and logged and perhaps this is why that less than 1% of units fail in the field.

The R&D department is a bit of a hot bed of activity and we were able to glimpse a few “future” products including the BLAK range which looked very much like the K3 range only bigger and bolder...you'll have to take our word for this as we weren't allowed to take photographs. The BLAK range is at the production prototype stage but we can let Hifi Pig readers know that there will be an amp, aCD Player,

a DAC, a streamer and a power amplifier. The BLAK series will utilise Aptx32i where relevant and will be modular in their construction with customers being able to preorder specific configurations. We also saw a prototype of an Oxygene DAC which Tufan claims will be “the most highly specified DAC at its price point”; He also mentioned there was still a way to go with this product but that it should be “Worldbeating”.

There's clearly a lot of investment in R&D at Roksan



with 21 new projects being active when we visited, including a new phonostage, a new speed control that will be variable to deal with the vagaries of voltage fluctuations around the world and a new tonearm called “the Pug” which will be a unipivot carbon fibre affair.

After our tour of the shopfloor we were taken to the really well appointed listening room where some of the pictures in the introduction to this article were taken... It's amazing to think that the twenty five year old DPI CD player is now selling for more than its original price. It's always difficult to assess new kit in unfamiliar surroundings, but our exclusive first listen to the K3 series was very impressive given the modest £1250 a box asking price and impressive finish.

The Future For Roksan

The consensus here seems to be that Roksan will keep its audiophile roots but will venture into new markets. “The future of hi-fi must be going towards smaller boxes and digital” There is also a clear desire to future-proof their products and to offer a range of products affordable by a wide cross section of the

music loving public. Tufan is clearly first and foremost a passionate lover of music who just happened to get into the manufacturing game, but is resolute in looking towards innovative products that are unique and interesting propositions for the marketplace...he certainly comes across as someone who has never been a band-wagon jumper and claims that “The concept of how we listen to music has to change”

Hifi Pig would like to thank Tufan, Simon and all the Roksan team for making our journey to visit them not only very interesting but also highly entertaining.



