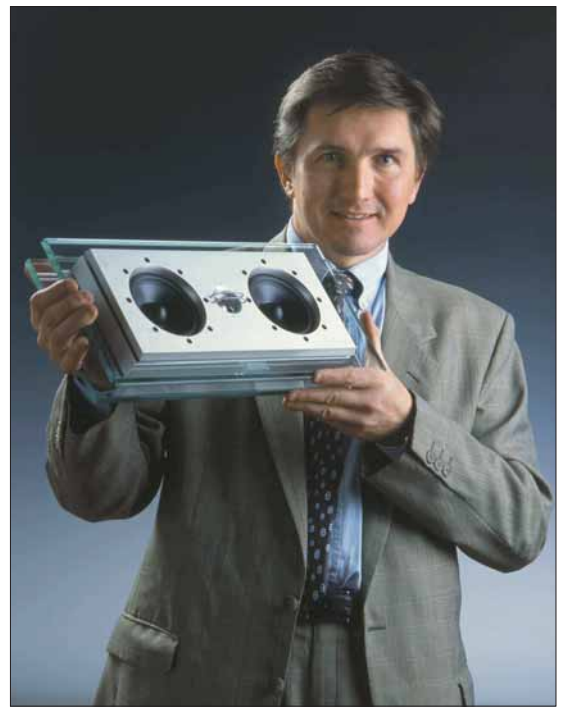
Seen and heard



Cedric Aubriot of Waterfall Audio tells Margot Douaihy how his company plans to grow its pan-European business, and how its customisable speakers meet the diverse needs of residential installers

Q: Please explain how Waterfall was founded?
A: In fact I made my first driver when I was only 12 years old, and from that time the passion of loudspeakers hasn't left me for one second. Let's say that for a few years I was a good consumer in the industry because I started buying products for my own pleasure. When I was 20, I had an amazing hi-fi system. Then from a pleasure it also became a business when I was still a student. I used to sell very big hi-fi solutions to private customers.

From this point I really started to think about a way to make different speakers that would both look stunning and sound great. I also came quickly to the point that these speakers would have to be different from the others because I didn't see the point in copying other products. Another key point was to be unique because it makes a big difference.

After looking at different technical solutions I came to decide to manufacture glass speakers and this is how Waterfall was created 10 years ago in July 1996.

Q: How big is your dealer-base in Europe? Which territories are the largest and how significant is your export business?
A: It is quite balanced. Off course France is a big part off our business, but export is an important part of our turnover. We have distribution in nearly 30 countries and in Europe, UK and Italy are two very important countries for us and we are very proud to have been rewarded many times by the English press, which is one off the most recognised on earth. An increasing part of the business is made by custom installers, architects that find our range brings them original and performing solutions for demanding customers.

Q: How do you plan on growing your dealer base across Europe?
A: Through shows aimed at professionals, custom installers, architects like ISE, CEDIA and press related to this market.

Q: What are the main growth areas for your company, and what strategies do you have in place to support growth?
A: On the production side, since the beginning, our company is based on a network structure with "key company" partners. For 10 years, we have been working with an ultra-sophisticated glass factory in the south of France which owns precise machines (like a water jet cutting machine) for making each glass within an amazingly high precision. We also work with another French company, manufacturing the Atohm driver that equips our speakers. Our production process represents more than two millions euros investment, and working with partners who are specialised in their own field allows us to be very flexible and efficient. Waterfall has been growing strongly year after year, and we're now building a new production line in the south of France.

Growth comes also from new products. Researching new solutions for integration is our strategy, and we take great care to listen to our customers and develop products that respond to their needs. Each product of our range is a solution to a request; for example if you look carefully at our In Wall, this speaker has been designed in an innovative way. With its 72mm depth, its sealed enclosure and its way-off trouble-free installation process, this product really cares about the installer.

Waterfall is both innovating into pure acoustic research and development and into new aesthetical designs. Since our creation, our tradition is innovation, and many exciting products are coming, but this is confidential.

Q: Do you ever target consumers directly or promote your products direct to the homeowner?
A: Yes, we do target homeowners and end-customers through advertising in consumers magazines, and our communication agency in France gets us articles in a lot of business and some financial magazines, as we need to create public awareness, and of course through consumer shows in various countries, which contribute to more people seeing the name of Waterfall.

Q: In your opinion, is digital technology changing people's perception of hi-fi? (Is the market still hungry for hi-fi?) Do you think the massive popularity of digital technology, via the iPod, is informing buying decisions for home audio?
A: iPod is really a revolution, it brings music so easily. It's a first step that can lead new customers to discover the home audio. Of course digital technology is changing people's perception, but not only in hi-fi. Sound and image are now available everywhere in the house. That makes it very important to be able to have speakers where you need them without deteriorating the aesthetic of the rooms. In a quite short time uncompressed signals will also be available from audio/video sources enabling the homeowner to enjoy ultra high definition in sound and vision. Due to their exclusive design, our speakers are able to bring the finest high quality of sound wherever you want it in your house, whether it's in hi-fi, home cinema or multi-room.

Q: Do you promote your products to architects or interior designers
A: Yes, we are actually quite active in France through the Architects Association, with various events aimed at promoting new technologies such as multi room and, of course, new ways of using hi-fi audio home cinema. Abroad, we participate in shows like Smarthome or Grand Designs.

Q: Please explain some of the custom-friendly features and details on your speakers. For example, what design elements speak specifically to the custom installer?
A: Today to integrate speakers means for some installers making holes in the walls. Don't you think it's much easier and time saving for the installer to fix a bracket on the wall and get the speaker fixed on it within a few minutes as long as the speaker you have is great to look at. With our UFL (Ultra Flat Line) range, which is only 7cm deep, we propose various models of speakers made with high-profile material such as glass or aluminium, combined with unique design, and is very easy to install.

With the Krysta Line range, our most famous Victoria, it is also proven to be magic; with its glass structure, it blends in and disappears in the interior and never clashes with styles. One of our famous customers described it as a "a piece of art". The great thing about our range of speakers is that it enables any custom installer or architect to have an innovating, performing, and exciting unique answer to any customer's request.

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www.waterfallaudio.com