

Robb Report

## HOME ENTERTAINMENT

THE FINEST IN AUDIO/VIDEO TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

# 2007

## PREVIEW

### THE HOTTEST AUDIO & VIDEO TECHNOLOGIES

**GUIDE**

THU 11/22	8:00 PM	8:30 PM	9:00
1 REC	Deep Blue Sea		Recd
2 VOD	Seabiscuit		Vid
3 HBO	Sex and the C...	Curb Your En...	Six
4 HBO	Mountain View Plot		Lib
5 HBO	Friends	Will & Grace	Scr
6 FOX	Lord of the Rings: The Fello...		CS

**Mountain View Plot**  
 8:00 - 9:00 PM TV-14  
 Drama (1995) - "The Legal Men" reviews the defense attorney and finds the last missing link

- > **3 HIGH-TECH HOMES:** TOURS OF AMERICA'S SMARTEST HOUSES
- > **200+ RADIO CHANNELS, 1 BOX:** ADA'S DUO DIGITAL TUNER
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# KING OF THE HILL

MCINTOSH REFERENCE COMPONENTS PROVE BIGGER IS BETTER. BY STEVE GUTTENBERG

**Y**ou know the way some motorcyclists feel about Harley-Davidson? McIntosh components cast a similar spell over audiophiles. Both brands are patently old-school American icons, revered in equal measure for their history, style, and performance. McIntosh's market position has always been staunchly high-end, but the company is extending its reach to stratospheric levels with the Reference Series. Each component was conceived on a grander scale than anything ever attempted in the brand's storied 57-year history. Behold the MCD1000 CD transport and separate MDA1000 digital-to-analog converter, the C1000 configurable tube/solid-state controller and preamplifier, the MC2KW monoblock power amplifier, and the XRT2K speakers. All of these components are crafted in large part at McIntosh's Binghamton, N.Y. headquarters.

The XRT2K speaker's sound is every bit as visceral and dramatic as you would expect from a 452-pound, 7-foot-tall speaker boasting 64 2-inch titanium midrange drivers, 40 0.75-inch titanium tweeters, and six 12-inch aluminum woofers! Those multitudinous drivers not only look impressive, they allow the speaker to handle the full force of the mighty MC2KW amplifier. The speaker's "line array" driver columns project a wide arc of sound to all the listeners in your room. The XRT2K is exquisitely finished in high-

gloss piano black, but custom finishes are available on a special-order basis.

Each MC2KW monaural, single-channel 2,000-watt amplifier can muster 8,000 watts for brief musical peaks, or when King Kong shows an uppity dinosaur who's boss. Even with all that power on tap, the MC2KW runs almost cool to the touch, so heroic ventilation schemes are unnecessary.

The size and weight of the 2KW's parts count mandated deployment over three super-sized chassis. There are two 1,000-watt power modules; each contains half of the balanced amplification circuitry and incorporates its own

power supply. The power modules are coupled to the output module, which functions as the amplifier's control center and houses the input and output connections and a turquoise-blue power meter. Did I mention these are huge amplifiers? The six-chassis, stereo pair of MC2KW amplifiers weighs 1,024 pounds! Also noteworthy: McIntosh might be the only manufacturer of solid-state amplifiers using output transformers to optimize the power transfer from amplifier to speaker. The idea is to create a design that can never, ever approach its operational limits, so the amp is always coasting no matter what.

The C1000 stereo preamplifier addresses the age-old "What's better: vacuum tubes or solid-state circuitry?" conundrum head-on. This three-chassis

*The MC2KW consists of two power modules and one output module (below)—and that's just for one channel. The blue power meter on the output module is a hallmark of McIntosh amplification.*







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The power module (left) provides the actual amplification for the speakers. Two power modules are required to drive each speaker. One amplifies the positive half of a sound wave, the other amplifies the negative half. This arrangement is called fully complementary or balanced amplification. It helps cancel out noise, and it also allows the amplifier to swing from full positive to full negative more quickly.

preamplifier employs both technologies, united within the C1000 controller. With the mere turn of a knob you can listen through the solid-state or tube circuits, or both at the same time. I find the tubes' sound supremely vivid, but I am swayed by the solid-state's firmer control of the XRT2K's phalanx of woofers. The nice thing is, you can switch in the flavor that suits the music or mood at a moment's notice.

Instead of a traditional CD player, the ultimate McIntosh system uses a separate MCD1000 transport connected directly to the McIntosh MDA1000 digital-to-analog converter, which also upsamples CD's native 44.1-kilohertz sampling rate to 768 kilohertz for improved sound.

Each of the Reference components' chassis is machined from thick black anodized aluminum panels. All of the components can easily be integrated into an automated control system.

I audition the complete system at one of McIntosh's Platinum Premier Dealers, Stereo Exchange in New York City. Salesman Allan Rohde's extraordinary dedication to the Reference system setup details makes the most of my listening time. First thing I notice about the sound is that it is undeniably bigger than the sound of other mega systems I have heard. Where others' speakers might use just a single tweeter, one or two midrange drivers, and possibly a small group of woofers to


make sound, the stereo pair of McIntosh speakers does the same job with hundreds of drivers. The unbridled power of the Reference system is most apparent when reproducing the sound of piano. As I listen to Allen Toussaint's grand piano on the *Our New Orleans* benefit CD, the sound is more ... well, more *there*. Enjoyed at a realistic volume, the piano's weighty presence, musical dynamics, and nuance are, for once, fully realized. On the same CD, Charlie Miller's "Prayer for New Orleans" raises goose bumps with just a heartfelt vocal and soaring solo trumpet. On another track, Randy Newman joins in with his "Louisiana 1927," accompanied by string players from the Louisiana and New York Philharmonic Orchestras. The sound is lush and warm, but the Reference system can also pin your ears back when Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band hit their orgasmic peaks. The loud sound is surprisingly easy to take because even at rock concert volume levels, the big Macs are cruising, and sounding a good deal better than any live concert I have ever attended. Sure, other high-end flagships may sound more see-through transparent or produce stereo imaging with greater precision, but the über McIntosh can get down and boogie like no other high-end system on the planet. With the XRT2K's 12 woofers at your beck and call, a subwoofer seems an unnecessary indulgence.



You can see from the 11 pairs of binding posts on the back of each XRT2K (above) what a complex speaker this is. It incorporates 40 tweeters, 64 midrange drivers, and six woofers in a single tower.

The timeless McIntosh aesthetic allows mixing and matching of various vintages of components. If you want to add say, the legendary 1963 McIntosh MR 67 FM tuner to the Reference system, it'll look right at home. The current Reference system is a stereo affair, but McIntosh engineers are busy developing a Reference DVD player and center-channel speaker for home theater applications.

Sure, any sane person might question the "need" for 2,000-watt amplifiers and gigantic speakers, but the need has everything to do with how loud you want to listen, the size of your room, and the sort of parties you throw. Hey, does anyone need a 1,001-horsepower Bugatti Veyron

16.4 to get from point A to point B? In either case, car or audio system, there is no denying the satisfactions of living with the biggest and baddest of its kind. For the audiophile who won't settle for less, the McIntosh Reference is the king of the hill. 

■ **PRICE:** MC2KW power amp \$30,000 each, XRT2K speaker \$45,000 each, C1000C controller \$8,000, C1000P solid-state preamp \$9,000, C1000T vacuum-tube preamp \$9,000, MCD1000 CD transport \$7,000, MDA1000 D/A converter \$8,000

■ **CONTACT:** 800.538.6576, mcintoshlabs.com



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