

CNET News

# Denver's high-end audio show wows audiophiles

The Rocky Mountain Audio Fest 2011, held last weekend at the Denver Marriott Tech Center Hotel, showcased a vast array of affordable and high-end audio goodies.

by [Steve Guttenberg](#) | October 19, 2011 7:35 AM PDT



The Davone Ray speakers

(Credit: Davone Audio)

The **Rocky Mountain Audio Fest** [<http://audiofest.net/2011/index.php>] 2011, held last weekend at the Denver Marriott Tech Center Hotel, showcased a vast array of affordable and high-end audio designs. Hundreds of manufacturers from North America, Europe, and Asia were represented at the show. RMAF has a very different vibe than the Consumer Electronics Show held in Las Vegas every January--RMAF is

more of a grassroots affair.

I noted a trend to more stylish audiophile speakers, like the 28-inch tall **Davone Ray** [<http://thecollection.ning.com/page/davone-1>] (\$7,500/pair) and the curvy, aluminum-bodied **Dali Fazon F5** [[http://soundorg.com/s\\_home.html](http://soundorg.com/s_home.html)] (\$4,495/pair). Most bona fide high-end speakers are big and bulky things, but these two boldly original speakers are simply stunning. They are not just styling exercises, the designs are linked to the pursuit of excellence in sound.



The curvy Dali Fazon F5 speaker

(Credit: Steve Guttenberg)

RMAF is a high-end show, but there was a good sampling of affordable gear on display. **Hsu Research** [<http://www.hsuresearch.com/products/hb-1.html>] was making some awfully impressive sounds with its HB-1 bookshelf speakers (\$150 each) and VTF-1 subwoofer (\$449). I'm going to try to get these for review soon. That little system made the room shake!

Emotiva's new Professional **airmotiv series** [[http://emotivapro.com/products/powered\\_monitors/](http://emotivapro.com/products/powered_monitors/)] of speakers featuring audiophile-quality bi-amplification and advanced technology drivers will be game changers in their price class. There are three speakers in the line, and I expect to receive a pair of the smallest ones, the airmotive4s (\$399) in the next week or so. Based on what I heard at RMAF this is the one to beat. NAD's first **iPod** [<http://www.cnet.com/ipod/>] speaker, the **VISO 1** [<http://nadelectronics.com/products/made-for-ipod/VISO-1-iPod-Music-System>] (\$700), sounded bigger and beefier than any iPod speaker I've heard to date. I'll have a lot more to say about this one soon.



The Emotiva Pro airmotiv4 speaker

(Credit: Emotiva Pro)

**Soundsmith** [<http://www.sound-smith.com/>]'s Peter Ledermann is a master craftsman, devoted to advancing the art of LP playback. His new Hyperion phono cartridges take a decidedly organic approach, so instead of using a tiny metal rod to hold the cartridge's stylus in the record's groove, Ledermann uses a hand-shaped cactus needle to hold the diamond stylus. The resulting sound is much closer to listening to a master tape rather than a LP. Record surface noise vanished, and the sound was extremely low in distortion. A lot of exhibitors were playing records, but the Soundsmith room was the best of the show. The Hyperion cartridge is extremely expensive, but comes with a no-fault 10-year warranty! I don't know of any other phono cartridge with anywhere near that level of coverage.

The **Wes Bender Studio** [<http://www.wesbenderstudionyc.com/>]'s sound oozed refinement and class. There was something about the way the Wavestream Kinetic V-8 tube amplifiers (\$60,000) made the Hansen Audio Knight speakers (\$24,000/pair) get up and dance. Voices sounded human and acoustic instruments sounded real. I closed my eyes and could almost believe the sound wasn't coming from a hi-fi. It doesn't get better than that.



The Wavestream Kinetics 'V-8' tube amplifiers

(Credit: Steve Guttenberg)

The **Zu Audio** [<http://www.zuaudio.com/>] Definition Mk. IV speakers kicked butt! They had the power to physically connect the listener with the music. These speakers don't just play loud, they let you *feel* the music's power in a way that few high-end speakers ever do. They just sounded better and better the louder I played them. The new Zu Definition Mk. IV is superdynamic, a real party speaker.

Coming up: the headphone scene at RMAF.

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