

Equipment Report



Nordost Tyr 2 Interconnect, Speaker, and Power Cables

Transparency, Purity, Texture

Wayne Garcia

I've written about this coincidence before, yet I still find it fascinating that the vocabulary I use in my day job as a fine-wine merchant is notably similar to the concepts and descriptors employed in the observational audio reviewing we do here at TAS and in similar publications. On the surface this may not appear a likely scenario. Especially if one is used to the standard 100-point scale of wine criticism that emphasizes wines' more hedonistic side. The so-called "fruit bombs" oozing plum and cherry and peach, or redolent of chocolate and vanilla notes, making it seem as if a wine's highest calling might be to emulate the ice cream section of your local grocer.

To be sure, the world is awash in wines that strive for just such over-the-top comparisons, and it's also true that a large portion of both wine consumers and the wine press are enamored of such come-hither qualities. But there's another school of thought—and granted, it's a more Euro-centric one—that is drawn to wines that express a sense of place: the not particularly elusive—but still derided, in some circles—concept of *terroir* that's a no-brainer to anyone who's tasted, say, the wines of Chablis, which are grown in limestone-rich soils interwoven with the fossils of crit-

ters that once inhabited what were ancient sea beds. It may not be scientifically provable that the resulting wines' expression of white rock and salty sea air notes—along with their fruit elements—is derived from the soil. But it's also easily demonstrated that these very qualities are what makes Chardonnay grown in Chablis smell and taste unlike that planted any other place in the world.

In other words, people like me are looking for wines of *transparency*, the first descriptor of similarity I note between the worlds of wine and audio. Applied to the former you already get what I mean—wines that convey a sense of the place they originate from.

When talking audio it's a component's/system's ability to bring us a close as possible to the recorded event.

Without pushing the idea too far, here are some other shared words that spring to mind: Focus, precision, depth, warmth, texture, open, tight, expansive, and, uh, frequently, *expensive*. Which brings me to the products under review here: a complete "loom," as its maker likes to call it, of Nordost's Tyr 2 cable.

My history with Tyr 2 started when VTL's Luke Manley recommended updating my decade-plus-old Tara Labs Zero and Omega cables with something from Nordost; this, while preparing to review his company's S-200 Signature stereo amplifier (see Issue 291).

For those unfamiliar with Nordost's approach to cable design, or perhaps in need of a brief refresher, the Massachusetts-based company began making its original flat-line cables in 1991. Nordost's initial goal was to create a flat FEP (fluorinated ethylene propylene) cable, originally derived from technology used in the aerospace industry, for audio use—most especially for "custom-install" applications, where invisibly threading cables underneath carpets or behind walls generally outweighs sonic considerations.

But as things turned out, once R&D was underway, measurements showed that Nordost's FEP cable designs were generally five times lower in capacitance than many of the day's best standard cables. In other words, they sounded pretty damn good, too. Once production and sales began people took notice, and the company quickly took off.

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Specs & Pricing

Tyr 2 Power Cord

Insulation: Fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP)
Construction: Mechanically tuned lay, length and dual mono-filament design
Conductors: 7x 16AWG
Material: Silver-plated 99.99999% solid-core OFC
DC resistance: 1.33 ohms per 1000ft
Velocity of propagation: 91%
Terminations: US (Nema), EU (Schuko), UK or AUS to IEC-C15 to IEC-C19 (figure 8 IEC-C7 also available)
Price: Starting at 1 meter, \$2939

Tyr 2 Interconnect

Insulation: Fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP)
Construction: Mechanically tuned lay, length and dual mono-filament design
Conductors: 7x 24AWG
Material: Silver-plated 99.99999% solid-core OFC
Capacitance: 33.0pF/ft
Inductance: 0.045μH/ft
Overall shield coverage: 97%
Velocity of propagation: 86%
Termination: Gold-plated Nordost MoonGlo RCA or XLR
Price: Starting at 0.6 meter, \$2204

Tyr 2 Speaker Cable

Insulation: Fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP)
Construction: Mechanically tuned spacing, length and micro mono-filament design
Conductors: 26x 22AWG
Material: Silver-plated 99.99999% solid-core OFC
Capacitance: 10.7pF/ft
Inductance: 0.13μH/ft
Velocity of propagation: 96%
Terminations: Gold-plated spade or Z-plug banana
Price: Starting at 1 meter, \$5039

NORDOST

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Associated Equipment

Rega RP10 turntable and Apheta moving-coil cartridge; Basis 2200 Turntable, Vector 4 arm, and Koetsu Rosewood Signature Platinum moving-coil cartridge; Oppo UDP-205 disc player; VTL TL5.5II and Sutherland N1 preamps; VTL S-200 Signature stereo amplifier; Magnepan MG 1.7 loudspeakers; Nordost Qx4 power conditioner and Qb8 AC distribution center; Finite Element Spider equipment racks

As CEO Joe Reynolds explained in an interview with the British publication *HiFi+*, “Nordost cables stress the importance of both mechanical construction and wiring geometry.” And as time evolved, Nordost developed proprietary technologies such as micro mono-filament construction, which, by creating a separation between the insulation and conductor, allows 80% of the conductor to be suspended in air, bringing “our cables far greater bandwidth and speed. This, along with precise manufacturing techniques, which can be seen just by looking at our power cords and speaker cables, is the key to great cable performance.”

As its cables evolved Nordost also brought greater sophistication to both the mechanical and electrical aspects of its designs, including paying close attention to the resonant characteristics of the materials used to manufacture them. As those familiar with the Nordost approach know, this means building cables to “mechanically tuned lengths.” These lengths vary from range to range, and even change according to cable type, since each mechanically tuned length is dependent on the mass of materials and specific cable geometries of each individual cable.

To put the various Nordost ranges of cables in context, think about the company’s four different family lines as a seamless progression of technology. Starting with the entry-level White Lightning (the first cables in the Leif series) to the top-of-the-line Odin 2 range, all are based on the same design philosophy: to produce *low-mass* (my italics) cables with both optimal signal transfer speed and perfect impedance matching, which is said to deliver the signal as quickly and accurately as possible, without any filtering, such as in-line boxes, which Nordost believes negatively impact the sound.

Within the various Nordost families, there are four distinct lines: Leif, Norse 2, Reference (Valhalla), and Supreme Reference (Odin 2). Each branch offers different levels of the technologies described above, and the Tyr 2 line under review here is found at the top of the Norse 2 family. All cables in the Norse 2 range share the following materials, technologies, and construction techniques: high-grade, silver-plated OFC copper; precision FEP extrusions; micro mono-filament technology; and mechanically tuned lay, conductor spacing, and length.

What differentiates the Tyr 2 cables from the range directly below it (Frey 2) is heavier-gauge wiring, as well as the number and purity of conductors used in construction, which in this case jumps to dual mono-filament construction. What Tyr 2 *lacks* compared to the upper Valhalla 2 range are the gauge, number, and purity of the conductors, as well as Nordost’s patented HO-LO:PLUG connectors, which are designed to seamlessly fit the internal geometry of each individual cable they house.

Before I attempt to describe the sonic nature of the Tyr 2 loom I’d like to emphasize something that’s obvious on one hand, but on the other not always explicitly stated in reviews. What I mean is that the sound I’m about to describe is within the context of my system’s various components and the gear I’ve recently reviewed (see Associated Equipment). Although your results may vary, I believe these sonic qualities will translate across the spectrum of today’s highest-quality gear.

Given the way I began this article, let’s circle back to the notion of transparency. In addition to the wines of Chablis I mentioned

Equipment Report Nordost Tyr 2 Interconnect, Speaker, and Power Cables



above, let's further explore this concept to describe how, for instance, a red Burgundy consistently displays the character of the vineyard it hails from, regardless of vintage variations. And because Burgundy vineyards—either via generational succession or sale—have been seriously fragmented over the years into the hands of a number of different owners, it's possible to taste, let's just say, five wines from essentially the same tiny patch of land made by five different producers. Needless to say, the differing approaches of the various winemakers involved is going to be felt in the wine—the use of more or fewer new oak barrels (and their toast levels), greater or less extraction, the length of the *élevage* (raising of the wine), etc.—are all factors that will affect the wine's aroma and flavor. Yet, ideally, even with all of these variables, the wine will still taste of the place it was grown. And generally (and rather obviously) speaking, the less heavy-handed the winemaking style the more transparent the finished product will be to the vineyard the fruit came from.

The same is true of audio gear. Though any given component's nature may be warmer or cooler, more finely detailed, more airy, deep, or dynamic than another's, ideally it will still have the ability—even with these various colorations—to bring us a decent, or better still, convincingly accurate semblance of the time and place a recording was made. Not some perfect—hence impossible—virtual time travel, mind you, but instead a truthful enough recreation of the performance that allows us to become swept away by the music, be it the extraordinary sound recorded at London's Kingsway Hall for RCA's famed *The Royal Ballet* or, another famed London venue, at Abbey Road.

With the Tyr 2 loom this feeling hit home like Maxwell's silver hammer after listening to the vinyl set of The Beatles' *Abbey Road, The Anniversary Edition*. As you know if you've heard it—and if not, be prepared to be astonished—Giles Martin's remastering of the Beatles' final recording is a revelation. From the get-go, "Come Together," check out McCartney's richly layered, chugging, rolling bass lines; the gritty textures and meaty crunch of Lennon's and Harrison's electric guitars; the full, funky, slightly

distorted Fender Rhodes piano; and the wallop and rhythmic drive of Ringo's drumming—especially that insistent kick pedal. With this new mastering of *Abbey Road*, the music doesn't just *sound* better than ever—so much more detail, texture, air, frequency—and dynamic-range—it *moves*, it grooves, it rocks, it sways us as never before.

As my colleagues in these pages have noted before, what we attempt herein is actually quite difficult, especially with the finest gear, which is to describe not necessarily a component's sound but instead its *lack* of sound, or coloration, its personality—or, ideally, its lack thereof. In this regard, the Tyr 2 loom (in conjunction with Nordost's Qx4 power conditioner and Qb8 AC distribution center) seems to open the proverbial window onto the music, allowing the group's instrumental and vocal interplay to shine through with relatively little interference. In short, to make us feel closer to not only the recorded event, but to the music making in progress at that time.

It's thrilling to experience. And getting us as close as possible to such moments is what makes high-end audio so magical at its best—why designers keep pushing; why we keep listening, exploring, and marveling as the audio arts continue to advance.

Yes, the older Tara Labs cables are richer, warmer, meatier, and punchier sounding. But to me they also impose more of their own sound and personality onto the music than do the relatively cooler but purer, more consistently revealing Nordost set.

Shifting through a series of more deeply familiar musical gears, Mahler's Symphony No. 2, as performed by my local band, The San Francisco Symphony led by Michael Tilson Thomas, is a piece I not only know intimately well from the orchestra's live recording, but also one I've heard several times at the recording's venue, Davies Hall. As such, it's the closest I can come to saying I was at the actual recording session (which, in fact, I may well have been).

The Second is one of the crowning achievements from

Equipment Report Nordost Tyr 2 Interconnect, Speaker, and Power Cables

this ensemble's complete cycle of Mahler symphonies, and this wonderful overall performance includes the late, great Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's gorgeous mezzo solo in the penultimate "Ulrich" movement. Hearing it through the Tyr 2 set was one of those revelations, those "wow" moments, at once so familiar yet completely fresh, that we seek whenever making significant upgrades to our systems.

First, and quite obviously, the "sound," or, more accurately put, *ambience* of this fine venue was more present than I'd previously heard from this outstanding recording. It was—no exaggeration—much more like being seated in our Row H center subscription seats than I'd ever experienced before. Meaning that the sense of the hall's volume, air, materials, and the orchestra's proximity to both the wooden shell behind the players and the auditorium to the fore was that much more lifelike, not just in the sound itself but in the feeling of being there it generated.

Then of course, there's the magic of Hunt Lieberson's voice. Like a newly born butterfly's wings making their first tentative moves, it slowly swells from the stillness of the hall, charged with the energy of anticipation. The airy puff of the brass fanfares, silken delicacy of the stings, the impression of depth, air, and, as the final movement erupts, explosive dynamics, brought me to the edge of my seat.

As Jonathan Valin so correctly pointed out in his recent review

of the MBL 101 X-tremes, instruments don't direct sound at us as if from a beam, but create sound in three dimensions. So the "pinpoint imaging" we audiophiles often talk about is a direct artifact of the recording process. Arguably a cool effect but not really as we hear it in life, where a hall is alive with reflected sound. And like the MBL's, my Magnepan 1.7s also pulse in multiple waves.

On well-loved yet very different-sounding rock records—from John Hiatt's *Bring the Family*, to Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, to Emmylou Harris' *Wrecking Ball*, and Nick Cave's extraordinary *Ghosteen*—though each is clearly a beautiful studio creation—Nordost's Tyr 2

achieves the magic trick we seek from our best recordings and systems. To fool us just enough with a semblance of the real thing that thoughts of our system vanish and we're left with just the music.

So, transparency, precision, purity, depth, texture, openness, expansiveness... Nordost's Tyr 2 loom brings all of this and more to the listening experience. Yet as I wrap up these thoughts another word now pops to mind that perhaps best sums up my analogy between wine and audio: *transformative*. That is perhaps the ultimate thing I can say about any experience. It takes us to another place, another level of understanding—and, in this case, another level of long-term musical pleasure. **tas**