



HiFi as a Hobby?

Without Aalt Jouk van den Hul the analogue world not be the same as it is today. His ideas have greatly influenced the principles of pickup making and his cable designs are based on top achievements in material and processing technology. Even at the age of 70, when other people think of playing golf at best, the creative Dutchman won't give himself a minute's rest. What is it that spurs him on? How important is HiFi still for him?

Interview and photographs by Norbert Lehmann
(Lehmannaudio)

NL: Many audiophiles simply don't know that you equip complete buildings with cables. Are your pickups and cables by now just a hobby?

vdH: Many years, the production and sales of phono-cartridges and a wide range of cables were our so called "bread & butter". Thanks to all developed technology in metal-free conductors, I have developed a new company specialized in these metal-free materials.

NL: To what extent did the focus on your products in the consumer, professional and industrial areas change for you during the past years?

vdH: Still the main turnover is based on the original products. I expect this year to create a bigger turnover in, what we call: fibres of all kind and types.

NL: What is your ongoing motivation to develop things ever further?

vdH: It is mainly intelligent curiosity based on physics and chemistry. Exploring new technologies and finding new applications. The great satisfaction is always when something developed in the brain works in real life. Gives me a "kick"..

NL: When it comes to selecting raw materials, you put special emphasis on durability and environmental protection.

How can this be squared with economic necessities?

vdH: Durability and "green design" are neither the cheapest nor a short-term solution for designs. But economically the best. The replacement period is much longer and quality-return after investment is much higher. In life many times quality is more valuable to quantity.

NL: Which is, in your opinion, the most essential component of a HiFi system?

vdH: The most complicated part in a hifi system is the listener. I find especially the learning curve of the listener the most complicated thing. You cannot hear over his ears to evaluate his observations. Equipment can be audited by many listeners and the combination of opinions is about the truth. With just two ears on one head, you never know the real quality of the music in the brain. Luckily enough there is also emotional evaluation. Even where we cannot discuss "taste", we all know by experience what "quality" incorporates.

NL: Is there a "cable sin" that literally brings tears to your eyes? Do cables deserve a "component status"?

vdH: There are plenty of mistakes you can make with cables. It starts already by focussing too much on marketing slogans

instead of listening for yourself. Your ears (can) tell you specific the quality of a product like cables. Like all other parts of your hifi system, cables are important to transfer the musical information. Cables can also damage sound, so respect them when the quality is maintained. Not many cables can do so. Many "decorate" sound with some extra spices. The art is to work spice-free.

NL: On your website one can find several how-to guides. What is your most important tip to take music reproduction with a home Hifi system on a higher level or to improve the sound of your personal system?

vdH: The frequently asked questions are meant for interested listeners who want to learn more about our hobby. The most important one is the advice to put your loudspeakers on a 15 degree line compared to the longest wall in your room. The exact explanation is given on www.vanden Hul.com in Tips & Hints.

NL: In your opinion, what is it that sets Van den Hul-products and the Van den Hul philosophy apart from other companies?

vdH: We are different in material applications like carbon conductors, carbon coatings of metal conductors and fusion me-

tal technology. Our insulation materials are specifically “green” and very durable. Our philosophy is that all our conductor products must be of European origin. The most important factor in our program is always: How does it perform? All applied technology is focussed on achieving the highest possible standard. Our profit (necessary to survive in this world) is mainly spent on R & D.

NL: During the past years or even decades you were able to intensify the collaboration with renowned companies and studios. What do you appreciate with your cooperations?

vdH: The most important factor is the match between our product and the quality of the equipment of environment (like studios) where our products are going to be used. Further we evaluate the business stability of the customer and his philosophy about sound reproduction. Both parties must be happy. That produces the most stable marriage and for many years.

NL: What are your aims for the future? Which innovations and products can music listeners look forward to?

vdH: Target for the near future is sound-wise the further application of new technologies where we know we score compared to the competition. Expansion in other fields, like the medical, where we have the best technology for signal transmission on extremely low levels. We just introduced two new loudspeaker cables with an amazing high quality: The Nova and The Super Nova. Audiophile products will not stop in our program. On long term

we focus also on applied fibre technology. Actually we supply to aerospace technology firms for plane and rocket construction and to medical research institutes. We deliver products for neutron control in nuclear reactors and X-ray transparent sea & air containers.

NL: You made a lot of recordings with a Nagra and in 1999 you even founded your own label. Do you still own your two Nagras?

vdH: I have two digital Nagras and both work well. Used them a while ago to record the local brass-band. They have been playing already for 105 years, but a serious recording was never made. As a reward, I got a free matinee performance on my 70th birthday.

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vdH: I use the B&K 4190 microphones

with B&K 2669 microphone amplifiers. And always the lowest number of microphones possible even where I have six of them. As microphone cable we always use ours: The Second, a balanced and multiple screened full carbon cable. The mixing console is an extremely low noise, high dynamic custom-built design with ultra-wide-range frequency response. The original design has been updated several times. All recordings were made in 24-bit format and 96 kHz sampling. The A/D conversion for the two Nagras was done by the DCS 904 converter which was updated several times. And after the recording the D/A conversion is made with the DCS 972. I monitor with the DCS Elgar together with the balan-

ced Lehmann headphone amplifier. An excellent design I really respect for its extreme natural response. And my headphone is a Sony CD3000. All the mains are stabilized by a 1 kW stabilizer with exact 50 Hz and 230 volts output: no R.F. or any digital ripple left.

NL: Are you planning more music recordings of your own? And do you envisage further publications on Van den Hul Carbon Recordings?

vdH: I have plans to record a big jazz band also on our Carbon recording label. Owing to too much work with cartridges (repairs and new units), new cable designs, new conductor technology, the many shows around this world I like to attend, all the e-mails and interviews, extra attention to my family with three sons growing up in this fast changing world with growing instability in political systems and environment and also a company with just a baby boom behind us, there is not much time left.

NL: Which role does monitoring through headphones play for you during the recording or production stage?

vdH: Headphone listening is the closest to the original sound because loudspeakers are always coloured beside the colouration of the acoustics in the reproduction environment. Colouration in the recording is natural and acceptable, but should not be audible in the reproduction environment. Also the environmental noise is much less, so the contact with the recording is more intense. And during the repair of old cartridges or building the new ones, I always listen over headphones to classical music. ■

van den Hul bv
Web: www.vandenhul.com



vdH cables on display during the HighEnd 2007



„An excellent design I really respect for its extreme natural response.“

Aalt Jouk van den Hul

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