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**Finite Elemente Pagode HD03
Edition MK II**



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ORDER AND COMPOSURE!

By Carsten Barnbeck. Photography: Ingo Schulz



_____When the talk turns to racks and bases then vibration is the name of the game. The focus centers on the mechanical properties of electrical components and how they behave when the listening room is blasted with pulsating bass. These phenomena generate a distinct microcosm, not because their effects are so infinitely tiny, but because this area of our hobby is so deeply shrouded in mystery. Are you raising your eyebrows at me right now? Well, next time you can (we recommend a family get-together), tell your less hi-fi-savvy friends and family that you have treated yourself to a fancy new rack in order to remove unwanted vibrations resulting from your devices. Their looks of total disbelief to real concern (which surely you've seen before) won't have gone back to normal even days later.

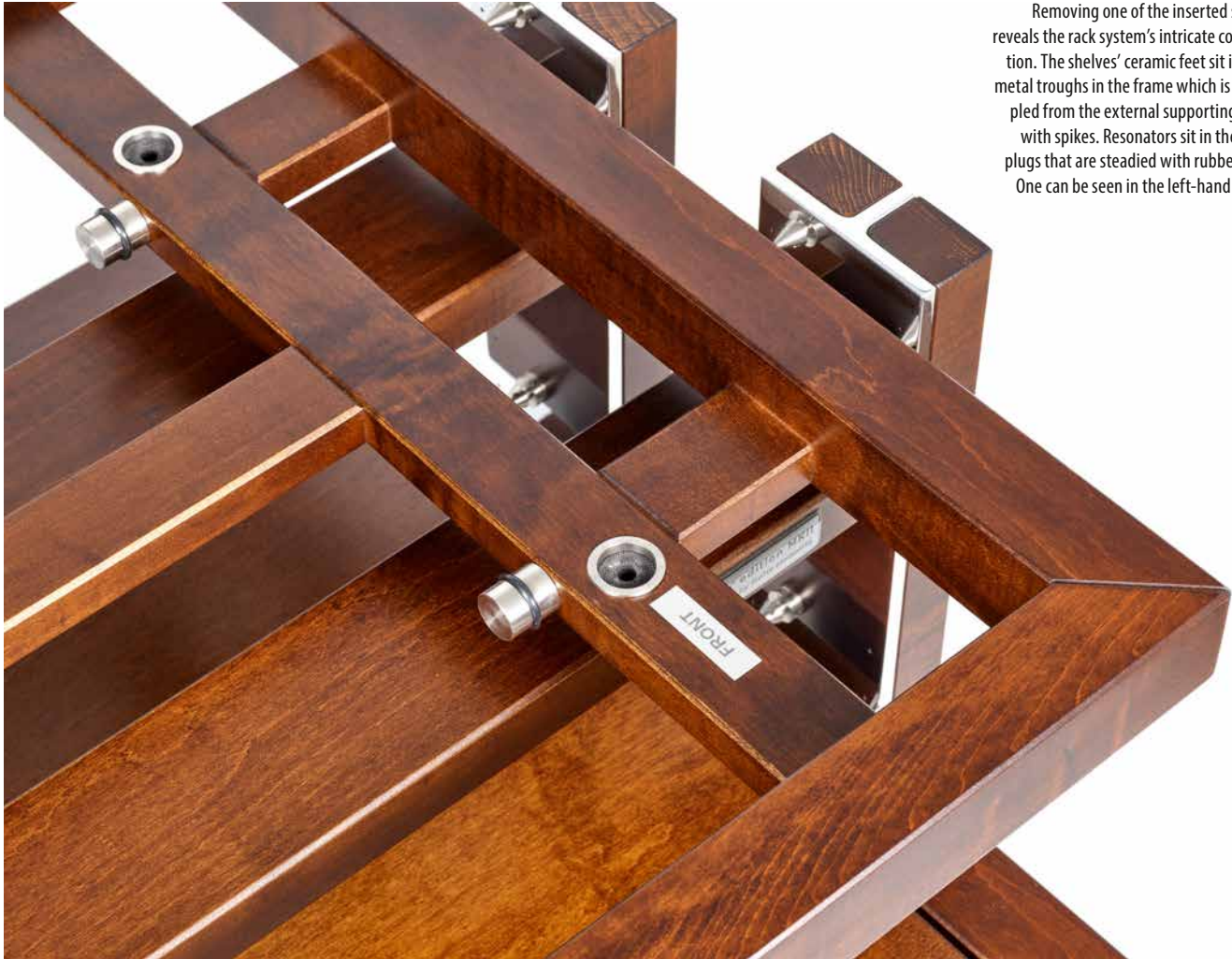
And yet, this is all based on well-established physics. We may not be able to see, taste or touch these physical laws, but we can confirm their existence through measuring technology: mechanics and electricity are condemned to a forced marriage. Magnetic fields form wherever an electric current flows, and, because we prefer alternating current,

the surrounding fields' polarity constantly changes. As there is always metal somewhere nearby, everything from the most delicate conductor track to the chunkiest transformer will vibrate. Electronics cause movement, and externally-caused impact noise and excitation can conversely impact electricity. None of this would be worth mentioning if it weren't for how excitable materials react to certain oscillation periods – of course, we mean their resonant frequencies.

Whenever battle lines are drawn and two heavy hitters (in this case, electronics and mechanics) are irreconcilably driven against each other, a mediator is advisable. This is precisely where a rack comes into play. It absorbs, dampens or channels away the vibrations and ideally ensures that the individual components can really harmonize and cohere gracefully.

And now we find ourselves presented with the true master of this art. In the early 2000s, the hi-fi world was rocked when Finite Elemente launched its Pagode line. This shelving system was so cleverly devised that, when placed next to most of its contemporary design concepts,

Hi-fi-racks are nearly the only things where a lack of character is not only tolerated but in fact required. It might sound strange, but the Pagode HD03 Edition MK II is a true master of this art.



Removing one of the inserted shelves reveals the rack system's intricate construction. The shelves' ceramic feet sit in small metal troughs in the frame which is decoupled from the external supporting frame with spikes. Resonators sit in the metal plugs that are steadied with rubber rings. One can be seen in the left-hand image.

it looked like alien technology. Until then, most equipment racks maintained a conservative design: metal frame, sometimes heavy, sometimes light as a feather, a few spikes here and there, with any real character derived from the shelving materials. It is no coincidence that hi-fi furniture was now deemed to be a full-fledged component once Pagode arrived. Recently, well over 15 years later, the manufacturer decided that it was time to push its racks to the next level with a few subtle but extremely effective changes, culminating in its second-generation (MK II) models. While the changes are hardly noticeable on the outside, let's dive into the structural design.

The Pagode Principle

A sturdy Canadian maple wood frame forms the solid base for all Finite Elemente racks. This "floor level" easily supports an impressive 120-kilo load. Four aluminum T-sections are screwed into the sides and, for the swish "Edition" model, are also maple paneled. These beams are

available in different lengths, meaning that the unit can be purchased either as a simple base or as a rack with one to three "upper levels". The higher levels are identical to the bottom level, but they can "only" support 60 kilos because they are suspended: eight adjustable spikes hold them in place. This ensures that the levels have only minimal contact with the other rack components. Each frame contains several wooden struts that provide reinforcement as well as incorporate inserted shelves. The latter are composed (and this is a key improvement of the generation II models) of an MDF-covered honeycomb structure and rest (another innovative feature) on four height-adjustable metal pins, at the end of which sit ceramic balls. These rest on small metal recesses located in the internal frame. The entire rack stands on Finite Elemente Cerabase feet which are decoupled via ceramic balls. Not only does the whole assembly look fantastic, but also from each individual level to the floor every component is decoupled threefold. The lightweight materials superbly absorb and divert vibrations and resonances. This means that devices placed on the different shelves cannot exert ▶



Witness the full Pagode Edition in all its glory: the bottom level supports all other upper levels. The Finite Elemente rack names only include the number of “supported” shelves, so an HD03 has a total of four shelves. Quite logical, no?

Finite Elemente forges a fresh **Pagode** concept with its second-generation models. The “Edition” maintains virtually zero intrinsic character and frees the components to truly sing with breathtaking order and clarity. Arguably the best rack system on the market!

CHALLENGING = A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.
INTUITIVE =

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any undue influence over one another, and impact noise and loud-speaker energy are almost completely absorbed. This alone would be adequate to establish the Pagode rack as a high-tech piece of furniture and confirm it as the undisputed leader in its field, but we haven’t even gotten to the best bit. The manufacturer went to town on its design, working with Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts to analyze every component level’s natural resonance via highly sensitive sensors. This is quite different from one level to the next. Then, armed with this data, Finite Elemente developed customized resonators that (as was revealed in the final measurements) absorb approximately 90% of natural vibration and 70% of the resonance caused externally by “forced excitation”. The resonators are small metal pins sitting in sockets — four customized plugs are inserted into each level’s struts. Therefore, our test rack’s levels were not only completely resonance free, but also the four levels were equalized via their customized adjustments and behaved identically. Furthermore, unlike comparable furniture pieces, it doesn’t matter how you fill the rack.

Can You Hear the Silence?

It’s not too easy articulating the Finite Elemente Edition’s impact. And we mean that as a huge compliment. The Pagode system doesn’t add even the slightest bit of character to the components it holds, but rather provides perfect foundations for amplifiers and sources to shine as bright as possible. Of course, this doesn’t become apparent until transferring them from any other rack onto the Edition. I found that the MK II ensured incomparable order and depth in the sonic image. Voices stood out clearer from the background and deep bass frequencies growled gnarlier, tighter and drier. Esoteric’s K-03XD, housed on the rack’s top level, maintained more composure and tangibly gained

in breadth and stage depth and, as part of the comparison, seemed to reach its full potential only with this set-up. To keep us from bad-mouthing the defenseless competition, Finite Elemente kindly provided the decommissioned MK I version to enable our direct comparisons. While also better than all the competition, the older model didn’t stand a chance in hell. The honeycomb shelves, with their ceramic feet, made the music remarkably vivid and nuanced. And this generational gulf could grow even wider: as an alternative to the standard shelves, Finite Elemente sells carbon fiber shelves, which subtly improve stage size and tangibility.

Such a sophisticated system, so intelligently designed and intricately crafted down to the tiniest details, of course comes at a cost. However, considering its performance credentials, the price is thoroughly justified and it wouldn’t be too much to say that anyone who has not heard their components on the Pagode Edition MK II doesn’t actually know how great they can sound! ■

Finite Elemente Pagode HD03 Edition MK II hi-fi rack | **Concept:** hi-fi rack with multiple decoupling and resonator technology | **Levels:** 2 to 4, also available as a pure power amplifier base | **Load-bearing capacity:** 120 kg (bottom level), 60 kg (Levels 1–3), optionally level 1 can be constructed for heavy-duty loads (load-bearing capacity of 120 kg, for an additional fee) | **Materials:** Canadian maple, aluminum, honeycomb and MDF | **Usable shelf space:** 52 x 47 cm | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 71/59/85 cm | **Warranty period:** 5 years | **Price:** from €6,680 (2 levels), test model approx. €10,450 | **Options:** highly polished aluminum (€960), carbon fiber shelf (€690), heavy-duty level (€1,590)

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ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Sources: Mark Levinson No. 5105, Esoteric K-03XD, Cambridge Audio CXN V2, Auralic Altair | **Loudspeakers:** KSDigital Residence 505, Lyravox Karlos | **Cables:** ViaBlue, AudioQuest, Chord Company