

Sept./Oct. 2006
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Recent and Upcoming Events

Oct. 10 - 16, 2006

Audio Cinema Art
Zagreb, Croatia
Dealer Training
with Peter McGrath

Oct. 11-12, 2006

"Music Matters"
Definitive Audio
Seattle, WA
with Dave Wilson
and John Giolas

Oct. 20-22, 2006

Rocky Mountain Audio Fest
Denver, CO
Peter McGrath and
Jerron Marchant
at the Display with
Audio Unlimited, Denver

WILSON® AUDIOFILES

Duette: Bred to Thrive in a Hostile Environment

by John Giolas

If you were to make a list of ecosystems hostile to survival, it would be understandable if you omitted the region located in the south Texas brush country called the Tamaulipan Thorn Forest. And you're right: you won't find endless sand dunes there as you would in the Sahara; nor would you need to fear becoming a human popsicle as you surely would in the frozen, other-worldly Antarctica. So why does the Thorn Forest appear on my list of the top unfriendly environments? Let's consider the Tamaulipan climate: summers are viciously hot and dry, and winter temperatures frequently dip well below zero when storm systems called "blue northers" march through. But it is not the severe climate conditions alone that account for this region's high score on the life-sapping scale. This is a place named for its flora, almost all of which is armed with thorns, spikes, or needles of one sort or another. I know, you're thinking that a bunch of thorny bushes and trees sound a bit benign compared to, say, a blinding, flesh-removing Saharan sand-storm. But consider this: a bird or animal lacerated by a Mesquite tree thorn is almost certainly condemned to a slow, painful death as the wound becomes infected and infested with parasites.

Small animals and rodents use this feature of the terrain to their advantage. Birds (such as the White-winged Dove), ground squirrels, wood rats, and even snakes (such as the Ruthven's Whipsnake) use the thorny underbrush of the Mesquite tree, the Whitethorn Acacia, and the Agarito scrub as an effective fortress. Rapacious predators that venture into this spiky foliage in pursuit of a meal risk a painful or even fatal injury.

One predator has adapted successfully to the Thorn Forest. The raptor known as the Harris' Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) is the only bird of prey that thrives in the region.

The Harris' seems quite content whether casually perched atop a Saguaro cactus on a 115-degree summer day or braving a sub-freezing blue norther. This beautiful buteo is recognizable by its rich chocolate-brown head, breast, and body accented by chestnut leggings and shoulders. But the easiest way to distinguish the Harris' from other hawks is by observing its social behavior. It is not unusual to find several birds hunting, resting, or just hanging around together. Mated pairs stay together indefinitely. Offspring of the couple often prefer to stay with their parents for extended periods, sometimes well into adulthood. They genuinely seem to enjoy each other's company.

The Harris' Hawk's communal nature is the source of the single most astonishing facet of their



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Environment (Cont. from pg. 1)

behavior. Male and female couples – and even the pair’s offspring – hunt together. This behavior is unique among hawks. The Harris’ bring into play a number of strategies that take advantage of this pack-like hunting technique. One method involves nature’s version of the tag team. Family members take turns chasing prey. As mom tires of the pursuit, dad takes over, followed by big brother or little sister, each taking up the hunt until the game is caught.

For small birds, rodents, and ground squirrels dwelling in the treacherous underbrush of the Tamaulipan Thorn Forest, the Harris’ Hawk has created a special hunting strategy. Once prey is discovered within its thorny dwelling, the smaller male hawk circles the parameter of the underbrush on foot. Squawking, flapping his wings, and opportunistically plunging his head into the thicket, the male takes care to avoid the lacerating thorns and spikes.

The female positions herself tactically on a Saguaro or an Acacia adjacent to the thicket, training her keen and intelligent eyes on the scene below. The moment comes and the prey is frightened from its hiding spot, fleeing from the cover of the brush on the side opposite the male hawk. The female makes her move: In one deadly and fluid motion, she spreads her wings, gracefully drops from her perch, and seizes her prey. It’s lunchtime for the hawk family.

Earlier this month, five hundred miles north of the Tamaulipan Thorn Forest in Dallas, Texas, I sat in a beautifully appointed demo room at one of Wilson’s newest dealers, Audio Concepts. In several e-mails and phone conversations, Mark Ashworth, Audio Concept’s owner, had expressed his excitement over the sound he was making with the Duette.

Shortly after I arrived, I was led to the Duette display, located in a front room of his store. Before me, perched strategically on bookshelves against one wall, was a pair of Ferrari Blue Duettes. The Duette’s

Novel crossovers were stationed on a shelf below. The display was elegant and simple. It was easy for me to picture the Duettes installed similarly in a high-end home.

I thought to myself, this is the application Duette was intended for. And I knew from experience that Duette thrived in this acoustically thorny region. But how would they sound here? I selected a CD I knew well, inserted it into the Naim player, and plopped back down into a comfortable leather chair for a listen.

In utter defiance of the acoustically

who has sold several systems using Duettes in the short time they have been a Wilson dealer. Mark and his group successfully capitalize on what appears, at first, to be an auditory paradox. The effect of hearing authentic Wilson sound coming from the relatively diminutive Duettes, stationed as they are in an architecturally accessible but acoustically compromised vignette, is wholly disarming.

An experienced audiophile client who came to Audio Concepts to listen to the WATT/Puppy System 8s later confirmed this to be true. I was attaching the spikes to the System 8 (having just completed setup training), and Mark suggested that the client have a listen to the Duette while he waited for us to finish.

It was easy to tell that he didn’t expect much. This was a smallish loudspeaker in a bookshelf after all. But it wasn’t very far into the first song that his body language began to change.

No longer able to contain his astonishment, the client jumped from his chair and walked up to the Duettes, as if making sure that it was these little speakers he was hearing. Such was his amazement at the sound of the Duettes that he wondered aloud if the WATT/Puppys could actually

be better. Of course, he later confirmed that the new System 8 pushed the musical boundaries further still. In fact, the client ended up ordering a pair of WATT/Puppys.

Like all current Wilson products, the Duettes create an experience so complete and satisfying, the listener is temporarily disarmed. What could be better than this, they wonder. When he was asked which Wilson speaker was the best, Marc Mickelson, editor of SoundStage.com magazine, replied simply, “The one you happen to be listening to.”

Duettes were built for a specific purpose. They are the outcome of Wilson’s new development process, Special Application Engineering. For Duette, the engineering team, led by Dave Wilson, aimed



Audio Concepts, Dallas, Texas

hostile environment in which these Duettes occupied, they proceeded to blow my jaded mind. Again. The sound wasn’t just good considering the adverse placement; it was good, period. The music coming from this pair of Duettes was engaging, involving, three dimensional – and was imbued with beauty and majesty. What I was hearing could have just as easily been coming from Sophias or WATT/Puppys – properly set up, mind you, in an area safely distant from the room’s music-corrupting walls.

My experience at Audio Concepts reconfirmed the remarkable achievement of the Duette. It also convinced me anew that this was the proper way to display Duettes. Those dealers who show the Duette in beautiful architectural vignettes, and make great sound, are experiencing sales success.

This is confirmed by Audio Concepts,

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Environment (Cont. from pg. 2)

to create a product that would sonically thrive in environments where other Wilsons (and other speakers in general) would be compromised, such as near walls, in bookshelves, or as a part of custom cabinetry.

There are good reasons why loudspeakers sound better positioned away from the room's boundaries. Or more accurately, as anyone who has been trained on the Wilson Audio Setup Procedure knows, a loudspeaker's performance potential is greatest when placed in what Dave Wilson has dubbed "the zone of neutrality."

The visually pleasing architectural integration of sound into our home environments has meant accepting serious sonic compromises. Placing a loudspeaker near the wall creates back reflections that destroy the time domain purity and timbral accuracy of the signal. Soundstage cues are lost and the frequency response is skewed.

Even Wilson Audio is governed by the laws of physics. From the outset of Duette's design cycle, Dave and the engineers straddled a series of dichotomies: The Duette had to be small and light enough to sit safely on conventional bookshelves, but had to play Wilson-type bass and dynamics; Duette had to possess a sense of tonal beauty and neutrality, but do this when placed near the room's walls or positioned on a bookshelf; Wilson required its new product to be endowed with correct group-delay characteristics, even when placed at different vertical levels; we wanted the user to have the option to position the Duette either vertically or horizontally with proper mechanical spiking, but at the same time, demanded that no spike attachment hardware be visible in either scenario.

In the end, the engineering team overcame all of these technical challenges. But not without great effort and ingenuity. Three patents protect the resulting technologies responsible for overcoming these hurdles. The Duette project required more research and development time than any other product in Wilson's history, save Alexandria.

Audio dealers have long dreamed of having truly musical sound in installations that require architectural integration of the loudspeaker. Acoustic obstacles caused by boundary interaction with walls, bookshelves, and cabinetry were once thought to be insurmountable. Until now, dealers and customers have been faced with two less-than-ideal choices: use inferior "in-wall" speaker systems, or try to make a high-end speaker system work where it was never designed to go.

Duette resolves this paradox with Wilson's signature combination of artistry and simplicity by bringing authentic high-end sound into the custom-cabinet environment. In order to understand the remarkable achievement of Duette, it must be demonstrated and experienced in this setting.

This is not to say that Duette can be plunked down just anywhere and create good sound. When placed on a bookshelf, the Duette benefits from proper tuning (just as with any Wilson product). Dealers that attend to the details of side-to-side "voweling," proper use of the group delay spikes, and correct tow-in have been universally rewarded with Wilson-like sound, and subsequently, sales success.

So, I have been a bit confused by some dealer's reluctance to demonstrate Duettes in architectural settings. Most of our dealers have heard Dave's Duette comparison during the 2006 CES or at the factory. This demonstration pitted the Duette placed on a bookshelf against some ideally positioned and setup floorstanding and compact speakers. Duette acquitted itself quite well against these more expensive competitors. In fact, despite its placement disadvantage, most observers preferred Duette on an absolute basis to the other products.

Nevertheless, many Dealers approach their in-store Duette displays the same way they would a Sophia or WATT/Puppy. Perhaps the assumption is if they sound good in a bookshelf, they would sound even better set up in the zone of neutrality. It is easy

to forget that Duette was optimized for acoustically hostile environments first and then subsequently tuned for free air placement – rather than the other way around.

It seems that some dealers just can't resist demonstrating Duette on its dedicated stand, set up far into the room. I understand: it seems almost sacrilegious to place a Wilson in the confines of a bookshelf. It's a little like taking a Ferrari four-wheeling. It just isn't done.

But displaying Duette as you would, say, Sophia misses the point of Duette's creation. The only way to truly understand the achievement of Duette is by hearing it in the environment for which it was designed.

Products that overcome what was once thought difficult or even impossible achieve a special status – even among high-end consumers. In the world of fine timepieces, for example, the genre dubbed "great complications" – mechanical watches that perform several timekeeping functions simultaneously – are most valued because they are so difficult to craft.

Similarly, we as humans are attracted to those creatures in nature that thrive in unimaginably adverse circumstances. There is something captivating and intriguing – even romantic – about achieving the extremely difficult. The fascination increases when the achievement is attended with a sense of elegance, intelligence, and artistry. Most powerful of all is when the achievement is singular in nature. Rarity has its own appeal. This is why the Harris' Hawk is so valued among bird watchers, and why it has become so desired among falconers.

Certainly, this partially explains Duette's appeal. They achieve, with a sense of ease and effortlessness, what was once thought to be impossible. They have the singular ability to create an authentic Wilson music experience in environments most audiophiles consider acoustically uninhabitable. And like all Wilson products, they have the rare ability to bring the listener closer to the music.

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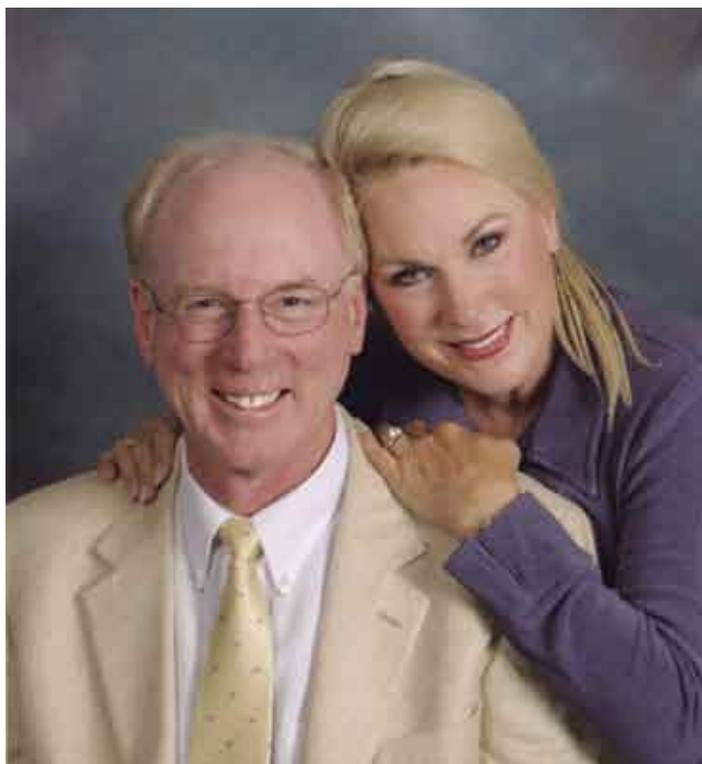
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DESIGN IS NOW CONTAINED IN
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invisible to the naked eye

The last thing we do in the manufacture of our loudspeaker enclosures—the application of the *WilsonGloss™* finish—is apt to be the first thing the customer notices in the showroom. It's the immediate visual expression of the attention to detail that underlies everything else we do.

READ MORE

"If (exceeds) all benchmarks, by wide margins." —soundstages



**Happy 40th Anniversary Sept. 6
Dave and Sheryl Lee Wilson!**



Congratulations, Brooks Berdan!

Brooks, owner of Brooks Berdan, Wilson Audio's dealer in Monrovia, CA, recently took 1st Place in the Concorso Italiano Concorso, Lamborghini Division, with his 1985 Countach 5000S. A panel of judges ranks the cars based on factors such as the condition and the originality of the car. This is the first year Brooks has shown his Countach. However, he has earned awards for his yellow 1972 DeTomoso Pantera for the last 10 years, including receiving "Best of Marque" and competing for Best of Show at last year's Concorso Italiano.



The building expansion at Wilson Audio continues to move forward at an amazing rate. A wall separating the business from area residences is completed. Landscaping begins the third week of Oct. and includes renovation of the existing pond and addition of some waterfalls.



The external part of 40 foot wide expansion on the north of the existing building is nearing completion. The next phase is to finish the rooms in the new research and development wing and to seamlessly connect the addition with the existing building.



The control room for the anechoic chamber will be located here. The chamber will allow for frequency response, diffraction, and vibration tests. The environmental room, located west of the control room (behind the drywall), is where accelerated aging, heat, and humidity tests are conducted. Down the stairs leads to the research and development offices.



Dust in the air, seen as spots on this photo, will be eliminated by the new state-of-the-art down draft system to be installed in the paint booths. This area will house three booths for finish paint and a mixing room as well. The expansion of our paint area will improve the ability to manage multiple colors simultaneously.



South of the existing building, the external part of the shipping and receiving addition is near completion. Adding a third dock, changing the locations of the docks and driveway, and adding a hydraulic lift on one dock will make access to shipping and receiving easier, especially for long trailers.



Recently, Wilson received a shipment of parts to construct the paint pits and the paint booths. The parts are being stored in the area slated to be storage for all the raw materials used in making speaker enclosures. This area is located just east of the shipping docks.

All Photos on this page were taken Monday, Oct. 9, 2006

Excerpted with permission from the United Kingdom's *hi-fi+* Issue 47, Sept. 2006. (www.hifiplus.com)

“Wilson Audio Duette Loudspeaker”

by Roy Gregory

“...arguably the most accessible and important Wilson to date....

“This is one Wilson where the cost of ancillaries really needn't exceed the cost of the speaker itself....Make no mistake, sonically speaking the Duette is more than just competitive at the £10K mark - it's a star....

“Like I said, they haven't just thought of everything, they've provided elegant solutions to each practical and sonic problem....

“It's an operating envelope that em-

braces any number of affordable, audio-ophile integrated amps, bringing the real cost of Wilson ownership well within reach of a huge potential audience for whom the brand was previously nothing more than a wishful pipedream. But the real kicker comes with the musical performance....

“Listen to the Duette and the first thing that strikes you is just how understated, immediately accessible and downright inviting it sounds....

“These speakers are so invisible,

their stage so massive and their dynamics so surprisingly effortless, that if you shut your eyes and play something full-range like an orchestra, they'll readily fool you into thinking they're much bigger than they are....

“In the Duette we have a speaker system that works on many levels: it is a true Wilson, it is a compact that does scale, that does staging, that does dynamics. Above all, it does music. What we have here, finally, is the little speaker that can.”



Ludwig Swanberg, of Audionord in Sweden, demonstrates the WATT/Puppy System 8 to a packed house at the Arken Hi Fi Show in Gothenburg, Sweden Sept. 7 - 10. Peter McGrath was on hand to assist with set up and to answer questions.



Prior to his demo, Dave Wilson discusses the new WATT/Puppy System 8 with an audience at the Top Audio and Video Show in Milan, Italy Sept. 14-17. Luca Natali, of Audio Natali, Wilson Audio's distributor in Italy translated as Dave suggested particular sonic nuances to listen for.



Dave Wilson delivers the key note address during the Hi Fi News Show Sept. 21 - 24, in London, England. Sheryl Lee helps with the power point part of the speech, which was entitled, “High End's Biggest Challenge: Recognizing and Respecting the Real Customer.”



Peter McGrath explains the differences between the WATT/Puppy System 7 and System 8 to Roy Gregory, editor of *hi-fi+* magazine in England. Absolute Sounds, Wilson's London distributor, had the Designo Mocha Black WATT/Puppys on display at the Hi Fi News show.