

REVIEW APERTURA ARMONIA EVOLUTION – “FRENCH AUDIOPHILE REFINEMENT”



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Dear Reader, this week I will surprise you with a review of some French speakers, particularly interesting in terms of their look, but also special in terms of their technical features. The Apertura speaker brand comes from Nantes, France and was recently added to the Avs Store portfolio. Surprisingly, I have received their speaker model called Armonia Evolution with I was going to spend two wonderful weeks and then write you this review.



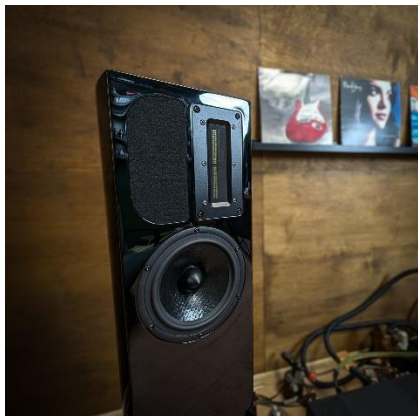
In the Apertura range, Armonia Evolution is positioned somewhat in the middle, preceded by the Swing, Sensa and Stela series, some more... budget sisters. Armonia Evolution is, therefore, a model of great interest because it represents Apertura's entry into the High-End range, from Armonia upwards there are increasingly exclusive models: Forté, Edena Evolution, Adamante and the fascinating Enigma MKII.

APERTURA – COMPANY PROFILE

Before we get into more details about these speakers, let's pay attention to the history and premises of the Apertura brand. The brand was created in 1978 by Christian Yvon, the factory being located near the city of Nantes. Christian Yvon has a long experience in the audio field, having collaborated in the past with extremely well-known brands such as Focal, Sonus Faber, JMLab or Goldmund. However, it's best to let him introduce himself, below is a video from 2014 at Munich High End:

What an interesting and passionate man! Apertura's motto is "nothing more, nothing less", their goal, as Christian explains in the video above, is to create speakers that reproduce reality as faithfully as possible. Over time, Apertura has introduced proprietary technologies, I recall here the filter architecture called DRIM, which allows the implementation of variable transition responses (6, 12 or 24 dB/octave), with a focus on phase coherence and minimizing distortion.

Also, what is immediately noticeable is the special architecture of the speaker body, designed with non-parallel walls and rigid laminated structures to reduce vibrations and internal reactions. I can say that once you see an Apertura speaker, you can't forget it. Apertura doesn't look conventional.



Speakers are hand-assembled in France, using SEAS drivers, Fountek ribbon tweeters, Jantzen voice coils, Mundorf/Jantzen components and OFC cables. The wooden bodies are produced in Asia. Below is a picture of the Apertura factory in Nantes, even this has an unconventional design:

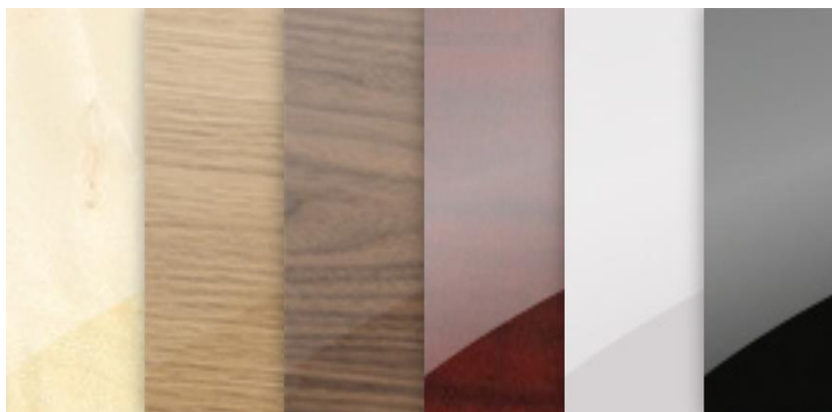
UNBOXING AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Apertura Armonia Evolution are not very large speakers, measuring 292 x 291 x 1069 mm with stands, weighing 22 kg per unit. The speakers are each packed in three cardboard boxes (box in box in box), being the first packaging of this kind that I have come across. Thus, after you open this puzzle of cardboard boxes, you discover the two speakers and the related accessories: textile gloves for handling, aluminium stands and 10 spikes.



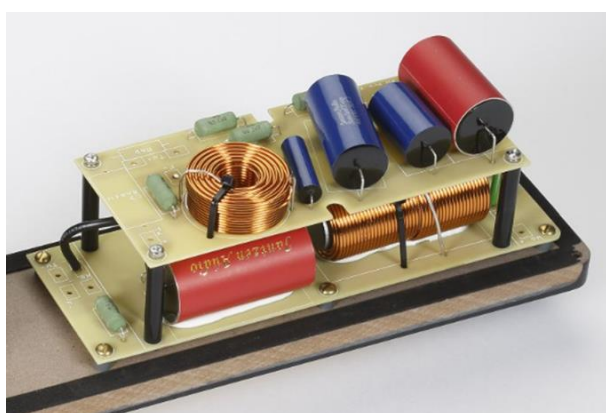
Yes, you heard right – 10, 5 for each speaker, another interesting thing. This special spike technology is called “mechanical grounding” by Apertura. I’ll come back to clarify right away, until then I will leave you with a picture below with the construction details of these enclosures

As you can see in the image above, the Armonia Evolution are of a very high quality, being some of the best finished speakers I have ever seen. My copies were finished in Piano Black High Gloss, but the American Walnut High Gloss or Rosewood High Gloss finishes are equally impressive. I can honestly say that the real wood veneer finish is absolutely spectacular! Below is an image with all the finishing options:



TECHNICAL DETAILS

Therefore, the Armonia Evolution is equipped with a Fountek ribbon tweeter that uses a flat metallized polymer diaphragm. The midrange and bass driver is SEAS brand and measures 18 cms, incorporating isotactic matrix technology and being equipped with a woven polypropylene composite cone.



In the image above you can see the crossover inside the Armonia Evolution; it is made of the proprietary Apertura architecture called DRIM, with triple attenuation slope and phase control over the entire bandwidth. Above you can see two completely separate electronic boards, one for the low-pass section and one for the high-pass section. The capacitors used are Jantzen brand. Each set of speaker units (tweeter and mid/woofer) is measured individually, and the crossover values are adjusted according to the measurements of these sets. Also, the wiring is done manually on a 140 µm copper printed circuit board. The connectors used are WBT brand made of pure copper and silver plated.

This Apertura model is the first in the range to use the special enclosure structure, known to the French brand, with two curved sides of different lengths and without parallel front and rear panels. The enclosure is also made of a laminar structure based on several thin layers moulded under pressure. Such a process creates fracture modes and limits the propagation of vibrations.

The internal frame has multiple cavities to stiffen the structure and create very specific areas where the damping materials can be applied.

The full specifications of the Armonia Evolution are:

- Frequency range: 37-30,000Hz/ +-3dB
- Sensibility: 87dB/2.83v/1m
- Impedance: 8Ω
- Bass-reflex
- Diffusion units: 18 cms mid-woofer with isotactic matrix, 8×120 mm ribbon tweeter
- Crossover frequency: 2.8 kHz
- Terminals: single-wire connection terminals (spike or banana)
- Dimensions: 205 x 291 x 1030 mm: with stands: 292 x 291 x 1069 mm
- Weight: 22.2 kg net – 22 kg (packed)

Below is an image of the back of the speaker, where you can see a plate with information about the model, as well as the speaker cable terminals, two in number, the high and low directions being divided on the inside:



POSITION

Returning to the situation with the spikes, as I said above, each speaker has 5 spikes, the Apertura philosophy for ground positioning being the most unique I have encountered so far: the speaker unloads all its weight on a central spike, and the four at the ends only serve to balance the speaker. I leave you an image of these legs below:

The installation procedure is simple: first you need to mount aluminium bars on which the spikes rest, and then the five spikes according to the manual. Be sure to install the bars and spikes for each speaker, they are different for the left and right speakers, you will find guides on the accessory boxes.



Also, given this proprietary spike system, I recommend that you use only the spikes and counter-spikes that come into the package, it is useless positioning these speakers on decoupling systems like Gaia; their sound will be altered, or, on aftermarket counter-spikes, their sound will not be the one intended by Apertura engineers.

A few paragraphs later, in today's "Audiophile's Point", I will tell you more about counter-spikes and the results of the tests with Armonia Evolution.

Until then, it is certain that you have to be very careful that the speaker puts its weight on the central spike and not on the side ones, this aspect greatly affects the sound, the speaker sounds best this way. I put a lot of emphasis on this situation with the central spike, my tests have proven that the correct sound of the Armonia Evolution is formed when it puts its weight correctly on this centre only.

Please be very patient with the positioning of the Armonia Evolution, they are not easy speakers to position, the bass is formed in relation to the back wall, if you move them too far from the wall, the bass will lose its power, if you move them too close, however, the stage will lose its integrity and you will lose depth. You have to work little by little and find the ideal configuration for your room, millimeter by millimeter, that's how sensitive the Armonia are to positioning.

As for toe-in, I recommend that you don't point them too far towards the listening point, a small toe-in of about 10 degrees is enough, start from there and experiment. Also, keep in mind that if your room is smaller than 15 square meters, Armonia Evolution are not a solution, they have a very loud sound and in such a room they can be too much, they can create too much acoustic pressure. They are certainly not near-field speakers. However, if you really want to try them in a small room, I also recommend what is written in the speaker manual: adjust them from the external spike adjustment, 5 mm left on the back, 5 mm raised from the front, this is how they will sound best in small rooms. In case you have a listening distance of at least 2.5 meters to the speakers, then place them "straight". Apertura recommends an equilateral triangle of at least 2.5 meters from the listening position. This is the starting point that I recommend.



WHAT DOES HARMONY EVOLUTION SOUND LIKE?

Coming to the most important subject of this review, my conclusions about the sound of the Armonia Evolution. These speakers sound very resolute, with a special focus on the music scene, you can easily figure out where musicians are placed in a recording, also having a very interesting holography, with a similar approach to Bowers & Wilkins, and the Armonia Evolution midrange is very accurate, which brilliantly reproduces the reality of the recording. The soundstage these speakers can create is fascinating; in my listening room they have managed to create a very large sound that clearly exceeded the physical boundaries of the room. The Armonia sound is very holographic and immersive. The Armonia bass is very short and controlled, it is an audiophile type of bass and will not satisfy fans of special effects like when Neo jumps from one building to another in the Matrix and you hear that round and humming bass. The Armonia Evolution are not for that.

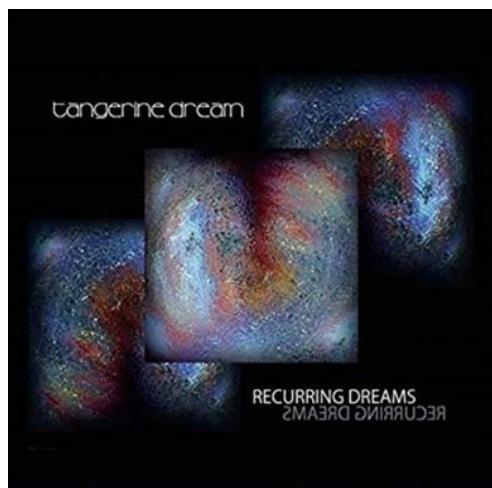


Their sound is faithful, balanced, audiophile and resolute, with a special emphasis on finesse and refinement of the highs, this is their basic advantage that I emphasize, Armonia Evolution are speakers for audiophile sound enthusiasts.

We continue with my tests and discoveries, as I am revealing them to you and i will give you even more details about the sound of the Armonia Evolution.

WHAT MUSIC DID I LISTEN TO ALONG WITH THE OPENING OF ARMONIA EVOLUTION?

Given the holographic and expansive sound that Apertura Armonia Evolution offers, we chose a suitable album to better understand them, namely "Recurring Dreams", an album released by Tangerine Dream in 2019.



Recurring Dreams is one of the band's new albums. Interestingly, the album does not have 100% original and new content, but rather, Recurring Dreams is a kind of memoir that current members of the band bring to the former Edgar Froese, the founding member of Tangerine Dreams since the 60s and the only member who was permanently and persistently present in the project from then until the end of his life.

When it was released in 2019, I have immediately started listening to Recurring Dreams, in my style, the way I usually listen to music, in the evening, with all the lights off, with a cup of tea in my hand or a glass of Beaulieu rum. As soon as I put Recurring Dreams on, I was amazed by a very resolute sound, as the older Tangerine Dreams albums are not, RD benefiting from the depth of the modern sound, but musically speaking, I was again amazed by the fact that I was hearing old themes from TD, which I knew so well.

Tangerine Dream's newer albums have a special way of presenting themselves, with a magical breath, a special and large soundstage, plenty of holographic effects, as if the universe were singing. And Recurring Dreams represents all of this to the fullest, it's like a book of holographic miracles.

Fortunately, as I expected, the Armonia Evolution brilliantly represented all of this, launching all of these holographic miracles into my listening room and creating that magical sound bubble that I seek when listening to albums of this kind. Recurring Dreams was the perfect test for these speakers.

WHAT ELECTRONICS DO APERTURA SPEAKERS WORK BEST WITH?

There followed a period in which I tried many amplification solutions with the Armonia Evolution, because I wanted to understand first and foremost which integrated amplifier would drive them best. In the AV Store show-room I had already listened to the Edena Evolution driven by an Aesthetix pair – the Atlas Stereo power amplifier and the Calypso preamplifier, and I was already delighted and impressed by the match between the Aesthetix and the Apertura. This time, however, I thought that the Armonia Evolution would be more affordable with an integrated amplifier, so I have decided to spend enough time to find out which model would drive them best. So, my listening room was filled with amplifiers one after another for two weeks, with multiple options from Moon, Hegel, Chord Electronics and Aesthetix, and in what follows I will tell you what results I have obtained with each one.

The first on my list was my well-established **Moon 340i X** that I have had in my personal collection for some time and it always helped me with its chameleon qualities, matching almost any speaker. It drove the Armonia Evolution without any problems, but given that the voice of the 340i X is a bit thin, and the Armonia Evolution also go in this direction, their sound together will not be completely balanced, being, for my taste, too open. That does not mean, however, that some of you will not appreciate this type of extra open sound.

Next on the list was the younger and more “slick” brother of the 340i X, **the Moon 641**. It kept everything described in the previous paragraph, following the same Moon sound philosophy, but it had an even bigger sound than the 340i X and a much better “grip” on the speakers, driving them even better, and more controlled. If you like the sound that the Moon and Apertura bring together, I don’t think the 340i X requires the budget difference from the 340i X to the 641, the first being enough for them.

I have continued my testing with **the integrated Chord Electronics Ultima**, it’s hard to explain why, but I just felt that it wasn’t a good match for the Armonia Evolution. I’ve heard Chord in many venues and have always appreciated their decisive and authoritative sound, but in this case, the match just wasn’t there.

I have also tried the integrated Aesthetix called **Mimas**. It worked very well with the Armonia Evolution, but took the sound into much too relaxed area for my taste. The Armonia are very fast and resolute, and the Mimas are somehow very relaxed and gentle, each of these two at different extremes, which somehow do not meet in a balanced situation. As with the Moon, it is a matter of taste, it is possible that what Mimas does together with the Armonia Evolution you really like, it is worth listening to. In my taste and opinion, the Aesthetix is a very good match with the Apertura speakers, but you should go for solutions with separate devices, power amplifier and preamplifier.

The last on the list is **the Hegel H400**, which also impressed me the most. I know the H400 as an amplifier with a “dark” tone, authoritative, but not very bright. It was obvious from the first note after I put it next to the Armonia Evolution that these two actually fit together wonderfully. The Hegel H400 pulled bass notes out of the Armonia Evolution that I have never dreamed could be there, their bass becoming round and authoritative, but without compromising control. Hegel offers a special magic with a special depth of the stage and a superb resolution on the highs, something that successfully complements the Armonia Evolution. I have really liked the combination of the Hegel H400 and the Apertura Armonia Evolution, I consider them the winning combination of these tests.

My conclusion regarding the match of the Apertura speakers is that they need some electronics with a deeper voice, something more like Iosif Sava, they also need an authoritative amplification, but qualitative, not necessarily quantitative, which is why the unexpected match with the Hegel is something to keep in mind.

AN AUDIOPHILE BRIDGE – SPIKES AND COUNTER-SPIKES

I'm also getting to the audiophile tip of this review, telling you today about counter-spikes, why they matter so much, and trying to help you choose some counter-spikes suitable for your scenario. Even though I had read before that the Armonia Evolution comes with everything they need in the package, I couldn't leave things to chance and, by virtue of some tests, I have immediately prepared several sets of counter-spikes to replace the ones that come in the speaker box.



First, a little clarification regarding counter-spikes, what they are, what they do and what they are good for. Counter-spikes, as their name suggests, are placed under the spikes of a speaker and provide "protection" so that the floor is not scratched and the speakers can be moved more easily. Well, these counter-spikes can be of many architectures and variations, they can be made of stainless steel, brass, aluminium, steel, or other combinations and sizes.

Some time ago we were migrating from decoupling solutions like Iso Acoustics Gaia to coupling ones, using spikes. First of all, the most important aspect to understand is this: Gaia decouples and spikes couple, each direction offering advantages and disadvantages. Ideally, you would try both directions in your room and decide which is more suitable. Today, however, we will consider that we have chosen coupling, that is, spikes, and we will detail what to put under these spikes.

Honestly, in all my experience, I have never had good results without placing something under the spikes. Left without anything underneath, they will create a kind of metallic sound, they will not sound good at all. Maybe only in combination with a thick carpet it is OK to have just the spikes, but when we have a shiny and flat floor, something must be placed under them.

This is where counter-spikes come into the equation, and most of the time, these are elements that are overlooked, on the principle that they are not important. Nothing could be more wrong. Counter-spikes have an astonishingly large contribution to the sound, sometimes providing exactly what is missing in terms of focus or timbre, or resolving unwanted resonances.

If you look at the image above with the different types of counter-spikes, I can tell you that they are all part of my personal collection and when new speakers arrive for review, in the first few days I spend hours trying to understand which ones fit the speaker best, choosing between decoupling and spikes (coupling) and all these counter-spikes. I confess that every time I go

through this investigative process, I am amazed at how much these counter-spikes change the sound.

However, in line with the Armonia Evolution, the astonishment was even greater because, unexpectedly, the best counter-spike solution is the one in the package with which these speakers are delivered, some tiny counter-spikes, nothing extraordinary, made of aluminium. Realizing that the best grounding solution for the Armonia Evolution is the one in the package, I learned more about this French speaker manufacturer. These people really test all these issues carefully and are convinced that they offer their customers the correct and universal solution.

I would not have thought that the out-of-the-box solution was the most suitable because for many years since I have been testing and writing about different speaker models, the out-of-the-box solution has never been the right one, and I had to invest time and money to find the right solution.

But unexpectedly, when I have mounted the counter-spikes from the package and found the correct positioning, along with the correct balance position of the central spike, the sound of the Armonia Evolution actually "fell" into place and sounded beastly. Justice to Apertura, you are great, I wish all manufacturers were as careful as you.

So, for those of you who are getting ready to buy Apertura speakers, don't bother testing other spike, counter-spike or decoupling solutions, go with the ones that come with the speakers. For everyone else who doesn't have Apertura speakers, if you go with the floor spike solution, take the time to test with several counter-spike models, these will be the icing on the cake that you are missing.

Tips

- It is imperative to position the Armonia Evolution correctly by letting its weight rest on the central spike, do not unscrew the side spikes too much, they are not there to support weight, but only to balance the speaker.
- Toe-in 10 degrees is the starting point for positioning, maybe 20 degrees if we want better focus, or 5 degrees if we want a wider scene. Experiment between scales millimeter by millimeter.
- If the room is small, leave the speaker 5mm on the back and raise it 5mm from the front, use the side balance spikes.
- Pair them with electronics that have a warm and authoritative sound, avoid electronics that have a thin sound.

GOOD

- Pure audiophile sound: refined highs, superb mid, short and controlled bass.
- Holography and three-dimensional scene.
- They are delivered with a perfect system of spikes and counter-spike, no need to invest time and money to integrate legs and after-market solutions.
- Exceptional finishes, the wood veneer finishes are absolutely gorgeous.

AGAINST

- They are difficult to position, too difficult I would say. It takes a lot of patience.
- They are not for rooms smaller than 15-20 square meters, they are not near-field speakers.
- If you are a bass-head, these speakers are not for you, the Armonia Evolution are speakers for audiophiles, with short and very controlled bass. You can find speakers with strong bass from other brands: KEF, Klipsch, etc.

CONCLUSION

I have spent two wonderful weeks with the Armonia Evolution, enjoying the Apertura sound at home, a sound that has given me many hours of listening pleasure, re-listening to my favourite albums. I discovered new details and valences in these albums that I had never heard before. This means that the Armonia Evolution have resolution to spare.

If I could have listened to the Armonia Evolution in near-field, as I like, they would have been perfect speakers, but unfortunately these are not speakers for small rooms, they need a large, ample space to unfold freely. Their voice is big and it is a real shame to keep it locked in a small space.

In conclusion, I would like to tell you that I remain impressed by this French brand of speakers, their implementation philosophy, the way they are built, the level of detail and the quality of construction. Bon travail mon cher Apertura, bravo Christian Yvon, we can clearly see that your speakers are built by audiophiles, hats off!

Silviu TUDOR

*An article written in my sweet spot,
and this is what I've heard.*

Find the original article here: <https://www.avstore.ro/blog/review-apertura-armonia-evolution-rafinament-audiofil-frantuzesc-15958/>